



## Standing Members

### Bangladesh

Ain O Salih Kendra (ASK); Association for Community Development (ACD); Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU); Welfare Association of Repatriated Bangladeshi Employees (WARBE)

### India

Center for Education and Communication (CEC); Center for Indian Migrant Studies (CIMS); Migrant Forum India (MFI); Migrants Rights Council;

### Nepal

All Nepal's Women Association (ANWA); Women Rehabilitation Center (WOREC)

### Sri Lanka

Action Network for Migrant Workers (ACTFORM); Migrant Services Centre (MSC); Women and Media Collective (WMC)

### Burma

Federation of Trade Unions – Burma (FTUB)

### Indonesia

Center for Indonesian Migrant Workers (CIMW); Jamas Pekabumi; KOPBUMI; Migrant Care; Solidaritas Perempuan; Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI)

### Malaysia

Messrs. Charles Hector; Tenaganita

### Philippines

Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative; Batis Center for Women; Center for Migrants Advocacy (CMA-Phils); Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anakan ng Migranteng Mangagawang Pilipino (KAKAMMPI); Kanlungan Center Foundation, Inc. (KCFI); Unlad Kabayan Migrants Services Foundation, Inc.

### Singapore

St. Francis Workers Centre (SFWC)

### Hong Kong

Asian Migrant Centre (AMC); Coalition for Migrants Rights (CMR); Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU)

### Japan

Solidarity for Migrants – Japan (SMJ)

### Korea

Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea (JCMK)

### Taiwan

Hope Workers Center (HWC)

# Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)

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## Uphold the Rights and Support the Struggle of Women Migrant Workers Women's Day Statement 8 March 2009

Today on the occasion of International Women's Day, we celebrate the immeasurable contribution of women around the world. On this day, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) calls on the international community to uphold the rights and support the ongoing struggle of women migrant workers.

MFA welcomes the adoption of the CEDAW General Recommendation 26 (GR26) on women migrant workers, and calls on governments to immediately implement this recommendation. For several years, migrants' rights advocates have lobbied the CEDAW committee to acknowledge the multiple levels of discrimination and abuse women face in countries of destination, transit and origin. GR 26 is a critical step in ensuring that states respect, protect and uphold the human and labour rights of women migrants.

MFA supports the inclusion of decent *work for domestic workers* in the agenda of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2010 and the proposal for an International Labour Organization (ILO) convention on domestic workers to strengthen protection of the fundamental rights of all domestic workers, local and migrant.

We also recognize the triumphs and successes of women migrant workers on this women's day. Women migrant workers contribute to all aspects of economic, social, cultural and political life in both countries of origin and destination. Women migrant workers' capacity to self-organize and establish economic empowerment for themselves is a testament to their strength in the face of the massive challenges through the migration process.

As we commemorate International Women's Day, we also recognize the difficult conditions and challenges confronting women migrant workers, particularly with the onset of the global financial crisis.

### Women Migrant Workers and the Global Financial Crisis

MFA is deeply concerned with the impact of the unraveling global financial crisis on the millions of women migrant workers throughout the region. The threats against women migrants are intensifying with reports of non payment of wages, loss of jobs, harassment and violence. The 1997 Asian financial crisis demonstrated that migrant workers, especially women migrants and those with irregular status are among the hardest hit and most vulnerable in times of crisis.

ILO forecasts that this year alone over 50 million women and men could lose their jobs worldwide as a result of the global recession. Over the past months MFA has monitored massive lay-offs of migrant workers. The Malaysian government has announced a 'locals first' policy, which effectively bans the recruitment of migrant workers for the manufacturing and service sectors. On 13 February 2009, the Nepal government appealed to the international community for assistance for its returning migrant workers. <sup>1</sup> The Philippine Department of Labour reports that some 40,000 have already

<sup>1</sup> As reported online at the following:

[http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=1949#](http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=1949#)

lost their jobs; 33,000 workers are coping with shortened work hours and wage cuts and some 5,000 men and women migrant workers have been retrenched because of economic slowdown.

