



25 Years Promoting Migrant Workers' Rights
BALIKAN NATIN, BALIKATAN NATIN ANG SAMAHAN

STATEMENT TO THE SECOND MEETING OF THE GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT (GFMD)

We, members of the Samahan ng Manggagawang Pilipino sa Belgium (Samahan), value the importance of discussing issues related to international migration and development amongst government, international organizations, academics, civil society and stakeholders like diaspora and migrants' groups. We likewise recognize the importance of the themes for the 2nd meeting of the GFMD.

We believe though that attention should be focused on the equally important issues of the feminization of migration, the social cost of migration, the limits of the legal channels of migration and the rights of undocumented migrants.

Feminization of migration should be addressed. This is because Philippine statistics show that since 1992, the number of Filipino women deployed overseas has been increasing. For instance, from a female-male ratio of 50-50 in 1992, the ratio of women deployed overseas has risen to 74 percent in 2004 although this has gradually dissipated to 60 percent in 2006. Because of increasing economic difficulties at home, more and more Filipino women migrate for work abroad to supplement the family income and help support the education of their children or their siblings. Migrant women have specific vulnerabilities especially in countries and societies where women are marginalized and therefore, their rights should be protected. Their contribution to development should likewise be recognized.

Social cost of migration should be acknowledged. Families are separated. Children grow up with the absence of one or both parents. The break up of the basic unit of the society should be addressed. The forum should delve into the psychological and emotional impact on children of dysfunctional families. Moreover, the rising incidences of marital separations due to infidelity and indiscretion brought about by migration of a married worker should be studied.

There should be recognition that there are limits to the legal channels of migration. Existence of involuntary migration and migration for economic reasons should be recognized. Governments of origin and destination countries need to work together to develop immigration policies to encourage legal channels of migration and better protection for migrants. The mobility of these workers across or within sectors should also be looked into.

The rights of undocumented migrants should be protected. Basic health insurance should be available to them. Acceptable working hours and their rights to vacation and leave should also be upheld. As most undocumented migrants are in the domestic sector, their contribution to domestic work should be recognized in measuring development.

Governments must work to ensure that decent working conditions should prevail in countries of origin so that workers truly have the option to migrate or not to migrate.

Destination countries should recognize their demand for labor. This would provide opportunities to migrants, better working conditions and better protection for them.

The Philippine government should direct its efforts to improving the domestic economy so that more jobs are created at reasonable pay so that standards of living are adequate. It should prioritize industries wherein overseas Filipinos will be able to invest and eventually provide employment for its citizens in the long run. Graft and corruption should be addressed so that resources should be channeled to projects where the people's lives will be uplifted.

The Philippine Government should likewise work for the delisting of the Philippines in VISION (system of Schengen visa inquiries) for a shorter visa processing of Filipinos to Europe. Family members wishing to visit their family in Europe will have a shorter visa processing.

Embassies should work for the recognition of diplomas and skills of migrants in receiving countries. For example, the Philippine Embassy in Belgium should work at least for the recognition of the Philippine Driver's license in Belgium for those being employed as cab or bus drivers and chauffeurs in overseas countries.

In support for the Filipino overseas workers, legal assistance and social workers should be available in countries where there are more than 20,000 overseas Filipinos like countries in the Middle East, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Italy.

Finally, GFMD should not remain as a venue to dialogue issues on migration and development. It should work for pressuring origin and receiving countries to some level of commitment.