



AIDS CONFERENCE 2006
Statement from CARAM-Asia and Migrant Forum in Asia



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For decades, migrant workers all over the world have made significant contributions to the economies of both home and host countries. Without the migrant workers the economies of many sending countries would have collapsed and those of the receiving countries would not have attained their impressive economic performances.

In spite of their significant contributions, many migrant workers are often subjected to various forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Women migrant workers in particular fall prey to all forms of violence. In times of conflict, it is always the migrant workers who are at greatest risk.

We are also concerned about the present mode of mass labour migration, which is premised on commodification of human labour – treating migrants as tradable commodities, uprooting them from the support systems of the family and the community, and negating the wholeness of their humanity. Because of these, the migrant workers suffer physical, mental and psychological ill health.

We express our outrage over the continuing denial and erosion of the rights of migrant workers, particularly to their health and well being, as evidenced by the recent summary deportations and mass expulsion of migrants (e.g. Malaysia); the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS; the high rates of occupational accidents and work related diseases; the steady stream of migrants deaths; the high incidence of mental, emotional and psychological stress and distress and the disintegration of migrants families.

We also express our concern over the ongoing discrimination against migrant workers as seen through the mandatory HIV/AIDS testing they are subjected to upon arrival in the host country. Conduct of mandatory HIV testing without their knowledge i.e. without pre- and post-test counseling, violates the right to information, privacy and confidentiality.

Migrant workers enter the country of work without spouses and partners. Further, marriage in the receiving country often becomes reason for deportation. Such policies deny the human, social and sexual identities and needs of migrant workers, and increase their health and HIV vulnerabilities when they opt for unsafe sexual activities. Women migrant workers and domestic workers are among the most vulnerable of groups and their right to health must be protected. As per Migrants Rights UN Convention they have the rights to family reunification at the host country.

The AIDS conference theme this year “Time to Deliver” underscores the emphasis to HIV prevention, treatment and care. While we are cognizant that the UN and world

leaders have committed to massive scaling up of HIV prevention, treatment and care with the aim of coming as close as possible to universal access to treatment and services by 2010, the theme of the conference, is an apt call for commitments to be translated into timely delivery and action.

However beyond this call we call for the scrapping of mandatory HIV/AIDS testing. In addition, migrant workers are tested for a further 18-20 tests, including pregnancy for women. We would like to reiterate our conviction that all migrant workers have the right to work and migrants who are tested positive with HIV/AIDS and other illness must not be repatriated and their right to work must be protected.

We stress the need for home countries to invest on information/education on HIV/AIDS in their pre-departure and pre-employment programs. Host countries should also provide adequate and accurate information on access to quality health care for all migrant workers irregardless of their status. Most of all, health care and services must be provided in their own languages, to migrant workers in both home and host countries regardless of their status.

If left on its current course, it will prevent the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. The challenges are indeed numerous. Financing to implement HIV/AIDS plans remains inadequate, leaving many Governments unable to sustain the delivery of HIV/AIDS programs. Fear, widespread stigma and discrimination, violence and homophobia continue to add to the resistance.

We call on governments to speedily move towards the goal of universal access and respond adequately through concerted action. This must be done through the fulfillment of their obligations to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the various international human rights conventions. These international instruments set the basic standards in upholding migrants' health and human rights. We further renew our long standing call on all governments to ratify the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

The right to health is a right to life. No migrant worker and migrant family should be deprived of this.

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