

Communique of the Second General Assembly of the International Migrants Alliance

Manila, Philippines

July 3-4, 2011

The Second General Assembly of the International Migrants Alliance, held on July 3-4 2011, was concluded with an even stronger commitment from its member and participating organizations from across the globe to continue building and strengthening an international movement of migrants and refugees against imperialism.

“We are workers, we are not slaves!” “Si, si, puede! (Yes, it is possible!)” “Long live international solidarity!” – these slogans and more reverberated throughout the hall of the momentous event that was aptly themed, “Strengthen and Expand our Movement: Migrants, Resist Intensified Imperialist Attacks, Achieve Victories in Our Struggle.”

One hundred thirty-three participants from 23 countries attended the General Assembly. These countries and territories are Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Macau, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Senegal, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States of America.

Being a part of the International Festival on Peoples’ Rights and Struggles, the IMA assembly served as the major platform for migrant workers and advocates to come together for their rights and wellbeing and for the strengthening of their movement.

Mr. Len Cooper of the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) in Australia and the Vice Chairperson of the International League of Peoples’ Struggle (ILPS) was the General Assembly’s keynote speaker. In his address, he said that: “Imperialism is creating a world full of displaced people which it hopes will enable it to divide and undermine the organised struggle of the world proletariat and bypass, undermine and weaken the working people’s trade unions and their resistance.”

He expounded on the situation of migrants in Australia and how the Australian government use various means in curbing the rights of migrants and ensure that the latter remain oppressed and exploited. “The displaced worker, the migrant, the refugee, is a commodity for buying and selling by big business. The treatment of labour as a commodity is at the heart of capitalist exploitation,” he said.

He also stressed that, “The struggle for the rights of displaced people, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, is part of the struggle for the liberation of the entire proletariat and the world’s people. To overthrow imperialism and the profit motive and replace it with a system ... a world where human rights are genuinely portable and universal.”

Solidarity messages were also given by staunch anti-imperialists who further urged the IMA to advance its work towards building the biggest, broadest and most militant alliance of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants around the world.

Prof. Jose Maria Sison, chairperson of the ILPS, outlined the rights of migrant workers based on the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of

Their Families. He said that, even if the Convention is not effective in many countries where migrants are, “the IMA can use it as a basis for drawing up a check list of rights which need to be upheld, defended and protected.”

Professor Sison also warned that the worsening crisis of the world capitalist system will contract job opportunities for migrant workers and further deteriorate the living and working conditions of migrants. Thus, he said that the people should demand for real economic development and job opportunities in their underdeveloped countries.

Meanwhile, Rep. Luz Ilagan of the Gabriela Women’s Party stated that for the IMA, “The challenges are clear. The monstrous claws of neoliberalism must be crushed. The continuing attacks on the rights of the migrants ... should be in the program of the IMA. Nor should the legitimate issues of families left in the countries of origin be ignored.”

An inspiring message was also sent by Rev. Rex Reyes, Jr., Secretary-General of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), who called current migration as slavery. He congratulated the IMA for the event and pledged the NCCP’s continued support to the struggles of migrant workers.

On the organizational front, the ranks of the anti-imperialist and progressive movement of migrant workers grew with 31 new organizations joining the roster of IMA membership. They are, namely:

1. Migrante Canada and Immigrant Women Workers’ Association (IWork) (2 from Canada);
2. Overseas Nepalese Workers Union (ONWU HK), Far East Overseas Nepalese Association (FEONA), and GAMMI-HK (3 from Hong Kong);
3. Migrante-Nagoya and Gabriela Nagoya (2 from Japan);
4. Osan Workers Cultural Center (1 from Korea);
5. 4-Way Voice Monthly (1 from Taiwan);
6. Pinas First (1 from Austria);
7. Comitato Degli Immigrati in Italia (1 from Italy);
8. SAMAKA-NL, Malayang Samahan ng mga Pilipino sa Nederland, and Kabalikat-NL (3 from Netherlands);
9. Migrante-Switzerland (1 from Switzerland);
10. La Alameda (1 from Argentina);
11. Frente Popular Revolucionario and Libreria Del Pueblo, Inc./Proyekto Alianza de Exbraceros del Norte 1942/1964 (2 from Mexico);
12. Migrante-Australia and Philippines-Australia Women’s Association (2 from Australia);
13. NDU Migrant Workers Network and Pinay Aotearoa Trust (2 from New Zealand);
14. National Union of Filipino Seafarers Crewing Danish Ships (FILDAN), International Seafarers’ Aciton Center (ISAC) and Kilusang Mayo Uno (3 from Philippines);
15. IMA Nepal (1 from Nepal); and
16. Frente Unido de Inmigrantes Ecuatorianos, Filipino-American Health Workers Association, Filipino Migrant Center Los Angeles, National Alliance for Filipino Concerns, and Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano (5 from US).

The assembly first approved the report of IMA Chairperson Eni Lestari who showed the achievements of the IMA in its work. She challenged the members to address the identified weaknesses of the alliance based on the campaigns, education, networking and organizing work that IMA conducted. It also approved the finance report of the alliance, amendments to the Constitution and the rules that guided the assembly.

In between plenary sessions, the participants were divided into regional groups to discuss the pressing issues and concerns migrants face in their respective countries and global regions as well as appoint their regional representative to the International Coordinating Body (ICB). Likewise, the associate members of the IMA held a separate caucus to discuss how they can better involve and contribute to the alliance.

Finally, the General Program of Action for 2011–2014 was approved, outlining the campaigns that IMA will conduct, activities that it shall initiate to educate migrants and disseminate important information, its advocacy in the international level, and resolutions to strengthen the IMA organizationally.

A new set of members of the International Coordinating Body (ICB) was elected by the alliance. The ICB elected the new set of executive Committee members, namely:

1. Eni Lestari (Chairperson)
2. Dr. Irene Fernandez (Vice Chairperson)
3. Gary Martinez (Secretary General)
4. Teresa Gutierrez (Deputy Secretary)
5. Connie Sorio (Treasurer)

The remaining ICB members are: Julia Camagong (regional representative for the United States), Elvira Arellano (regional representative for Latin America), Rumana Shiekh (regional representative for South Asia), Grace Punongbayan (regional representative for Europe), John Monterona (regional representative for Middle East & Africa), Hsia Hsiao-Chuan, Mostafa Henaway, Antonio Arizaga, Luz Mirian Jaramilo, and Teddy Dalisay (elected at large).

Associate members in the ICB will be represented by Ramon Bultron of Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants and Wahu Kaara of Kenya Debt Relief Network.

Alternate members to the ICB are Joy Sison (USA), Dennis Maga (New Zealand), Jane Ordinario (Canada) and Anisur Khan (Bangladesh).

The IMA Second General Assembly was a resounding success. As the past chairperson Eni Lestari put in her report: “Three years ago, we declared that it was time that we – the migrant workers – speak for ourselves. For the last three years, we did; and we did so with militancy and the determination to fight for our rights and resist imperialist attacks to the migrants and the people.”

In the next three years, migrant workers will continue to arouse, organize and mobilize to achieve concrete victories for the migrant workers and pave the way for the establishment of societies where there is no forced migration and migrant workers and refugees are back home in their countries with their families and living decently, peacefully and humanely.