





# Women in Asia: Surviving and Resisting the Crisis

By Mary Joan A. Guan



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**W**omen in the Asian region faced several challenges during the past couple of years. Economically, they were one of the hardest hit during the 2007 global economic financial crisis because of the massive retrenchment in industries that hire mostly women. Disaster after disaster attacked the region caused by climate change that made women and children more vulnerable. On top of all these, political repression and gender discrimination victimized hundreds of militant and activist women in the region.

Yet, women persist. They are natural survivors. Existing in a region where people are mostly poor and oppressed, women live through the challenges. Living in a society where gender discrimination continues, women endure the hard times. They resist.

So how did Asian women survive the crisis? What are the mechanisms available to them? How did they resist their pathetic situation?

Although Asia is a multicultural region, women display commonalities in surviving a crisis. There are also aspects to be considered on how they cope, such as their personal capability, the governments' response, and other resources available to them. As women start to handle the crisis through their personal capacity, many women are discovering the merit of collective effort to change their situation.

Some of the mechanisms opted by women are, in the long run, detrimental rather than beneficial to them. Some even resort to anti-social strategies such as drug dealing and prostitution

### Triple Threats

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) stated that countries in Asia and the Pacific are hit hardest with a triple whammy of food and fuel price increase, climate change, and the global economic crisis<sup>1</sup>.

The triple threats can be traced to imperialist globalization that perpetually haunts Asia and the rest of the world. Women, together with their children, receive severe blows because of their status as one of the most marginalized sectors in society. The International Labor Organization calculated an increase of 50-120 million in the number of Asians living under the poverty line during the period 2007 to 2009<sup>2</sup>. Crisis means more hardship for the poorest and marginalized sectors in society. Approximately 70% of those who live on less than a dollar each day are women<sup>3</sup>.

The triple threats exacerbate the vulnerability of women, through (1) increased unemployment especially among those working in export-oriented countries, (2) aggravating exploitation in the workplace, (3) lower remittances to their families,

(4) insecurity on food and other resources, (5) vulnerability to sex trafficking and prostitution, and (6) lesser opportunity for education and lesser access to health and other social services.

### Coping Strategies

Crisis magnifies existing inequalities. Access to basic needs and services becomes a challenge. As part of the marginalized sectors, women make an effort to look for means on how to survive, always taking into consideration the wellbeing of their families. Such consideration puts a lot of pressure to women.

Women in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia, have common mechanisms in responding to the crisis. Women reduce their own and their family's consumption on food, reduce the number of meals and buy non-nutritious food. They also resort to borrowing from loan sharks, affluent relatives and friends, and finance institutions. Many of them have multiple jobs or have been confined to informal employment.

Some of the mechanisms opted by women are, in the long run, detrimental rather than beneficial to them. Some even resort to anti-social strategies such as drug dealing and prostitution, just like in Thailand. Women, especially those belonging to the lowest income bracket, could not afford to be unemployed. They have no savings and no social security to fall back on. Especially when the crisis intensifies and the cost of living rises, women pursue to work even more and accept any work available, regardless of the conditions and consequences.

On the other hand, constructive strategies have also been worked out by women. One significant example is the mechanism used by Vietnamese women, who maximized the spirit of sharing and collectivism. They did not only think of themselves when jobs are available but instead, shared with others, bearing in mind that every one of them needs to give remittances to their families. In this way, the insecurity and depression of the workers are lessened.



Women discuss the impacts of the ecological crisis in Indonesia.

Support from others is an important factor why women can cope even with the most depressing situation. The social cost of the crisis includes increased breakdown in family relationships. In Indonesia, women who lost their jobs have faced divorce and domestic violence<sup>4</sup>. They were able to survive through the social networks that support them through cash loans, provision of food and care for the children<sup>5</sup>.

Although only Thailand and Indonesia have articulated about prostitution as the last recourse for survival, prostitution has been a long standing issue in each of the countries in the region. It is indicative of a feudal patriarchal society that considers women as commodities and sex objects. Women who have fewer opportunities to get jobs become more vulnerable to become victims of prostitution. In the Philippines alone, as climate change reduces income from farming and fishing, there are reports of some women driven into prostitution. Small brothels reportedly appeared

near the coastal areas where transient seafarers hire women for sexual favors and often, the women are ferried to bigger ships by their pimps<sup>6</sup>.

#### Employing Different Tactics and Strategies

Through mobilizing, women show their collective power to make clear demands, strategizing each move. They have taken different kinds of strategies, from simple to sophisticated approaches in redressing their grievances.

Women prepare simple petition letters from the concerned stakeholders sent to the decision-makers or state officials. In the Philippines, women usually do petition signing against price increases. But it does not end with letters.

Mass demonstrations, assembly, or rally occur to make clear their demands. An organization in Sri Lanka, the Praja Abhilasha Network, sets up a people's tribunal this July 2010 to compel the



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government to act for the people displaced by war and tsunami. Reportedly, the government has done nothing for the 450 families displaced by civil war and for the 17,000 people stuck in refugee camps after being displaced by tsunami<sup>7</sup>.

For the workers, it can come in the form of organizing a strike, especially if management is not receptive to the demands of the workers during negotiations. It can be any collective protest action with the objective of getting the message across especially if the target audience refuses to listen.

The 3,000 Chinese workers in the Japanese-owned factory that produces electronic components are on strike to demand wage increases. The strike is the latest in a series of protests by the Chinese labor movement to demand better working conditions

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and wage increases. The workers are encouraged by the successful result of strikes in some factories belonging to Honda and Toyota that resulted in wage increases of between 20 and 30 percent<sup>8</sup>.

As women's involvement for social change progresses, they realize that their experiences should be consolidated through service, immersion, and education. In this way, one can learn the more appropriate solutions for the community's problems. It can also be the means to organize communities.

In the Philippines, Samahan ng Maralitang Kababaihang Nagkakaisa or SAMAKANA (Organization of United Urban Poor Women) always requests Center for Women's Resources to conduct education and training activities, as part of the members' consolidating activity. Through these activities, the members figure out the correlation of their plight with the existing policies in the country. These activities likewise facilitate their plan of action.

Women's resistance can also be in the form of a parliamentary struggle, participating in the legislative arena to design laws that will be advantageous for women. For instance, in the Philippines, through women's active participation in the elections for nine years now, women have been able to field sectoral representatives through the Gabriela Women's Partylist (GWP) in Congress. GWP promotes the politics of change, which deviates from the patronage style of traditional politicians. Through the painstaking struggle of Filipino women, certain laws were passed such as the Anti-Rape Law or Republic Act 8353, the Anti-Violence against Women and Children Act or Republic Act 9262, the Anti-trafficking in Persons Act or Republic Act 9208, among others.

Writing about the realities is also a form of resistance. It can be a powerful tool to arouse the sentiments of the target audience. Articles that stir debate result to writers being harassed or worse, being killed. The Philippines was dubbed as the deadliest country for journalists in 2009 by the Newseum,

a museum of news history located in Washington, counting 33 journalists killed in service for the year 2009 alone<sup>9</sup>.

While some resist through the pen; others do it with arms. Liberation movements in Asia have made the region a threat to the global powers especially to the United States. Former US president George Bush even called the southeastern part of the region as the second front of terror. The US' cry on the "global war on terror" has served as a political leverage to Asian authoritarian governments to adopt repressive programs that curtail civil liberties and violate human rights. Despite the various means of suppression by authoritarian governments in the region, the revolutionary movements in the Philippines, India, and Nepal persevere because of continuing impoverishment of the people.

Whatever form of resistance women in collective action takes, it still shakes the status quo. This is because organizations and movements change the balance of power and create new power bases. Organizations serve as pressure to change the way things are. They get the attention of the populace, shape the terms of the decision-making process, and frame the issue in terms of the desired solution.

### Commitment as an Ingredient

For a women's movement to last, the zeal to carry out the basic precepts of their organization is the ingredient for success. Commitment stirs action. Commitment means to pledge to a certain purpose and to practice the beliefs consistently.

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It was the commitment of our toiling foremothers a century ago that started to uplift the condition of women. Yet, the welfare of women has still a long way to go. It is now the duty of the contemporary generation to continue the struggle.

The road may not always be easy. Resistance invites repression. Yet throughout history, women have had to unite in order to build a stronger shield against oppression and crisis. This time, women can see the crisis as a challenge and an opportunity to address systemic imbalances and to cultivate a gender-sensitive culture that nurtures women, children, and men.

