

*During these trying times*

# Celebrating Our 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with Stronger Commitment to Serve Migrant Workers

The Mission celebrates its 28<sup>th</sup> year of service to the migrant workers with endless happiness and gratitude to its board, volunteers and friends in the same field of service to the community for their support. The Mission must also be thankful and grateful to the officers and members of MOVERS, an organization of migrant workers, for devoting their precious time in providing voluntary assistance that enables the Mission to cope with the enormous demands of providing services to migrant workers of different nationalities.

More than anything else, to the migrant workers who serve as an inspiration and source of strength in pursuing the long term goals, objectives and the tasks set by the Mission 28 years ago. But it also has to thank its tireless and committed staff, who for 28 long years stayed with the Mission and continue its perseverance in delivering the necessary services it can provide to at least lighten the burden of migrant workers.

When the Mission was established in March of 1981, it has already set its overarching principle of *"We dream of a society where families are not broken up by urgent need for survival. We dream and will actively work for a homeland where there is opportunity for everyone to live a decent and humane life."* This principle that the Mission adheres to provided it with the framework in framing and implementing its program.

When it was founded in 1981, it was the period when the export of labour is being systematized by the then dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Though Middle East is the preferred market, Hong Kong is slowly becoming a destination for migrant workers. Since then, year after year, the increase of migrant workers goes by the thousands.

The continuing deterioration of the Philippine economy left no choice among Filipinos than to seek jobs abroad. This condition, the government exploited to the maximum. Economic recovery programs of all administration embark on a plan that made export of labour as a permanent pillar of its economic strategy and plan. The much needed foreign exchange can be easily generated through the remittances of migrant workers and exaction of numerous fees will augment the coffers of the government. In this viewpoint, the people became a mere commodity for export. Migrant workers know this very much because they experience it all from day one in the whole process of working abroad.

Meanwhile, in their country of destination, particularly in Hong Kong, as migrants increase in numbers, stringent policies is being imposed for whatever real purpose only the government of Hong Kong knows like the two-week rule. Despite overwhelming evidence to disprove their reasons, still it was strictly implemented in 1987.

As to their rights and welfare, the obvious presence of service providers can easily attest as far as negligence, especially of their respective government is concerned.

That was the situation when the Mission was conceptualized and established. And the situation remains the same then and now.

## **The Grave Challenge of 2009**

The Mission is treading on its 29<sup>th</sup> year with so much challenges. Since its existence, this is the first time will it encounter different and difficult situations and problems faced by its constituents.

Depression, recession, financial downturn, anybody may call it what they want but it boils down to one reality, it is an economic crisis of great proportion. It hit the very nerve center of all capitalist countries. It started in 2006 when the real estate business in the US reached its peak and no way to go but down. The real estate bubble burst and resulted to a chain of reaction to other financial institutions in the US and elsewhere. It affected the financial, manufacturing, trading and commercial businesses in the different parts of the globe. Several big multinational banks in the US closed down. Many companies reduced their workforce to cut overhead cost. Large monopoly companies with overseas

*Celebrating, pls. go to p. 2*

*Celebrating, from p. 1*

production are gradually reducing their operations if not closing down completely. The first one who will be fired will definitely be the migrant workers.

This has more devastating effect on the economy of the poor countries of which the economic program is export oriented and import dependent. In this situation, all the more that the government of sending countries will depend on the magnitude of its export of labour just to hold on to a life saver in an ocean-deep-like crisis. The Philippine government is really the best as far as export of labour is concerned. Instead of preparing for the forced return of migrant workers, it embarks on a more aggressive marketing strategy and prepares its mechanisms for implementation. It

immediately came out with an administrative order to all departments and line agencies of the government to assist the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration by removing all obstacles for a smooth and systematic marketing of its people for jobs abroad. Will it solve the crisis? Even they don't know. But one thing is sure it will aggravate the social cost of migration.

This is a new situation that the Mission and its co-service providers face.

It is like the sword of Damocles hanging over their head. They don't know if they still have work when they wake up or for how long will they be retained by their employers.