Women migrant workers are commonly the economic backbones of the families. As such they are facing greater challenges as families back home deal with rising cost of food, medication, clothing, educational expenses, and other basic necessities. The reason for migration such as unemployment and attempts to support families will not disappear in the global recession. Desperation may deepen and migrants may endure perilous conditions to continue sending support back home.

In 1996 the immediate impact of the Asian financial crisis was felt by women migrant workers:<sup>2</sup>

- In Hong Kong, the minimum wage of foreign domestic workers were frozen and employers pushed for wages to be further curbed.
- Counseling groups in Hong Kong reported cases of termination of migrant domestic workers as their employers were hit by the crisis.
- In Malaysia, there was a sharp increase of undocumented Indonesian and Burmese women migrant workers.
- In Korea, from June 1997 to January 1998 at least 150,000 to 300,000 workers, men and women, have been deported.
- Reports of non-payment of wages as well as undocumented women migrant workers unable to find work were also documented.

MFA is deeply concerned that migrant workers will again bear the brunt of the global crisis if migrant workers are not supported in this difficult time. As MFA monitors the on-going financial crisis, we note with growing alarm the lack of response from governments to the needs of women migrant workers. Governments must recognize women migrants' concerns and examine in consultation with workers' organizations how to support migrants at this time. We reiterate our call to governments to stop labour export policies, the commodification and exploitation of migrants and dependence on migrant remittances as a national development strategy.

Governments must recognize the multiple and cross-cutting discriminations that confront women migrant workers. Gender perspectives are essential to addressing the specific and urgent needs of women migrants in the midst of the financial crisis.

### Women Migrant Domestic Workers

Domestic workers provide an environment for other workers and their families to improve their living standards by taking care of their homes and household members (children and the elderly). However, due to the nature of their work and their working environment (households of private persons), they cannot be monitored by labor inspectors. In most countries, they are not included under national labor laws, thus denying their status as "real workers". This is true in many countries particularly in Asia where very few have passed laws on domestic workers.

MFA is very troubled by the continued non recognition of domestic work as work. The exclusion of domestic work from national labour legislation has permitted the proliferation of violations of all the fundamental principles and rights at work, including respect of freedom from forced labour and non-discrimination.

In celebration of May Day 2008 MFA together with the Asian Migrant Domestic Workers Alliance launched a regional campaign "*Domestic Work is WORK*". For International Women's Day, we welcome and support the proposed ILO Convention on Domestic Workers as another step toward protecting the labour and human rights of domestic workers, both local and migrant.

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<sup>2</sup> Asian Migrant Yearbook 1998

In solidarity with women and women migrants around the world, MFA calls for the following:

In light of the above issues, MFA calls for the following:

- The ratification and effective implementation of the UN Migrant Workers Convention on the protection of migrant workers and members of their families, the core human rights conventions of the United Nations, the fundamental Conventions of the ILO and those that pertain to migrant workers;
- Governments should ensure that gender- and rights-based approach are at the core of policies, legislations and programs of countries of origin, transit and destination;
- For governments to ensure that retrenched migrant workers are adequately compensated, not forced to repatriate and be ensured of safe passage home;
- For countries to have holistic and coherent policies for job generation in order for people not to be forced to migrate, making migration an option and not a means to survive;
- Governments' stimulus programs should not stigmatise migrants or heighten xenophobic sentiments toward migrants;
- For governments to develop and implement, in consultation with migrants groups, sustainable and comprehensive reintegration programs for migrant workers;
- Recognize the value and contribution of women migrant workers in both countries of destination and origin; in countries of destination protection of the labour and human rights of women migrants as well as provisions for social services for women migrants;
- Adoption of an ILO convention specifically addressing the rights of domestic workers, both local and migrant domestic workers;
- Recognize domestic work as work by ensuring that domestic work is included in national labour laws; and
- The implementation of CEDAW and the GR 26 on women migrant workers.

*MFA is a regional network of non-government organizations (NGOs), associations and trade unions of migrant workers, and individual advocates in Asia that are committed to protect and promote the rights and welfare of migrant workers. It is guided by a vision of an alternative world system based on respect for human rights and dignity, social justice, and gender equity, particularly for migrant workers.*