### NOTES

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# Impacts of the Economic Crisis to Women Migrants

By Eni Lestari



**W**omen migrants comprise almost half, or 49%, of the total number of migrants in the world. They work mainly in labor-intensive industries or in the service sector as domestic workers, caregivers, nurses, waitresses or entertainers. Hundreds of thousands of women also become migrants by way of marriage such as in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, USA, Canada and in a number of countries in Europe.

The massive migration of women resulted first and foremost to the worsening exploitation of women in their home countries. Women, especially of worker and peasant origin, are continuously displaced from their jobs and their lands and are forced to

seek employment abroad regardless of what type of job is available, how indebted they can become in the process of migration and however vulnerable they are made to abuses.

While some may call this as “feminization of migration”, the International Migrants Alliance (IMA) still prefers to call it as forced labor migration. What is really happening is the intensification of exploitation and oppression of women.

As part of imperialist strategies to curb the crisis it has itself created, they are now drumbeating migration as way towards development. This framework is most apparent in the thrusts of the Global Forum on Migration and Development or GFMD. Though it is supposed to be a non-binding forum, it does not stop imperialists, their semi-colonies and colonies from pushing through with their agenda of using migration to push for the concept of development that does not depart from neoliberal globalization policies.

The thrusts of GFMD will only intensify the exploitation of migrant workers as it does not address the root causes of forced migration and even further systematize labor export. In fact, it is fast transforming governments of sending countries to become not only facilitator for the migration of their people but direct seekers of job markets where the cheap labor of migrants can be exploited.

Further commodification of migrants and the promotion of modern-day slavery is what GFMD will do. As the exploitation of people is the only way for imperialists to curb the crisis, migrant workers – women migrant workers – are not spared.

One of the most immediate impacts of the economic crisis is the erosion of livelihood of women migrants. Because of the crunch, many companies closed down or reduced their production.

In the first few months alone after the crisis erupted in 2008, some of the recorded mass layoffs of migrant workers included those in Taiwan, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates and Macau. In Taiwan, for example, more than 9,000 workers lost their jobs for the period of October to December 2008 alone. Some countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and New Zealand even went out of its way to encourage companies to layoff foreign workers first if they

need to cut their work force.

Migrant workers in the construction, manufacturing and hotel and restaurant industries were some of the most heavily-affected in terms of mass layoffs. Even in countries like the United States, Ireland and Spain, migrants who work in these sectors were some of the first to be terminated from their jobs.

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But with the economic crisis, capitalists are actually in an even direr need of cheap labor than before. The cheapest labors that they can find are, of course, the migrant workers.

While thousands of migrant workers were terminated from their jobs, most of the migrant workers were maintained but with reduction to their wage and benefits. These included reduction to their working hours or the removal of free board and lodging like the one implemented in South Korea to migrant workers under the Employment Permit System. Meanwhile, workers in Australia under the 457 visa scheme that allowed companies to hire migrants for skills not readily available in Australia experienced a worsening of problems they were already suffering from such as unpaid wages, underpayment, higher wage deductions, and lesser benefits.

Restrictions in availability of jobs also became a norm for migrant-receiving states. Malaysia declared a ban on hiring of foreign workers in factories, stores and restaurants while Macau disallowed giving supervisory positions to migrant workers in the gaming industry.

These restrictions in the job market forced migrant workers to compete even for the most 3-D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) of jobs. Many were forced to accept even the most inhuman condition just so they could hold on to their jobs.

Social exclusion and discrimination against women migrants have also intensified due to the crisis.

We are already a socially-excluded sector in many host countries. We are not given the same rights even if we play a big part of the productive forces in these countries.

Instead of re-evaluating the basic flaws in their social and economic structures and the adverse impacts of neoliberal globalization, governments of major migrant sending countries instead opted to make their respective labor export programs more aggressive and systematic in deploying their nationals abroad.

With the crisis, xenophobia and discrimination became more rampant. This was recognized even by the International Labour Organization as discriminatory policies in host countries that aimed to further reduce the rights of migrant workers mushroomed.

In Hong Kong, for example, foreign domestic workers – mostly women and are live-in workers – were not included by the government in their proposal for a statutory minimum wage to the Legislative Council. In a very important labor legislation, the biggest sector of the migrant worker population in Hong Kong was outrightly excluded, thereby creating a subsector of workers who do not enjoy one of the basic labor rights.

Last year, Macau tried to implement two policies detrimental to migrant workers. These were the imposition of a levy to employers of migrant workers and the six-month re-entry ban for migrant workers who terminated their contracts.

While the campaign against these gained some concessions like the removal of penalties for migrant workers who terminated their contracts and were not able to report to the authorities and the exemption from the levy of employers of foreign domestic workers, the major anti-migrant and essentially discriminatory provisions of the policies remained.

Discrimination also intensified for marriage migrants.

Problems of marriage migrants have always been one of the most unattended concerns. Policies that protect marriage migrants are totally lacking even in countries where marriage migrants constitute a big part of the married population. Stricter border control resulted to even stricter immigration rules that made the acquisition of permanent residency even more difficult for marriage migrants.

Undocumented migrants are also facing the heat brought on by the crisis.

Undocumented or irregular workers are again being made as convenient scapegoats of a number of countries to explain the rise of unemployment and social problems to the local workers.

Crackdown operations again intensified in countries with a big number of undocumented migrants such as South Korea, Japan and Malaysia. Undocumented migrants were again projected as criminals who “steal” jobs and thus deserved to be arrested, detained under inhuman conditions, and summarily deported. In the first half of 2009 alone, 17,000 migrant workers were deported by the South Korean government.

In Europe, the EU has approved for implementation the Return Directive that aimed to deport hundreds of thousands of irregular workers to their home countries. The directive imposed stiff penalties to undocumented workers, allowed for very long detention of arrested migrant workers and paved the way to impose re-entry bans against migrants.

These undocumented migrants did not become so voluntarily. Most of the undocumented migrants were forced to become one due to abuses and labor rights violations that they experienced from their employers. They ran away from their employers and due to various reasons such as the insecurity of the future of their families if they go back home, they instead opted to take the more dangerous path of being undocumented migrants in order to still have that opportunity to survive.

Even if they are undocumented, their contribution to the economy of host countries as workers are real. These are, however, ignored and calls for amnesty or decriminalization of undocumented migrants are disregarded.

For migrant-sending countries, the crisis meant the intensification of the commodification of migrant workers.

Migrant-sending countries were some of the most severely affected by the economic crisis. With an economy that is very much tied up and subservient to the interests of imperialists, the crisis doubly impacts these countries with their economies becoming even more unstable and the economic benefits they get from their nationals working abroad are also threatened.

Instead of re-evaluating the basic flaws in their social and economic structures and the adverse impacts of neoliberal globalization, governments of major migrant sending countries instead opted to make their respective labor export programs more aggressive and systematic in deploying their nationals abroad.

Part of the further systematization of their labor export programs was the drive to seek out more labor markets for their nationals either through bilateral labor agreements with migrant-receiving countries or dishing out more incentives for bigger profits for private recruitment agencies. Both the Philippine and Indonesian governments, for example, banned direct hiring to force migrants to go through private recruiters as an encouragement

to placement agencies to intensify their hunting of jobs for workers as well as remove from their shoulders the responsibility of taking care of their nationals who encounter problems.

Aside from this, sending governments also institute income-generating schemes through more type of fees or hiking up the existing ones. With such fees, governments automatically earn millions of dollars both from new migrants and existing ones.

For as long as the basic economic, political and



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social setup of these countries remain, they will continuously rely on labor export and the profit they get from such an industry to keep their economies afloat and put a stopper on the social volcano created by widespread and severe poverty and unemployment.

Through all these, migrant workers – we – struggle.

The issues and concerns of women migrants are of topmost concern of the International Migrants Alliance. Since our establishment, we made the women migrant's agenda as a major advocacy point for us.

In different countries, policies that further constrict the already limited rights of migrant workers were met by advocacy actions from the organized grassroots. Big rallies were held by migrants with many supported by local women's groups or trade unions. These included the militant movement of

migrants in Hong Kong fighting against exclusion to the Statutory Minimum Wage and other discriminatory policies and practices in Hong Kong; the campaign against unjust retrenchments by the united ranks of local workers in Taiwan, New Zealand and Australia; the fight against the immigration reform bill in Japan; and the unity of migrant workers in Europe against the EU Return Directive.

