

## **20 YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY MIGRANT WORKERS PERSIST IN STRUGGLE**

### **MIGRANTE Canada**

December 18, 2010

The whole world today celebrates International Migrants Day. On December 18, 1990, the United Nations General Assembly signed and adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Canada, an active recruiter of migrant workers, has never signed this covenant. As of 2009, there were over 280,000 foreign workers in Canada. Still, the current conservative government aims to recruit more migrant workers who will have no chance of getting permanent residence status and will have minimal to no protection at all. Next to India, the Philippines is the third largest source country of migrants coming to Canada. From 2007 to 2009 alone, almost 50,000 foreign workers from the Philippines entered Canada via the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

Many of these university-educated workers find employment in remote communities doing jobs that locals are unwilling to do. Among them are Antonio, Arnisito and Ernie in Manitoba who came to Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to work in a gas station in High Prairie, Alberta – all of whom are married with children living in the Philippines. They were arrested and are now facing deportation, accused of “working without status”.

“The Temporary Foreign Workers Program puts people in a very precarious and vulnerable situation” says Migrante Canada chairperson Maru Maesa. “It has to be thoroughly reviewed, changes have to be made. This includes providing opportunities for temporary foreign workers to apply for permanent residence” she added.

However, the current administration in the Philippines has not lifted a finger to address the issues of Filipino migrants. The Philippine government abandons its responsibility of providing good jobs for its citizens at home. Instead, President. Noynoy Aquino continues to engage in the massive deployment of Filipino workers overseas. “With Filipinos leaving the Philippines at the rate of some 4500 a day, labour export is indeed profitable business” Maru Maesa pointed out.

The story of the 3 fathers from Manitoba is not new. Every day, we see and hear of harrowing experiences of abuse, deprivation and displacement of millions of migrants around the world.

Labor export is being intensified by governments in many underdeveloped and developing countries, most especially now with the financial and economic crisis. It is the neoliberal solution to keep the sinking Philippine economy afloat as Filipino migrant workers remit dollars to their loved ones. To date they now rank fifth in terms of the highest amount of remittances sent to the home country. A World Bank report said that even if the global economy has slowed down, migrant workers’ remittances will continue to rise. The bank estimates that money sent home by Filipino overseas workers would reach a total of \$21.3 billion for 2010.

In the recent gathering of migrant-sending and -receiving countries through the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), governments boasted that migrants can help in their

countries' development through their billion dollar remittances. They said that this can be done through "Managing Migration" i.e., a more systematic and intensive push to export labour in the name of development with lack of or no protection.

Neo-liberal globalization has forced us to migrate. It has reduced us to mere commodities to be bought and sold in the global marketplace. And the more aggressive drive to export labour impels client regimes to seek bilateral agreements with receiving countries to ensure the continued sale of migrants at "competitive" prices.

As we celebrate International Migrants Day, Migrante Canada and Filipino migrants the world over must take up the challenge to be ever more militant in exposing the conditions and issues of our compatriots, in launching and being part of campaigns that highlight and address the struggles of migrants.

It is important, too, that we link our struggles to those of other movements fighting for their own but similar causes: the workers' movement for jobs, decent wages and better working conditions; the peasant movement to own the lands that they till; the women's movement, and the youth and students' movement. We must lock arms even with people's movements for national liberation. The core issues of their struggles are the very issues that we also fight for. In the final analysis, our genuine liberation from the evils of forced migration lies in the resolution of the roots of the problems causing the underdevelopment of our peoples and nations.

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