

DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (IAMR)

Manila, Philippines
October 28-30, 2008

We, migrants, refugees and advocates, from 152 organizations in 35 countries, gathered together for the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) in Manila, Oct. 28-30, 2008, declare our unity and solidarity.

The IAMR is the response of grassroots migrants and refugees to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) process which professes to embrace “development” and “identify ways to strengthen the mutually beneficial relationship between migration and development”

The GFMD comes at a time when the number of migrants, more than half of which is women, has grown to about 205 million around the world. Tens of millions are undocumented while about 20 million are refugees. Altogether they remit US\$2.26 trillion, an amount which is far more than the combined 'development assistance' given by capitalist countries to colonies & semi-colonies.

Cognizant of the need to advance human development* in real terms understood and felt by migrants and refugees, we strongly oppose the framework and definition adopted by the GFMD on migration and development, which specifically promotes a temporary labor migration program with the Philippine model as example.

As the advanced capitalist countries continue to dominate global politics and economics, so does the concept of development follow. 'Globalization' today has meant trade liberalization, the opening up of domestic industry to so-called free market forces, privatization and deregulation.

Supposedly designed to address global problems, these policies have caused and exacerbated poverty, hunger, death, landlessness, unemployment, economic and financial crises and conflicts in our home countries. These conditions have left us poverty-stricken, displaced and oppressed and have left us without any option but to migrate and leave our country and families in order to seek the safety and security of other lands and in order to survive.

We are aware that the GFMD arose in the midst of the worsening world economic crisis where the advanced capitalist countries are fighting their way out of this crisis while retaining their economic and political interests, control and power, while poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment continue to ravage the lives of peoples of their colonies and semi-colonies.

The GFMD is essentially an anti-poverty and financing scheme designed by the World Bank and the OECD to perpetuate the semicolonial and semifeudal character of many poor and underdeveloped countries. By designing this scheme, the WB and OECD, and other international financial institutions, want to ensure that the poor, debt-ridden countries would be able to pay their huge debts through migrant remittances, thus transforming those remittances as a “tool for development”.

We condemn these migrant receiving and migrant sending governments, international financial institutions and intergovernmental organizations espousing the neoliberal agenda in the GFMD. They are the culprits why our countries are poor and underdeveloped. They are the ones who have to answer to the people for the devastating effects of their neoliberal policies -- joblessness, underemployment, landlessness, inflation, deteriorating social services, etc.

As migrants and refugees, we bear inhuman conditions and suffer attacks on our rights and welfare in the countries where we have sought to find residence, work and refuge. We are regarded as cheap labor and are virtually turned into commodities for export in exchange for foreign-exchange revenues.

We are lowly-paid and exploited in the host countries where we are found. We do mostly jobs described as 3D's = dirty, dangerous and demeaning. We have become targets of hate crimes, as we continuously confront racism, discrimination, xenophobia, criminalization and slavery. We suffer the blame and become scapegoats for the domestic crises in our host countries, falsely accused of stealing local jobs and feeding ourselves off from welfare funds.

We are subjected to threats of and actual arrests, detention, deportation and physical torture. The undocumented among us and our children, are criminalized and subjected to harsh and inhumane treatment in violation of international labor and humanitarian standards.

The women among us experience added oppression – lower wages, stereotyped and isolated work opportunities, first to be laid off, sweat shop slavery, deskilling, sexual harassment and rape often ending in murder, and often fall victims to human trafficking for forced labor, prostitution and other forms of slavery.

These debunk the GFMD vision that women migrant workers have been empowered by the diaspora. As migrants and refugees we do not enjoy the full guarantee of labor, health, social and basic human rights as enshrined by international conventions. On the other hand, union rights are directly attacked and repressed.

1. We condemn the continuing attacks on the economic, social, civil and political rights of migrants and the repression of progressive migrant organizations.

2. We denounce the blacklisting of seafarers when they fight for their rights and the plan threatening their job security by placing them on probation for three months whereby they can be sent home after the said period. Likewise, we condemn the Flag-of-Convenience (FOCs) which remains to be a money-making venture because the flagship state, manning agencies, training centers, and the government receive tax-cuts and non-strict labor laws.

3. We reject the GFMD framework that migration is an “alternative to development”, because in fact neoliberal globalization has failed miserably on its promise to usher development especially in poor countries that has a vast pool of unemployed.

The GFMD exposes the real intent of advanced capitalist countries and their institutions to exploit the migration phenomenon, the lucrative labor export programs and migrant remittances for the purpose of salvaging or propping up the collapsing economies, especially of semi-colonies and dependent countries. The Arroyo government in the Philippines is the best example of a puppet government and migrant exporting country collaborating with imperialist countries in pushing the flawed GFMD framework of promoting remittances to supposedly advance economic development.

While there is some truth that remittances temporarily alleviate the financial woes of families of migrants, this perverse notion signifies greater commodification of migrants and the perpetuation of conditions for cheap labor, not to mention the destructive social costs of migration, especially on children and families. Labor sending and receiving countries expose their unstated albeit inhuman policy of qualifying migrants into those who are merely fit or unfit to work overseas.

Today, we assert and stand up for our rights, welfare and interests as migrants and refugees. We declare our commitment to empower ourselves and other migrant organizations and formations through our own self-organizing, education and mobilizations and actions on our issues.

1. We condemn & oppose the neo-liberal globalization scheme & the war on terror, & demand for an end to wars of aggression.
2. We vow to work for an alternative development strategy, which among others, will remove the systematic basis for forced migration and conflicts. We refuse to take part in any sell-out that would turn our future and the future of our countries and people into more impoverishment and exacerbate underdevelopment. We refuse to be modern-day slaves. We shall actively resist the neoliberal agenda of the GFMD.
3. We call for the full implementation of all international conventions and instruments for the protection of our rights and welfare as migrants and refugees.
4. We call for an end to all forms of racism and discrimination, and vow to struggle against xenophobia, criminalization and slavery of the undocumented among us.
5. We inspire ourselves by the past and present struggles of our progressive and militant brothers and sisters migrants & refugees and grassroots-based advocates to uphold & advance our rights through various forms of struggles and organization.
6. We honor the memory of those in the diaspora who have lost their lives crossing real and imaginary borders.
7. We declare our unity and solidarity with all migrants and refugees, and all progressive and militant forces around the world in fighting exploitation and oppression.

8. As we speak in our own behalf, we ask the rest of the oppressed peoples and progressive forces around the world to join us in our exodus to build a humane, just and peaceful world, free of exploitation and oppression.

No to the GFMD!

No to forced migration! No to labor export!

No to imperialist globalization!

Migrant rights are human rights!

Advance the international solidarity of migrants and refugees!