In the international field, the IMA co-organized the first and second International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees or IAMR as the grassroots-centered gathering to confront the GFMD. The GFMD, which will soon have its fourth run, is the current major arena for imperialists to dictate their design on migration and migrant workers. While giving lip-service to the rights of migrants, its basic framework on development remains to be faithful to imperialist globalization and thus develops migration policies that do not only cover up the grave impacts of neoliberal policies to the people, but also actually perpetuate the structures where imperialist control and plunder can flourish.

This year, the GFMD will be held in Mexico City. The IMA through the Third IAMR will again be there to hold high the banner of the anti-imperialist movement of migrants and refugees.

Aside from advocacy and education on the current situation impacting migrant workers, members of the IMA have also strengthened cooperation with service providers and advocates in order to

respond to crisis situations of women migrants who were terminated from their jobs, have labor and immigration cases, have been victims of violence against women, or have no place to stay or support themselves while in a foreign land. These services are very important in the light of the intensified labor and immigration problems migrants are experiencing.

To summarize and conclude the points, the economic crisis in the world today affects women migrants in two fronts. The first is as migrant workers in the countries where they are in and the second is as people of countries where they come from.

In the host countries, migrants are made modern-day slaves. They are the disposable workers whose labor power is exploited and whose rights can be arbitrarily withheld and legally violated through anti-worker and anti-migrants laws. For sending countries, meanwhile, migrant workers are nothing more than mere commodities for sale. They are neglected in times of crisis and squeezed dry of their hard-earned money as long as they have the capacity to work abroad.

Women migrant workers have always been in crisis and the economic crunch has only made it worse.

This is what we must confront. Together we must resist. For still, it is in our solidarity that our resistance can meet the onslaught of imperialists.

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Eni Lestari is the chairperson of the International Migrants Alliance. This paper was presented at the Conference on Women Resisting Crisis and War held in Baguio City, Philippines from 19-21 July 2010.

# Climate crisis: A letter for UNHCR from a Grade 5 student

By Bhavani Prakash

I was pleasantly surprised and inspired by this passionate letter that arrived in my mailbox about the issue of Climate Refugees and what the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) needs to do to help migrants affected by Climate Change.

It's by Atulya Venkataraman, a fifth grade student of United World College of South East Asia, Singapore. It reads thus:

"Dear Madam,

Please allow me to introduce myself as a student in Grade 5 at United World College of South East Asia, Singapore. We are currently studying climate change and its impact on communities. My friend Jun Oh Koo (Korea) and I are collaborating on a project to present at our school exhibition on 25th May.

While we as a civilization are working to prevent climate change and avoid catastrophes, we must prepare for calamities. There is a significant danger — many islands such as Vanuatu in the Pacific, Maldives in the Indian Ocean, coastal areas of India and Bangladesh will be greatly affected and perhaps even disappear under the sea. This would displace large segments of population living in these areas. Many of these people are already among the weakest in an economic sense.

These displaced populations will have nowhere to go and will become refugees, similar to the refugees of a war. Currently the definition of refugees under the UNHCR is that a refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." (From the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees)

It is important to notice that people who have lost their homes, their livelihoods and just about everything are a group of people who are not covered under this definition. To paraphrase Socrates, I am neither a Greek nor an Athenian; but, a citizen of the world.

**As such I believe it is my humble duty to propose that the definition of refugees as defined by the UNHCR be changed to include people displaced by climate change. Perhaps greater minds are already dealing with this issue and I am only adding my voice in support of these great minds. This small step will provide a giant leap of relief for millions who will unwittingly be born refugees 50 years from now.**

In 2050, when I am 61, I do not know what the world will be like; but, Madam, as an 11-year old today if I can get you to address this issue, my life might not be entirely wasted in playing video games rather than doing my school work as my mother always reminds me.

Sincerely,

Atulya Venkataraman  
Activist, Climate Refugees"

My reply to Atulya:

“Dear Atulya,

Thank you for your letter. It shows an impressive level of maturity for one as young as you.

Trust me, your life will never be wasted, given the care and concern you show for people, especially the vulnerable. Your letter indicates that you are way ahead of those three or four or even five times your age, who are too busy with their own lives to create a positive change for the world.

Your suggestion is extremely powerful. The mere act of including climate refugees in the UNHCR definition would give the much needed attention and focus to this issue. Unfortunately, the “great minds” (borrowing your words) are dragging their feet on this important change that needs to be incorporated in the way we look at climate refugees and prepare well in advance before calamity strikes.

So far, the official UNHCR position as quoted in their magazine is, “While agreeing that the refugee agency was already involved in a limited way in environmental issues and helping internally displaced persons, UNHCR said there were fundamental differences between the two groups. Refugees could not turn to their own governments for protection because states were often the source of persecution and they therefore needed international assistance, it said, whereas environmental migrants continue to enjoy the same national protection whatever the state of the landscape. Lumping both groups under the same heading would further cloud the issues and could undermine efforts to help and protect either group and to address the root causes of either type.”

However “national protection” is not going to be very helpful, because most of the environmental



Atulya (center) and Jun Oh Koo with Hugh Pollard (right).

<http://www.ecowalkthetalk.com/>

migrants are from developing countries, which do not have the resources to manage this kind of large scale migration, even if most of it is internal. These countries do not contribute to much of the global climate change, which is largely due to consumption by richer, developed nations. It is only fair that more is done to help these countries with adaptation efforts.

More people need to come forward to press for this amendment in the UNHCR definition, so yes, I am forwarding this letter with a copy to you to the UNHCR, and am also broadcasting this message through the UNHCR facebook page, Twitter and LinkedIn. I hope many people will see your message and also support this issue.

If you need any help or clarifications, let me know.

Do send us pictures of your exhibitions, and some of your write-ups and findings. I'll be happy to post them in a blog for you.

Thank you once again. Keep up the good work!

Warm wishes,  
Bhavani Prakash”

This article is reprinted from <http://www.ecowalkthetalk.com/blog/2010/05/21/climate-refugees-a-letter-for-unhcr-from-a-grade-five-student/>

# HIV/AIDS, Women and Funding Woes

By Myrna A. Maglahus



<http://www.aidsconnect.net/sites/default/files/2009-09-23-livingAIDS.jpg>

Progress on the HIV/AIDS response is hampered because gender inequality and violations on women's rights still exist. Furthermore, resources to protect and respect women's rights are insufficient because policies on women and gender equality are often not translated into practice.

## Global Situation of HIV and Women

At the end of 2008, an estimated 33 million people were living with HIV worldwide. Although the global epidemic stabilized since 2001, new infections in other countries have offset the dwindling number of cases in several countries,

with most number of cases in Sub-Saharan Africa (22 million) followed by South and South East Asia (4.2 million) and Latin America (1.7 million). Globally, women account for half of those infected by HIV. In Africa, the number of women with HIV has increased to 12 million (almost 75% of these



<http://zunia.org>

women are from Sub-Saharan Africa) compared to 8.3 million African men living with HIV. The main mode of transmission in this region is through heterosexual sex. In the Caribbean, young women are 2.5 times more likely to get infected by HIV. Commercial sex is also the major factor of the spread of HIV in Latin America, with 30% of women being infected. In Asia, among the 47 million PLHIV (People Living with HIV), 35% are women who generally acquired the virus from their long-time partners who engage in sexual activities with multiple partners, or from partners who inject drugs, as in the case in Indonesia.

#### Vulnerabilities of Women to HIV

Biologically, females, especially young girls, are more vulnerable than men to HIV because of the sensitive nature of the female genital tract. Moreover, women often experience the impact of HIV more than men because of existing gender inequalities in societies. Fewer choices available to women regarding their sexual behavior limit their capacity to deal with the risk of infection. Women who have experienced abuse and who are financially dependent on their spouses often have difficulty negotiating for safer sex with their husbands due to low self-esteem and confidence.

Even if women are becoming independent, oftentimes, this independence is only reflected in their careers. Pressures to conform to traditional roles still exist at home. The traditional role as caregivers often puts burden on women to care for relatives as well as children orphaned by AIDS. Women's childbearing role also means that they also have to contend with issues such as mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Also, trafficked women are likely to be among those with least access to reproductive health information and services. Due to the nature of the work, many of them are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse and physical violence, unwanted pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS. Often, these women have no access to adequate health care due to their illegal status. In Northern Thailand, ethnic girls are trafficked and forced into the sex industry. These girls are reputed to be preferred as sexual partners by the Chinese as they are perceived to be free from HIV infection.