They also don't know what new policies will be imposed on them by the Hong Kong government or even by their



respective government for it to weather the current economic crisis at their expense as usual.

More difficult situation will be presented to service providers by migrant workers. It might be that despite the harsh treatment or policies against undocumented, a great number of migrant workers will opt to stay despite the expiration of their permit to stay or work. This is so because the worst of their anxiety is not losing their job but the stark reality they will face when they returned home. No jobs are awaiting them in their own country.

Globally, coincidence or not, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) suddenly came into being in 2007. It speaks of equating migration and development. It speaks of human rights of migrants yet, they speak at the back of

migrants. They speak of finding ways and means to develop the home country of migrants and yet rich countries plunder the economy of these countries. In fact the 3<sup>rd</sup> GFMD in Greece directly stated in their theme to include migration in the strategy of developing the economy for all. This is short of saying to use migrant workers to bail out the entire world from the grave crisis it is experiencing today.

#### **What Can Be Done?**

The grave situation of 2009 made more a necessity for the Mission not to act alone in this trying time for its constituents. It is difficult to address the enormous effect to the migrant workers of this economic crisis. The Mission has to strengthen its network to collectively devise a plan on how to attend to a new situation, worse than the usual assistance asked by migrants.

It has to educate the migrants on the real situation in order to prepare their hearts and minds in better understanding and making necessary preparations in addressing this crisis while attending to their immediate problems.

The Mission's network has to regularly discuss and based on their respective data and information draw certain overall view of the situation in order to have a relatively objective appraisal of the trend on the situation of migrant workers.

The Mission will always hope that time will come when the celebration of its Anniversary will cease not because it folded up but because the situation does not create anymore for people to migrate in order to survive and the Mission has served its purpose for its being. 📱

# A Crowded Marriage:

## A Poignant Interplay between Power and the Powerless

The Lord, in Genesis 12:1, promised Abram (later, Abraham) three things: land, progeny and that he will be blessing. All these seem to come to pass except that of children. So Sarai (later, Sarah) his wife tried to take matters in her own hand. What we see in the following events is a poignant interplay of power and powerlessness. Let us read Genesis 16.

*"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, 'You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' (vss 1-2)*

Sarai wants to make Hagar a surrogate mother. The fertility she does not have, she will achieve through her maid, Hagar.

*"...Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl,*

*and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived" (3-4)*

However the result was not what Sarai desired. A reordering of relationships emerged. Hagar — the maid whose name Sarah did not utter and to whom she never speaks — was no longer the lowly, docile, powerless slave she once was. In giving her to her husband, Sarah unwittingly changed her status. "...and when she saw that she had conceived, she

looked with contempt on her mistress." (16:4)


Her marriage has indeed become crowded. Sarai now blames Abram for the consequence of her action:

*"Then Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!' But Abram said to Sarai, 'Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her. (5-6)*

Ironically, the word 'dealt harshly' here is the same word used to describe how the Israelites were treated in Egypt

(Ex 1:11,12; Deuteronomy 26:6). In her affliction, Hagar sought liberation in the desert and escaped to freedom.

In all these, Abram, the one who duped the Pharaoh and got away with it far richer than he was before (Genesis 12:10-20), the powerful chieftain who vanquished four kings (Genesis 14), around whom this story revolved, was complacent and docile, taking no responsibility, not mediating.

The story of Hagar and Sarah does not end with the end of their lives. It continues until today. They are revered as the grandmothers of the Jews, Muslims and Christians. Will there ever be reconciliation between their children? 

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Christian Meditation followed by Lent Lunch at 'The Li', St. John's Cathedral

Every Monday from March 2-30, 2009, join us for a simple lunch with tea and coffee in the Li Hall from 12:30-2:00PM.

Cost of lunch is by donation. All proceeds will go to ministries of St John's.

