



Communique of the 2nd National Consultation of Service Providers for Migrant Workers



In 2006, service providers for migrant workers gathered for the first-ever effort to forge unities for stronger cooperation to deliver even improved services to migrant workers, particularly the foreign domestic workers.

Two years after, major service-providing organizations and groups of migrant workers came back together to review the collective actions made and their impacts, as well as the shortcomings of the network formed in the first National Consultation of Service Providers for Migrant Workers in Hong Kong.

Organized by the Mission for Migrant Workers (HK) Society, 30 participants from 10 service-providing NGOs, two local organizations and three grassroots migrants' organizations took part in the 2nd NCSP that focused mainly in evaluating the two years, gaining a deeper understanding of the issues that face migrant workers in Hong Kong, and drafting a common plan of action.

The consultation opened with a message from Archbishop Paul Kwong read by Fr. Dwight dela Torre. He said that he was personally glad that the group met once again as this was imperative for service providers to look for ways and means to "enhance cooperation for better services and advocacy for migrants in Hong Kong."

He encouraged the body to "use this time also to plan for other future possibilities of cooperation in the field." He said that he "know this is not easy but try to do your best to find common grounds instead of differences, without trivializing but recognizing and giving due respect to those differences."



He added that "Worldwide, thousands and thousands of workers are being displaced. This scenario is being replicated in Hong Kong but not in the same magnitude and severity – and I hope never, because a worker losing one's job means a family thrown into an uncertain future, and that's one life too many. The same is true with foreign domestic helpers: an FDH losing her or his job means a family thrown into an uncertain future and that is one life too many."

SJC Dean Andrew M. Chan then delivered the keynote address where he said that ministry alongside migrant workers is a ministry of caring and such ministry takes on as its model Jesus' ministry to the weak and vulnerable.

He stressed that migrant workers are the ones helping and assisting the local people in the country and expressed his hope that through the NCSP, the people will see the needs of the migrants.

"If we come together, we could change the world," he intoned.

Afterwards, Ms. Cynthia Abdon-Tellez gave a presentation on the two years of the service providers' network.

Ms. Tellez gave a rundown of the accomplishments of the network in the areas of Capacity-Building and Networking for Better Service Provision, Enhancing Education Work, and Advocacy and Lobbying. She narrated



the coordination work that members of the network conducted. She also relayed that independently, service providers also pursued their education work though coordinated educational activities were lacking.

Ms. Tellez highlighted Advocacy and Lobbying as the area where the service providers played a very important role in terms of popularizing the issue and supporting the campaigns of the migrant workers. Successful campaigns included those on wage and levy, the POEA Guidelines for Hiring of Filipino Household Service Workers, the POEA Memorandum Circular No. 04 and SE 2258 of the Indonesian government.

She then presented concrete expressions of coordination that happened recently. Such experiences served as concrete examples of how cooperation of service providers can work out and how it will ultimately serve the migrant workers themselves.

Sr. Felicitas Nisperos of the Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Filipinos shared her experiences in service provision, and as the new Directress of the Centre. She related their initiative to confront the Police together with other service providers in an informal forum on the issue of trafficking in person.

Ms. Elijah Fung, the Manager of the HIV Education Centre of St. John's Cathedral clearly established the connection of health issues with migrant workers in Hong Kong.

She stressed the importance of understanding the reproductive system, grasping the need for protection and safeguarding themselves from sexually-transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS and related matters. She said that despite the low rate in the number of people directly infected, the threat is real and educational activities need to be intensified.



She also emphasized on the need to strongly prevent the spread and overcome the vulnerability of ethnic minorities especially the foreign domestic workers who are predominantly women through proper information and health education. The SJCHIVC's activities to popularize the issue are held in cooperation with the different migrant workers groups of different ethnicities in Hong Kong.

Ms. Fung finally urged the participants to conduct advocacy work on the mandatory HIV testing for migrant workers.

An open forum then followed the presentations to further enrich the two-year assessment.

In the afternoon, Ms. Eni Lestari, spokesperson of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) and chairperson of the International Migrants' Alliance (IMA), presented on the current situation and trends on migration. The condition that migrants face and will face, she said, are the challenges that service providers have to respond to.

In particular, she expressed that the current global recession will surely bring problems for migrants especially to their wage and job security. She underscored the Two-Week Rule in Hong Kong as an aggravating condition for this problem.

She also argued that the hardships for migrants will not only come from the HK government but also from governments of sending countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia who will also get hit by the economic crunch. Finally, she expounded on the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) as being the newest tool that shall impact the trends of the policies on migrant workers and migration.





After all the presentations, the participants broke into workshop groups to further deepen the discussion and come up with a plan of actions.

The participants identified the strengths and weaknesses based on the resolutions adopted by the NCSP. From there, they discussed ways in order to further improve the NCSP. The results of the workshops were then presented to the body.

With a resounding *"isang bagsak"* (a clap to express approval), the 2nd NCSP unanimously decided to formally establish the network of service providers in Hong Kong to further strengthen service and assistance to migrant workers. The network is expected to lead and coordinate the future cooperative efforts of service providers in areas of capacity-building, advocacy, networking and education. This coalition will be registered and the process to do so will be researched.

In the workshops held, it became clear that the service providers have varied strengths and concentration of work. The bond that unites service providers is commitment and persistence to serve despite many limitations.

The 2nd NCSP decided to launch training programs to build the capacity of the coalition members. These trainings shall take inspiration from the situation and struggles of the migrant workers themselves. Thus, it was pointed out that the trainings must include inputs from the grassroots workers themselves.

Part of the training sessions also is to define some related concepts in service provision necessary to develop a common language and understanding of such concepts (i.e. "advocacy", "counseling", etc.)

To also further disseminate the work of service providers, it was proposed and approved by the body that a material that will contain information on various service providers will be made. It will include clear details on the services offered by the groups. Such material will be widely distributed and existing programs of service providers must be maximized to do so.

Under advocacy and lobbying, the 2nd NCSP identified the following issues that the coalition shall carry: 1. Two-Week Rule (NCS-1987); 2. Wage differentials between foreign and local workers; 3. Job security and job protection; 4. Debt bondage; 5. Overcharging of placement fees; 6. Free health services and other health issues including HIV testing, and; 7. Levy.

Important events will be maximized by the coalition to highlight the work of service provision as well as the concerns of migrant workers. The type of activities to be held on dates like the International Women's Day (March 8) or the International Migrants Day (December 18) will be planned out.

It was decided that an immediate meeting of representatives of participating groups will be held in order to detail the plans of the group including the most immediate ones related to the building and registering of the coalition.

The 2nd NCSP ended with a stronger commitment from participating service providers to continue the work of assisting ethnic minorities. The participants vowed to continue the cooperation started in the past years and strengthen the networking of different organizations in order to deliver effective services in various fields – welfare, education, advocacy, empowerment – to the migrant workers.#