Migrant workers returning to Lao PDR from Thailand, for example, have been found to have higherratesofHIVinfectionthanamongthegeneral population, even though the overall prevalence in Lao PDR is low. In the aftermath of the tsunami in Thailand, the needs of Burmese illegal migrant women, who were wives of fishermen, were neglected by the Thai government due to their illegal status. Their reluctance to come forward and access necessary RH services was further aggravated due to the threat of being prosecuted. Receiving countries often have strict regulations sometimes including mandatory HIV testing to migrants entering their borders. There have been several cases among Filipina migrants who were deported after being found HIV positive. These Filipina migrants' rights to confidentiality and to access pre- and post-test counseling are violated as the HIV test results are often disclosed, not to the client, but to the potential employers and officials of embassies and immigration offices.

#### HIV Funding Woes

In the 2006 High Level Meeting on AIDS, all

member states of the United Nations, including donor countries, have pledged to uplift women's rights and "eliminate gender inequalities, gender-based abuse and violence and to increase the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection" through the provision of necessary health and support services and by creating an enabling environment to empower women towards their economic independence and strengthening male involvement in achieving gender equality.

Four years after, activists took the stage and flashed banners demanding donors to not retreat from funding necessary HIV programs during the recently concluded XVIII AIDS Conference in Vienna. This outburst from the activists was due to the dwindling fund source for HIV prevention and treatment programs, which has harmful consequences to HIV programs that benefit women.

The huge funders of HIV/AIDS Programs include the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the World Bank Multi Country HIV/AIDS Programme (MAP). These organizations contribute financially to achieve MDG6. Despite existence of global initiatives and collaborations addressing the global HIV/AIDS challenge, majority of these funders have either unclear or slow implementation of gender-sensitive programs and insufficient indicators to measure progress in achieving women's rights in the context of the HIV/AIDS. Most countries also rely on external funds, particularly from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. However, the Global Fund faces a funding shortfall of \$4 billion. In the US, HIV campaigners have been disappointed by President Obama's decision to give \$5 billion to the PEPFAR global HIV initiative, an amount representing a 30% shortfall of Bush's funding.

In 2009, The World Bank issued a report which predicted that the continuity of HIV treatment may be threatened for around 70% of people currently on treatment in sub-Saharan Africa, 50% in Asia, and 25% in Russia and Central Asia. Official



<http://www.ghf.org.uk/>

Globally, women account for half of those infected by HIV. In Africa, the number of women with HIV has increased to 12 million (almost 75% of these women are from Sub-Saharan Africa) compared to 8.3 million African men living with HIV.

Development Aid, which contain HIV treatment money, was significantly reduced. In these conditions, it is common practice that public health financing is not prioritized and sexual health will be at the bottom of the list.

Because of diminishing external financial support, countries now face the difficulty of mobilizing resources to sustain national HIV/AIDS Programs. Tanzania cut its AIDS budget by 25% because of the effect of the economic crisis. The government of

Botswana issued a statement early last year stating that due to the deficits in the diamond export market, the country will only be able to provide treatment until 2016. In South Africa, more than half of those eligible for treatment had to wait over a year to actually receive it and another 20% of patients eligible for Anti-Retro Viral died waiting for them.

To cope with the funding decline, some countries resort to alternative solutions. Most countries have policies providing free antiretroviral drugs, but recent trend in funding have forced governments to require many patients to pay 'out-of-pocket' costs such as diagnostic tests, treatments for opportunistic infections and transportation. These items can be quite considerable, especially to women who often are economically dependent. In 2008, India's national rail service, Indian Railways, introduced discounted fares for HIV-positive people travelling to receive treatment but the low status of women prevent them from accessing RH services, even if the discounted fares are available.

The AIDS response is further hindered by corruption and lack of accountability among governments, funders and CSOs as well. Paula Akugizibwe, Advocacy Coordinator at the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa, remarked

that accountability should extend to CSOs, as CSOs often evade their own responsibility. The International AIDS Society President Julio Montaner expressed during the Vienna AIDS Conference that the global AIDS response is at a crossroads, particularly after the G8 and G20 meetings failed to continue their pledge towards Universal Access and for not making clear-cut steps towards achieving the MDGs where gender is a cross-cutting issue.

Making women's rights protection and gender equality a reality in the HIV response requires more than advocacy. Until women's rights are realized, progress will be constrained. In the context of national responses, it requires a combination of political will, technical expertise and financial resources that turns women's rights and gender equality into programmatic priorities that are budgeted and implemented. Civil societies working on HIV need to be more active and informed players in funding modalities that can provide support for women's rights activities. In the context of international assistance and cooperation, it requires willingness to collectively remove barriers to women's rights and commitment to ensure that sufficient funds are targeted towards the support of women's rights.

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# Greece must stop treating migrants as criminals

By Amnesty International



[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_SXH9eUth50s/w/TERMbZ2dU1I/AAAAAAAFwgj/ZkTUUBAG90/s1600/greece\\_PaganiDetentionCenter.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_SXH9eUth50s/w/TERMbZ2dU1I/AAAAAAAFwgj/ZkTUUBAG90/s1600/greece_PaganiDetentionCenter.jpg)

**T**he Greek authorities should immediately review their policy of locking up irregular migrants and asylum-seekers, including many unaccompanied children, Amnesty International said in a new report on Tuesday.

Greece: Irregular migrants and asylum-seekers routinely detained in substandard conditions, documents their treatment, many of whom are held in poor conditions in borderguard stations and immigration detention centers with no or limited

access to legal, social and medical aid.

“Asylum-seekers and irregular migrants are not criminals. Yet, the Greek authorities treat them as such disregarding their rights under international law,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director for Amnesty International.

“Currently, migrants are detained as a matter of course, without regard whether such measure



Nicola Duckworth

<http://report2009.amnesty.org/>

is necessary. Detention of asylum-seekers and migrants on the grounds of their irregular status should always be a measure of last resort.”

Greek law makes irregular entry into and exit out of the country a criminal offence. As of June 2009, the period of detention for the purposes of deportation has increased from three to six months.

Tens of thousands of migrants arrive in Greece each year. The vast majority of them reach the country through the Greek-Turkish land and sea borders. They are mostly Afghan, Somali, Palestinian, Iraqi, Eritrean, Pakistani and Burmese.

“After an often hazardous journey, migrants end up in detention centers without access to a lawyer, interpreters or social workers. As a result, their circumstances are not assessed correctly and many in need of international protection may be sent back to the places they have fled, while others may be deprived of appropriate care and support,” Nicola Duckworth said.

Irregular migrants and asylum-seekers are not

informed about the length of their detention or about their future. They can be kept for long periods of time in overcrowded facilities with unaccompanied minors being detained among the adults. Those detained have limited access to medical assistance and hygiene products.

Few asylum-seekers and irregular migrants are recognized as refugees by the Greek authorities. From the over 30,000 asylum applications examined in 2009, only 36 were granted refugee protection status while 128 were granted subsidiary protection status.

In the vast majority of detention facilities visited by Amnesty International delegates, conditions ranged from inadequate to very poor. Those detained told Amnesty International of instances of ill-treatment by coastguards and police.

Length and poor conditions of detention provoked irregular migrants and asylum-seekers to stage protests in Venna, north-east Greece in February 2010. Likewise, in April, irregular migrants went on hunger strike on the island of Samos to protest their length of detention.

“Detention cannot be used as a tool to control migration. The onus is on the authorities to demonstrate in each individual case that such detention is necessary and proportionate to the objective to be achieved and that alternatives will not be effective,” Nicola Duckworth said.

Amnesty International said it believes that the Greek authorities should explore alternatives, such as the establishment of screening centers staffed with qualified personnel.

The authorities need to ensure that irregular migrants and asylum-seekers arriving at those centers have access to free legal assistance and interpreters in languages they understand, and medical assistance.

This article is reprinted from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/greece-must-stop-treating-migrants-criminals-2010-07-27>.

# UN, CSOs Assess MDG Achievements

By Katrina Abarcar

For the United Nations (UN), 2010 marks a critical year for the Millennium Development Goals. From September 20-22, the UN will be hosting an MDG summit (High-level Plenary Meeting) whose aim is to identify ways to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. To gather input for that meeting, the UN held “Informal Interactive Hearings of the General Assembly with Non-governmental organizations, Civil society organizations and the Private sector” this past June 14 and 15.

At the hearing, representatives of civil society and private sector organizations shared their analysis of the challenges in meeting the MDGs and their recommendations to overcome those challenges. With rising levels of poverty and growing unemployment worldwide, we appear to be further from achieving the MDGs than we were in the year 2000. But the attendees were reminded that for the millions going hungry, failure of governments to meet the MDGs would be unacceptable.