### Forum Concerning Foreign Domestic Workers

22 March 2009, 3-5PM  
St. Jude Church

### Roving Mobile Counseling

29 March 2009, Sunday, 10AM-5PM  
Central and Causeway Bay Area

主辦機構

Mission for Migrant Workers

香港天主教正義和平委員會  
OFFICE & PRINCIPAL COORDINATOR: THE A. S. CATHOLIC CHURCH

### 「同一屋簷下——外傭議題面面觀」座談會

Happy under One Roof?— Open Forum Concerning Foreign Domestic Helpers

日期 Date: 22 / 3 / 2009 (星期日 Sunday)

時間 Time: 3pm - 5pm

地點 Venue: 天主教聖若瑟堂 禮堂 St Jude's Church hall  
香港北角邊華街三十號  
30, Kin Wah Street, North Point, HK

語言 Language: 粵語、英語 (備即時傳譯)  
English, Cantonese  
(Simultaneous interpretation provided)

講者 Speakers

外傭服務團 (香港)  
Mission for Migrant Workers  
Miss Cynthia Ca Abdon-Tellez

天主教正義和平委員會  
Justice & Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese  
孔令嫻小姐  
Miss Jackie Hung

香港家庭傭工權益協會  
Hong Kong Employers of Overseas Domestic Workers Association  
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# Indonesian Women Migrants in HK Rallied to Scrap Law 39



Around 400 Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong under the umbrella of United Indonesians against Overcharging (PILAR-HK) rallied at the Indonesian Consulate in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong on March 8, 2009.

The group demanded the Indonesian government to scrap Law No. 39 on Deployment and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers Abroad approved in 2004 immediately. The law has violated their human rights by regulating the privatization of migration to licensed private agency.

According to the first speaker in the rally, Ms. Eni Lestari as PILAR coordinator, the law denied the rights of Indonesian migrant workers to direct hiring and forced them to process through private recruitment agencies which caused them to suffer various forms of exploitation from recruitment, deployment and repatriation. The violations included the confinement in the agency dormitory before leaving the country, forging their names, address, age, confiscation of their documents and other contract violations

that the agency intentionally arranged for them.

“Indirectly, the Indonesian government used the law to wash their hands and avoid the responsibility in protecting its own people because now deployment and protection are agency’s jobs” she added.

The second speaker was Ms. Umi Sudarto, secretary of PILAR who spoke about placement fee. “The law also stated clearly that placement fee is shouldered fully by the Indonesian migrant workers. Worst, the amount is being dictated by the recruitment agencies. This explains why all Indonesian migrants have to suffer from long months of salary deduction abroad and endure abuses to enable them to pay the fees” Ms. Umi Sudarto said. In Hong Kong alone, according to her, the deduction on their salaries range from 5 to 7 months, around 85% to 100% of their monthly salary. Those who refused to pay the fee will be terrorized including their family in Indonesia while trend of termination after the seven months’ deduction has also increased in the past three years.

Ms. Ari, the last speaker, exposed the failure of Indonesian consulate in providing adequate services to Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong and Macau. She said PILAR has been urging the consulate to open fully on Sunday as majority of Indonesian migrants are on holiday. But instead of addressing the demand, the consulate extended its services on Sunday from two to three hours only.

“The number of Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong has reached 120.000 but the services remained inadequate and it seems the Consulate has no political will to attend to this demand” Ms. Ari stressed out.

The group also chanted and sang migrant’s songs. After an hour of program, the group dispersed and joined the rally to the Central government Office led by the Asian Migrant Coordinating Body (AMCB).

## Forums on Global Financial Crisis Held in Macau

Two forums on the Global Financial Crisis and its impact on migrant workers were held on February 28 and March 1 in Macau.

The first was held after the evening mass officiated by Fr. Peds Ubalde of the Society of Our Lady of Trinity under the Diocese of the Catholic Church in Macau.

The second was held at the Catholic Youth Pastoral Center near the red market and which was organized by Migrante Sectoral Party – Macau chapter.

A power point presentation was shown to the migrants and church congregations on the causes of the Crisis and an open forum on its impact on the migrant workers especially in Macau soon followed.

All in all 73 individuals and 8 Filipino organizations joined the two activities. These activities were co-organized by the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) HK Limited and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) with said partners.