The presenters understandably placed a strong focus on meeting the targets of MDG 1, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, through a range of recommendations on how to address poverty and its structural causes. In addition, a notable feature of the hearings was the strong representation of women on the panels and in the audience. Therefore, the issue of gender inequality and its impact on achieving the MDGs was addressed in a number of the presentations.

The first speaker at the hearings, Farah Kabir of Action Aid, spoke both on MDG 1 and gender inequality. She pointed out that women make up the majority of the world's hungry, yet they produce



<http://www.un.int/iom>

60-80% of the food in most developing countries and are main producers of the world's staple crops. According to the research of ActionAid, less than 1% of national agriculture budgets targets women and as little as 10% of international aid to agriculture goes to women farmers. She called for investment in small scale farming (referred to as a 'smallholder rescue package') with a focus on women farmers as the key way to halving hunger by 2015.

Constance Okollet of Osukuru United Women's Network highlighted the growing burden women in their community have faced adjusting to the concrete impacts of climate change. Okollet, a peasant farmer, discussed how floods and droughts resulting from climate change have diminished agricultural productivity in Uganda, a country that used to export food to neighboring countries. She also shared how climate change and the floods have increased disease, death, and reduced school attendance and highlighted how women have shouldered the responsibility of sustaining their families within this context.

In recognition of gender inequality and other forms of discrimination, a number of groups voiced the need to truly root the MDGs in a rights based approach to ensure that the most marginalized and disadvantaged communities are truly benefitting from policies designed to meet the MDGs. Seydi Gassama of Amnesty International spoke of the gross violations of human dignity endured by millions of girls, boys, women and men living in poverty. He commended Ecuador for being the first country in the world to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights which allows individuals and groups within a country to seek justice from the United Nations should these rights – which include the rights to adequate housing, food, water, health, work, social security and education - be violated by their government.

With regards to the MDGs, Gassama called on Member States at the Summit to: better monitor the achievement of the MDGs and their consistency with human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights; include the excluded by taking action to identify and end all forms of discrimination; promote participation by action, ensuring that people living in poverty are able to participate meaningfully in MDG planning, implementation and monitoring at all levels; and provide international cooperation and assistance that supports the national realization of minimum essential levels of economic, social and cultural rights for all.

Other speakers argued that the MDGs cannot be achieved through the dominant economic paradigm being pursued by countries worldwide, and that the onset of the multiple crises (food, energy, financial and climate crises) linked to the continued promotion of the neo-liberal economic model is proof. Daniel Van Daele of the International Trade Union Confederation called on global policy makers to recognize that the lax regulation of financial markets and instruments, the rapid liberalization of trade and capital markets, unfair terms of trade, ill-advised export-led growth models, tax evasion by Multinational Companies, heavy debt burdens and severe shortfalls in financing for development have all hindered the achievement of the MDGs.

Among other things, Van Daele recommended



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rethinking and restructuring of the institutions of global governance (including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank), and confronting the shortfalls in development financing by giving developing countries access to credit lending on terms that are commensurate with their needs. He also supported the implementation of the Financial Transactions Tax.

Bhumika Muchhala of the Third World Network called for the promotion of national development strategies that build the productive capacities and social and economic infrastructure of developing countries. For too long, the promotion of financial and trade liberalization has seriously eroded public investment and spending necessary to build a country's productive capacity, create employment, and provide social services in the areas of health, education and housing. Third World Network also supported the creation of a sovereign debt resolution mechanism to address debt burdens carried by developing countries.

But despite growing evidence that the dominant economic model acts counter to development goals, Athena Peralta of the World Council of Churches pointed out that in response to the crisis, countries have been forced to adopt even more stringent fiscal policies and to prioritize the rights of big businesses over people's economic, social and cultural rights. WCC called for governments and international institutions to pursue economic policies and build frameworks based on, among other things: a more equitable distribution of assets

like capital, technology, land, education, and health care; sustainable consumption and production; and social reproduction and ecological protection. Peralta argued that many conflicts worldwide are a product of socio-economic deprivation, eradicating poverty would lead to stronger social cohesion, human security and lasting peace.

Unfortunately, there was little discussion on a post-2015 agenda. And with the focus on what

governments and international institutions should do to meet the MDGs by 2015, there was little attention given to the role people's movements should be playing in compelling governments and international institutions to genuinely address the roots of underdevelopment.

Katrina Abarcar is the coordinator for IBON North America. She participated in the Millenium Development Goals HEaring on June 14 and 15, 2010.

# Women's Conference Calls for Women to Unite and Strengthen Resistance Against Crises and Wars

By Ben Patrick Soliguin

In recognition of the negative impacts of neoliberal globalization and war to women and the celebration of the centenary of the International Working Women's Day, the Asia Pacific Research Network, GABRIELA, Asian Rural Women's Coalition, and Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development co-organized a conference on the impact and women's responses to the economic and climate crisis and war entitled "Women Resisting Crisis and War" in partnership with Innabuyog, Plan International, Global Fund for Women, The Primates World Relief and Development Fund, and Karibu Foundation.

The conference held from July 19 to 21 brought representatives of workers, peasants and fisherfolk organizations, pastoralists, Dalits, indigenous people, youth, migrants, women, and other sectors and stakeholders together to a common space for sharing and learning experiences, strategies and perspectives on survival and resistance amidst the multiple crises and wars.



Ubo Pakes

These people were gathered to share, develop and provide new approaches for resisting and overcoming the neo-liberal and neo-colonial onslaught to further control resources of underdeveloped countries.

The three-day event tackled the impacts of the economic and climate crises to women, women's means of survival and resisting the crisis, the

impacts of war on women, women resisting war, and the challenges for organized women's resistance with inputs on war and militarism, rejecting victimization, organizing and mobilizing against neo-liberal globalization and for freedom and democracy, and an overview of current strategies.

Because of the current social structure, women grew more vulnerable to the crises. As discussed in the conference, women are more prone to job losses because of the gender-specific inequalities in the labor markets. In addition, the industries hit by the latest economic crisis were those that hired mostly women workers like garments, electronics, and services industries. According to the Asian Development Bank, 80 percent of those who lost their jobs in the said industries were women.

This led to further exploitation of women in the workplace where they experience lower wages, longer working hours, and unhealthy working environment. A case in a factory in Indonesia shows that the economic crisis was used as rationale to terminate women workers who worked for more than ten years, but the real reason was to allow the factory to hire younger workers who would accept lower wages and more "flexible" arrangement.

In Asia, as women comprise over half of the agricultural workforce, they also suffer from the impacts of the climate crisis. This has led women to look for other means of survival, which make them more vulnerable to sex trafficking and prostitution. As they move to urban centers to look for jobs, women end up being deceived into situations of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation. In Thailand for example, cases of prostitution increased by 20 percent from 2008 to 2009.

But women, as shown by the conference, do not take these impacts sitting down. As they become more aware of their oppression and exploitation, they realize the need for resistance.

Women's resistance ranges from pens to arms. Some would engage in petition signing, rallies and demonstrations, among others. As an example,

women workers stage strikes to demand higher wages and better working environment as in the case of an electronics factory in China and in other parts of the region. But due to the continuing exploitation and impoverishment brought about by the current social structure, some would opt for armed struggle, as in the case of the revolutionary movements in India, Nepal, and the Philippines.

Meanwhile, workshops on surviving the crisis with focus on surviving climate disasters, hunger, and development aggression; impacts and resistance of war and militarism, community resistance to war's displacement, and popular resistance to war and militarism; and strategies for effective campaign and advocacy work were also held.

Culminating the conference was the presentation and deliberation of the Conference Declaration (see Statement section for the copy of the declaration).

The results and the declaration of the Asia-Pacific Women's Conference will be discussed and shared with the Montreal International Women's Conference. The women's conference in Baguio City, Philippines is Asia-Pacific's process leading to the Montreal Conference to be held on August 13-16.

This women's conference in Montreal will bring together women active in their communities and on the frontlines of struggles against imperialist globalization, war and violence against women. It also calls for the participants to assess the achievements and shortcomings of the worldwide women's rights movement in the last 100 years, honor the pioneers and celebrate the centennial of the International Women's Day. Likewise, participants will be gathered to discuss building a Global Militant Women's Movement in the 21st Century and formally establish the International Women's Alliance as its culmination.

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Ben Patrick Soliguin is a research assistant with IBON Foundaton, Inc.

# In historic move, UN creates single entity to promote women's empowerment

In a bid to accelerate the empowerment of women, the General Assembly held on July 2, 2010 voted unanimously to create a dynamic new entity merging four United Nations offices focusing on gender equality, a move hailed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other senior officials.

“The newest member of the UN family has been born today,” Mr. Ban told the Assembly after it passed the resolution setting up the new UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to be known as UN Women.

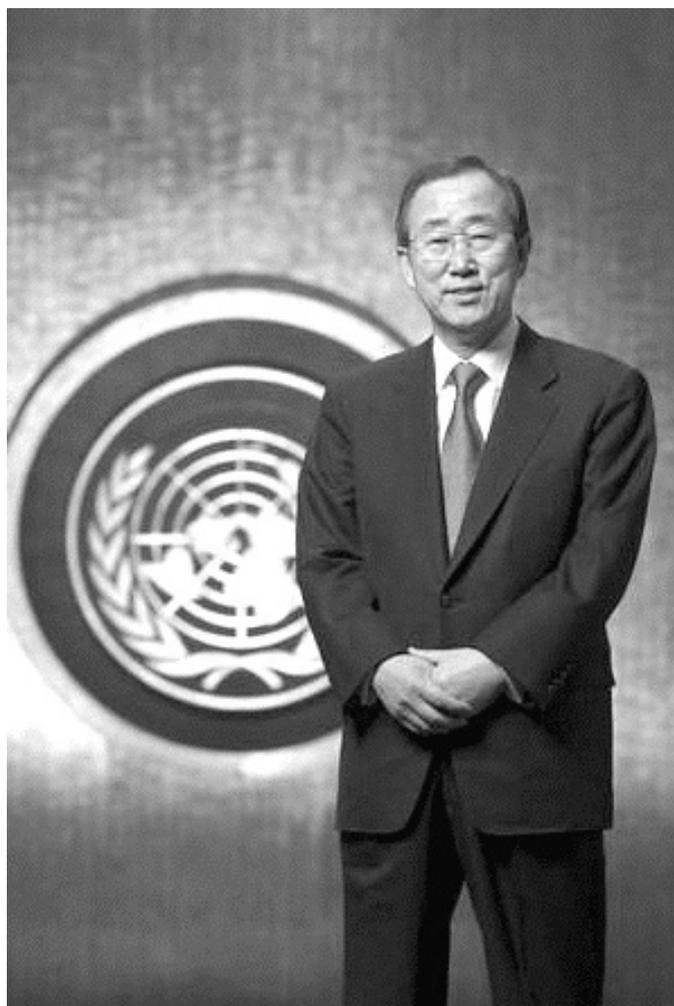
“This is truly a watershed day,” he declared.

The new body will merge four of the world body's agencies and offices: UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW).

“By bringing together four parts of the UN system dedicated to women's issues, Member States have created a much stronger voice for women and for gender equality at the global level,” said the Secretary-General.

“It will now be much more difficult for the world to ignore the challenges facing women and girls – or to fail to take the necessary action,” he added.

UN Women is the result of years of negotiations among Member States and advocacy by the global women's movement. Set to become operational next January, it will drive the world body's efforts



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

to promote women's rights.

UN Women is set to have an annual budget of at least \$500 million – double the current combined resources of the four agencies it will comprise.

Mr. Ban acknowledged that many Member States are facing resource constraints due to the global economic downturn, but expressed confidence



UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro

that the new office will receive strong financial support.

“UN Women is a recognition of a simple truth,” he said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“Equality for women and girls is not only a basic human rights, it is a social and economic imperative. Where women are educated and empowered, economies are more productive and strong. Where women are fully represented, societies are more peaceful and stable,” it added.

“Today’s action will do more than simply consolidate United Nations offices,” Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro told reporters earlier today. “It will consolidate the United Nations strengths.”

She noted that while the UN has made significant strides, it has also faced serious challenges such as inadequate funding and fragmentation.

One of the main goals of UN Women will be to support the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and other inter-governmental bodies in devising policies.

The new body will also aim to help Member States implement standards, provide technical and financial support to countries which request it, and forge partnerships with civil society.

Within the UN, it will hold the world body accountable for its own commitments on gender equality.

“UN Women will give women and girls the strong, unified voice they deserve on the world stage,” Ms. Migiro said, calling today a “positive and exciting moment” for the entire UN family.

Set to be based in New York, UN Women will be headed by an Under-Secretary-General, to be appointed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The UN, said General Assembly President Ali Treki, is “uniquely placed” to take the leading role on the issue of promoting women’s rights, expressing his delight at the creation of UN Women.

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This article is reprinted from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35224> published on 2 July 2010

**International Conference of Migrants Service Providers  
on Undocumented Migrants and the Current Global Economic Crisis**

Academy House, San 76, Insu 6-dong, Gangbuk-gu, Seoul City  
July 16 and 17, 2010

## DECLARATION OF UNITY

We, grassroots migrant organizations and unions, migrants' rights advocates and service providers gather together in Seoul, South Korea this July 16-17, 2010 for the International Conference of Migrants Service Providers on Undocumented Migrants and the Current Global Economic Crisis.

This conference we hold is a continuation of the regional conference held in Malaysia last 2003 where we shared experiences and united on analyses and strategies in dealing with the phenomenon of undocumented migrants.

We gather this time with the aims of knowing the current situation of undocumented migrants, sharing experiences in providing services to them and discerning the direction of our common tasks and strengthening our solidarity with one another and with all migrants.

As participants to this Conference, we hereby declare:

Whereas, the phenomenon of undocumented migrants is caused by the failure of governments of both labor-sending and labor-importing countries to uphold the rights and welfare of migrants;

Whereas, these governments have enforced exploitative and oppressive immigration and labor policies on migrants to maximize profits out of cheap labor;

Whereas, refugees and other migrants become easy prey of labor exploitation at the borders, especially those coming from countries of conflict;

Whereas, programs and services given by service providers have afforded avenues to undocumented migrants for redress of grievances through legal and supra-legal assistance, counseling services, shelter for those out of job, victimized and sick, labor education, communication, research and advocacy for human rights and recognition as productive inhabitants of society and other humanitarian services necessary for their well-being;

Whereas, these programs and services initiated are borne out of the deep commitment for social justice and the respect of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which these governments are signatories and specifically the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;

RESOLVED AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that we participants take on the challenge to advance the campaign against the unabated discrimination, abuse and exploitation, arrest, detention and summary deportation of undocumented migrants through the following actions and resolutions:

- 1) Launch campaigns against government crackdowns, ADD (arrest, detention and deportation) and all forms of attacks and violations of undocumented migrants. We shall release statements and urgent appeals, hold actions whether individually or jointly and conduct other activities possible. In concrete, hold a protest against the Thai government who is currently planning massive crackdown on undocumented migrants;
- 2) Hold fact finding missions about the conditions of undocumented migrants, specifically the crackdowns conducted by host governments, and use the results from these missions in engaging with governments and inter-governmental institutions such as the United Nations;
- 3) Study how impacts of the global economic crisis on undocumented migrants and the policy changes (i.e. bilateral agreements, national labor policies, etc.) at the governmental and inter-governmental levels. Use this information for education of migrant workers, as basis for dialogue with trade unions and other groups, and strategic methods in amending them or developing pro-migrant legislation;
- 4) Develop an internet-based mailing network for communication and information exchange, especially of statements, appeals, stories of best practices and case study experiences. Ensure translation in due consideration of non-English speaking organizations and individuals;
- 5) Strengthen solidarity and alliance among unions of local and migrant organizations in the destination countries as well as those existing between home and destination countries. Specifically, establish a network of service providers, NGOs and trade unions as well as strengthen outreach programs to undocumented migrants;
- 6) Use Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other existing international conventions in raising the issue of undocumented migrants. Maximize certain inter-governmental agencies in filing complaints regarding attacks on undocumented migrants and advancing the campaign for their protection;
- 7) Plan actions against the G20 summit happening in Seoul, South Korea this November 2010. Release a statement that shall aim to gather local and international support with specific concern on the intensified crackdown on undocumented migrants in Korea. Maximize the media in publicizing the campaign and gathering support;
- 8) Mobilize for the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees in Mexico, November 2010.

Signed this 17th of July, 2010 at the Academy House, Seoul, South Korea.



## Women resisting Crisis and War Conference Declaration

We, 110 women and men from 16 countries and regions from Australia, Bangladesh, China and Hongkong SAR, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam, and The Netherlands, and representing peasant, agricultural workers, church groups, Dalit women, fisherfolk, indigenous women, migrants, minorities, workers, urban poor, girls, youth, academe and support NGOs and networks met for the Women Resisting Crisis and War: A conference on the impacts and women's responses to the economic and climate crisis and war from July 19-21, 2010 in Baguio City, Philippines.