# The Life Story of Farida



I was born on August 28, 1979 in Malang Indonesia. My mother is a house wife, my father is a farmer and I am the oldest child among four children. I have two sisters and a brother.

I finished my secondary education in a Muslim school. I wanted to be a police woman but my father was hospitalized due to liver malfunction. I decided to help my family and to support my father's medical needs because every day we need to spend HK\$200 a day for his medical fee. My family borrowed money. Our land was given as collateral but still my father died on October 22 2002 after being hospitalized for two months.

I applied as a domestic helper in Singapore in 2003 and worked there for four years. I then went back to Indonesia and applied as a domestic helper in Hong Kong to help my mother and brother who is still going to school. Before I came to Hong Kong, I have undergone four months training in an agency. I was told to pay the agency HK\$3,000.00 per month for seven months as agency fee.

I arrived in Hong Kong on May 7, 2008. I stayed at the agency first before I went to the employer's house on May 10, 2008. I served my ex-employer, her husband and

two children- a boy aged 5 years and a 1 ½ year-old baby girl. I did household chores and took care of the defendant's children.

The employer was not easy to work with because after working for them for a few days she sent me back to the agency for a four-day training as she was not satisfied with my work.

*This is the story of a migrant woman worker who has struggled hard for her rights and won.*

I was not given food for breakfast and lunch so I had to buy noodles to eat. For my rest days, I had to work from 6:45AM to 12:15PM before I could go out. I had to come back at 8:00 in the evening and continue to work till 12:00 midnight.

On July 28, 2008, the employer's son went inside the play pen and assaulted his younger sister. The employer accused me of hurting her son. I was brought to a


police station, detained for three days and two nights before I was brought to court.

I was allowed to bail. The lawyer from the Duty Lawyer's Scheme Office gave me the address of the Director of the Bethune House. That was how I got here.

While waiting for my case to be heard, I spent my time listening to stories of fellow residents in the Bethune House, accompanying them in their court hearing, and because I know some English language, I helped in translating for my compatriots from Bahasa Indonesia to English and vice-versa.

In time, I was learning and gaining some experience being exposed to the physical set-up of a court. My first experience was intimidating and frightening until I got used to it, but when my time came, it was also like a "first time".

I was having nightmares before the hearing. I was afraid to go to jail especially that I know in my heart that I was not guilty of the accusation. I tried to be strong on the very day.

The alleged assault case was heard on 15 – 16 December 2008, and after the two-day trial, I was found NOT GUILTY. 

# ATKI-MACAU celebrates Valentine's Day with Indonesian Migrants

More than 100 Indonesian migrants joined the Valentine's Day celebration organized by the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI-Macau) on February 8, 2009 in Portas, Macau.

The event was also co-organized by Macao Live Net Association and sponsored by the Red Ribbon Education Committee of Macao Aids Prevention and Control Committee.

Indarti, the Chairperson of ATKI-MACAU shared their program and services to fellow migrants and how the organization has responded to the needs of their members and fellow Indonesian migrants. She also reiterated the importance of organizing, educating and mobilizing their ranks to protect their rights and welfare considering the effects of the global financial crisis to the job security of migrant workers in Macau.

Eni Lestari, chairperson of



*Ex-Change of Hearts. Indonesian migrant workers exchange hearts during the Valentine's celebration in Macau.*

ATKI-HK and the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) delivered a speech on the historical development of ATKI and its importance to the Indonesian migrant movement not only in Macau but also globally. She also discussed the recent formation of the IMA who is working with different grassroots organizations in coordinating the different campaigns on issues that affect migrant workers in the region.

There were cultural presentations, trivia on the employment conditions of migrants in Macau as well as questions on HIV/AIDS and health concerns.

Members of ATKI- Macau and friends were treated to a barbeque of assorted items. It was a day of fun and camaraderie as several friends from Macau and Hong Kong were present to grace the occasion. 🇮🇩

**Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW)**  
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CHINA

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**MIGRANT FOCUS**

Migrant Focus is a monthly publication of the Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW Ltd.)

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