In this conference, we have reached unity in the analysis that imperialist globalization spawned the multi-faceted, yet interconnected crises encompassing the economic, political and ecological spheres and is causing unparalleled suffering all over the world. Worst afflicted of these crises are people from poor countries, most especially women and children.

Measures formulated and utilized by the imperialists regarding the global financial meltdown compounded by the insatiable greed for profit only aim to save itself from the inherent crisis of capitalism and therefore only passes the burden on to the poor and further aggravates hunger and poverty.

This imperialist crisis further propels profit-driven and unsustainable industrial development that cause irreversible damage to the world's environment leading to longer periods of drought, flash floods, crop failures, and clean and safe water scarcity, among others. This crisis results in the global climate meltdown, the depletion of natural resources and the destruction of lives and livelihoods, especially of ecologically-sensitive indigenous and traditional livelihood systems.

Avaricious intents to gain more access and control over sources of raw materials and cheap labour propel imperialist countries led by the United States of America to intensify wars of aggression and sponsor autocratic and military leadership in many states. These imperialist-led and instigated wars and militarization have led to various forms of human rights violations with impunity particularly targeting activists and other human rights defenders. Ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts and civil wars are causing harassment, detention, forced displacement including internally displaced peoples, killings and enforced disappearances. Caste and communal atrocities and aggression are resulting in massive violence against Dalits and minority women. Rape and other forms of sexual abuse of women and girls are being used as a tool of war and suppression of communities.

Imperialism historically has sustained patriarchy. These global crises which are the result of imperialism further perpetuate patriarchy, making women more vulnerable to exploitation, oppression and multiple forms of discrimination and violence.

Women's rights as human rights are continually violated. Women face the greatest burden of displacement, dislocation, trafficking, hunger and gender violence as the world economic, ecological and political crisis deepens.

Yet, women through time have shown extreme resilience with the spiralling multiple crises. Women have utilized various mechanisms for taking control over their lives, from simple and individual acts of survival to collective organized actions to assert their economic, social, cultural and political rights. Women have shown that the most effective form of survival and resistance are through organized and militant struggles, employing different tactics and strategies ranging from organizing, forming of alliances, parliamentary struggles and direct actions including armed resistance.

We now reaffirm the need for women and peoples' movements from different countries and regions to unite, intensify and strengthen our defense and resistance against imperialism and its worsening attacks.

We are gathered to strengthen and consolidate our movements to achieve genuine peace, social justice, democracy and sovereignty. Towards this, we commit ourselves:

- a. To resist corporate monopoly, development aggression and to assert food sovereignty. We affirm our commitment to reclaiming our fundamental rights to land, water and other productive resources.
- b. To stop the profit-driven exploitation and destruction of natural resources and put an end to the imperialist destruction of global climate! We will confront climate crisis by building community resistance and resilience. Climate Justice Now!
- c. To resist wars of aggression that cause unending violence to women, children, and their communities. We will act to condemn religious fundamentalism, acts of terrorism and sectarianism that

are unleashing violence on societies and in intensifying the oppression of women

- d. To end all forms of exploitation, discrimination and violence against women and children.
- e. To call on national governments and international parties to find political and negotiated solutions to address the root causes of crises and wars.

And as we commemorate the centenary of the International Working Women's Day, we will work for the strengthening of international solidarity and build on the gains of women's and peoples' movements throughout history to remove all impediments to realize a better world for humankind.

Aidwatch	Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao (Inpeace)
AMIHAN	Innabuyog
APIT Women's Work	Institute for Global Justice (IGJ), Indonesia
Asian Rural Women's Conference (ARWC)	Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE), India
Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC)	Institute for National and Democratic Studies (INDIES), Indonesia
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)	International NGO Forum for Indonesian Development (INFID)
Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)	Iraqi Al-Amal Association
Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN)	Jobs Creating Development Society, Pakistan
BICOLANA	Kalumaran-Bai
Binnadang-Innabuyog	KARAPATAN
Bluestar Workers' Union	Kilusang Mayo Uno
Center for Women's Resources, Philippines	LILA FILIPINA
Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultation Society (CECOEDECON), India	MIGRANTE
Centre for Human Rights and Development, Mongolia	Naga Women's Union, Manipur
Centre for Sustainable Rural Development, Vietnam	NAKASA BAI
China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO)	Nepal Policy Institute (NPI)
Coastal Development Partnership, Bangladesh	Pakistan Institute for Labor Education and Research (PILER)
Committee for Asian Women, Thailand	PCPR Pangasinan
Committee Against Violence on Women (CAVOW) India	Peace for Life
Cordillera Human Rights Alliance	Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific (PAN AP)
Cordillera People's Alliance	Plan International
Cordillera Women's Education Action Research Center	SAHANTIVASA, India
DESAPARICIDOS	SAMAKANA
East Timor Development Agency, Timor Leste	Save the Appayao People's Organization
Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc.	Society for Rural Education and Development, India
Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS), India	Solidaritas Perempuan, Indonesia
GABRIELA Cebu	Sustainable Community Development, Vietnam
GABRIELA National Capital Region	Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement, India
GABRIELA Panay	Third World Network (TWN), Malaysia
GABRIELA University of the Philippines Diliman	Triumph Workers' Union
Green Movement of Sri Lanka (GMSL)	UBINIG, Bangladesh
Human Development Organization, Sri Lanka	United Luisita Workers' Union-UMA
HUSTISYA	University of San Carlos
IBON Foundation	University of the Philippines Diliman
ILAW	Vikas Adhayayan Kendra (VAK), India
	Women's Development Center- Bohol
	Yarn Venture Union

# From Imperialist Nukes to Socialist Construction

By Jazminda Lumang



<http://mikeely.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/joan-hinton1.jpg>

**J**oan was once asked to summarize her life and her contributions, and she said: “I have taken part in two of the greatest things of the 20th century – the development of the atom bomb and the Chinese revolution. Who could ask for more?”

As we remember the American nuclear physicist, Joan Chase Hinton --an internationalist, a people's scientist and a true socialist, we hope that the lessons in her life and struggles will inspire the youth of today in search of a better world.

Joan was born on October 20, 1921 in Chicago, USA. She is the youngest of three siblings from the distinguished and progressive Hinton family.

Her father, Sebastian (known to many as Ted) was a patent lawyer. His fascination with kids' play that involves climbing and swinging using wooden structures in three dimensional spaces enabled him to invent the jungle gym (the jungle gym is now commonly known as monkey bars in children's playground).

Her mother, Carmelita was a teacher and founder of The Putney School, an independent progressive coed high school in Southern Vermont. Joan attended her secondary school at Putney where she learned the tenets of "learn by doing", "don't be afraid of hardships", "honesty and truth above all else", "the world is made by your head and your hands", and "having education does not make you better than working people".

Her elder sister, Jean Rosner was a civil rights and peace activist and her older and only brother, William was a farmer, revolutionary and best-selling author of *Fanshen*, published in 1966. *Fanshen* chronicles the land reform process in the northern Chinese village called Long Bow where he participated in the 1940s.

Her great grandfather, mathematician and philosopher George Boole was the inventor of Boolean logic and was later regarded as the founder of the field of computer science. Her

great grandmother, Mary Everest Boole was a self-taught mathematician and inventor of string geometry.

Her great, great uncle, Sir George Everest was the English surveyor of India, for whom Mount Everest was named after.

Her great aunt, Ethel L. Voynich was the best-selling author of the 1897 book, *The Gadfly*, which sold over a million copies in the Soviet Union and China.

Joan was only two years old when her father died, leaving her and her siblings under the care of her strong-willed mother. Her mother's Dewey-inspired philosophy of "learning by doing" influenced for most parts her love for hard work, arts, science, and community development. This was confirmed in an interview when she said, "If you want to know about me, you should know my mother."

The virtues she learned from her mother and the Putney School enabled her to value the arts and physical fitness and the outdoors and hard work. Joan was good at playing the violin and became an excellent skier and eventually a ski instructor. She even qualified in the US Olympics team to join the 1940 Norway Olympic Games had the war did not cancel it. Her love for the outdoors and science later convinced her to study Physics at Bennington College where her sister Jean also studied.

While completing a long college project at Bennington, Joan studied cloud chambers that allowed her access to Cornell University's physics department. It was at Cornell where she first met Erwin Sid Engst, a dairy farmer from upstate New York.

Joan was recruited and became one of the few women physicists that worked with the Manhattan Project, a secret US military research project created during the World War II to develop the first nuclear bombs and the first human-engineered nuclear detonator.



<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/>

Sid Engst shared a rented room with her brother, Bill, who by then gave up sociology and studied agriculture at Cornell. Bill and Sid became good friends and later Joan, too.

After finishing her course in 1942, Joan pursued further studies at the University of Wisconsin and earned her doctorate in Physics in 1944. In February of that same year, Joan was recruited and became one of the few women physicists that worked with the Manhattan Project, a secret US military research project created during the World War II to develop the first nuclear bombs and the first human-engineered nuclear detonator.

As a graduate student of the Institute for Nuclear Studies at the University of Chicago, she worked with the Project's water boiler reactor alongside prominent scientists such as Nobel Prize-winning physicist Enrico Fermi and witnessed the first nuclear bomb (Trinity test) detonation in Alamogordo, New Mexico in 1945.

She left the project soon after she learned how the nuclear bombs they developed were eventually

used in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. She tirelessly lobbied to internationalize atomic energy in the US Congress and became active in the peace movement.

In 1948, her disillusionment with pure science and her belief in internationalism made her decide to give up her career in Physics and go to China. The revolutionary fervor brought by China's social transformation inspired and attracted many young people including her brother, William, and his friend, Sid Engst, who all eagerly looked for a better option to capitalism. Bill came to China in 1937 to observe land reform at work and later wrote his account of land reform in a village in Communist China in the bestselling book, *Fanshen*. Engst, on the other hand, worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association as an agricultural and dairy specialist to the Chinese government since 1946. The same determination and commitment to internationalism also brought Joan to China. Joan first worked with Madam Sun Yat Sen in Shanghai before making her way to the Liberated Areas where she reunited with Sid Engst. Both were married in April 1949 in Yanan and later

raised three children.

At the 1952 Asia and Pacific Regional Peace Conference in Beijing, Hinton was quoted in expressing “a deep sense of guilt and shame” for Hiroshima and condemned the bomb as “a crime against humanity.” Since then she learned about converting killing weapons into useful tools, from cooking pots, ploughs, and hoes to wagon wheels and pumps and gates for irrigation canals.

Details of all these including Hinton and Engst’s concrete, real and day-to-day struggle in agricultural production alongside their Chinese counterparts and raising a family in the socialist construction are told in the book, “Silage Choppers and Snakes Spirits: The Lives and Struggles of Two Americans in Modern China” by Dao Yuan Chou published by IBON Books. From the Great Leap Forward to the Socialist Education Movement that followed, and into the Great Cultural Revolution, which brought them to Beijing where they worked for the first time in office buildings (as editors and translators) rather than in direct production, to being caught in the middle of the struggle for China’s political spirit, they participated in a turning point big character poster (da zi bao) denouncing the isolation and special treatment of foreigners, which was approved by Mao himself, empowering the foreign community in Beijing to join the Cultural Revolution.

Eventually kicked out of their work units, they continued their revolutionary work in the Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment made up of hundreds of foreign comrades who had come to China to help build socialism.

In the 1970s, the family stayed for a few months with William Hinton’s family to work in Dazhai, the famous socialist agricultural model and learned the lessons and truth of Dazhai’s struggle for self reliance through transformation of self and land.

By the end of the Cultural Revolution, Hinton and Engst were back to production and agriculture at the Red Star Commune south of Beijing where



Joan Hinton in China, 2008

her disillusionment with pure science and her belief in internationalism made her decide to give up her career in Physics and go to China. The revolutionary fervor brought by China’s social transformation inspired and attracted many young people including her brother, William, and his friend, Sid Engst, who all eagerly looked for a better option to capitalism.

they helped design and build machines and instruments to mechanize China’s dairy industry.

While at the Red Star they saw the response to the death of Mao and Zhou, and the subsequent rise to power of Deng Xiao Ping. In witnessing the profound changes in China, still from the perspective of being in production with ordinary people, they summed up the annihilation of the revolution to which they gave their lives this way: “In China, you have to have a sense of history, a sense of struggle and a sense of humor.”

Hinton valued her days of working together with farmers and workers to build a communal society. She acknowledged the power of “the hands of the people”: “everyone would do the most they could. Everyone developed to



<http://www.thechinabeat.org>

their full capacity. Everyone was busy. Everybody had a job. People weren't exploiting each other."

As a people's scientist, she longed for any place that "could put even more effort into construction, into building better homes for her people, into eliminating floods, into stabilizing crops, into bringing in machinery and transforming their land from one of despair and poverty into one of prosperity, enlightenment, a nation of scientists working for the enrichment of mankind."

Following Engst death in 2003, Joan continued to live in China and fought against the privatization of the State-owned Academy of Agricultural Mechanization Services, a mechanized dairy farm north of Beijing.

Joan is survived by her three children, Bill of Marlboro, New Jersey; Fred of Beijing and Karen of Pau, France and four grandchildren.

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Jazminda Lumang is the Executive Director of IBON Foundation, Inc. This biography was read during a memorial for Joan Hinton on 6 July 2010 at Bantayog ng mga Bayani, Quezon City, Philippines.

## POEMS BY JOAN HINTON

All the people of Latin America  
Squeezed by the IMF, World Bank and  
WTO.

Are looking to Venezuela,  
Where Hugo Chavez alone has stood up to  
say NO!

With Wolfwitch, a wolf disguised in sheep's  
clothing,  
Appointed by Bush as head of the World  
Bank.

Everywhere viewed with fear and loathing,  
As his tail appears swaggering behind  
Washington's think tank.

Worst of all we have Bolton on calling  
For UN Ambassador as Bush's choice.  
Now even republicans are stalling,  
While democrats oppose him all with one  
voice.

So when congress is away on vacation  
Bush pulls an executive decree,  
Behind their backs he appoints John Bolton  
As the UN Ambassador to be.

Away with Bush's dream of world  
domination.

Away with the IMF, WTO and WB.

As the world's people force Imperialism's  
extermination,

So then and only then will they too be free!

- JH  
2005.8.11

## ODE TO BLIND BELIEVERS IN “THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE”

(Written in 1963 while China was still building socialism)

Yes

You've a high enough standard of living all right  
your hundred million tons of steel  
Your cities lit up so bright  
(if you don't look too deep that is)

How strange.....

You think you're ever so far ahead  
with all the meat you have to eat  
You don't even care for bread.  
(As long as you're on top that is)

You think you're so far ahead!  
The gadgets galore in every store  
have made you dizzy in the head.

A pity .....

What could you possibly understand  
looking with eyes that do not see  
Absorbed in your glittering fairyland.  
So ignorant! So terribly blind!

What's wrong?...

You tremble in a panicked fear.  
Atomic bombs are all you hear.  
The new you can not comprehend  
You think one blast will be the end!

But then..... After all.....

It's not your fault you laud  
This incredible monstrous fraud.  
For with cold calculations  
Those who control communications  
Have kept you unaware  
As they wrapped you in their snare.

Open your eyes  
From all those lies!

Just look!  
Can't you see?

A force is growing fast  
Far greater than any atomic blast.  
The scheming plotters of nuclear war  
Will be crushed by the peoples to rise no more.  
Black and white and yellow and brown  
Will bring imperialism crashing down  
Till those who thought they owned the place  
Will be swept aside by the human race!

And then?.....

As heated water comes to boil  
As rotten logs make fertile soil

This decrepit degeneration  
called by you your civilization  
Will give birth within it's womb  
As it races to it's doom  
To all that's just and right  
Which it held so long from light.

Six billion hands, six billion eyes  
Seeing through those treacherous lies  
Poisonous weeds will never let grow  
As a new and beautiful world they sow

And that which you have failed to see  
Will in the end set you too free.

- JH

# Women & Economics

## Impact of the economic crisis on women

- Women constitute around 60–80 percent of the export manufacturing workforce in the developing world, a sector the World Bank expects to shrink significantly during the economic crisis<sup>1</sup>.
- The global economic crisis is expected to plunge further 22 million women into unemployment, which would lead to a female unemployment rate of 7.4 percent (versus 7 percent of male unemployment)<sup>2</sup>.
- Women are concentrated in insecure jobs in the informal sector with low income and few rights; they tend to have few skills and only basic education. They are the first to be fired.
- The global vulnerable employment rate is expected to range between 50.5–54.7 percent for women, compared to a range of 47.2–51.8 percent for men<sup>3</sup>.
- 80 percent of women workers are considered to be in vulnerable employment in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- 700,000 clothing and textile workers in India lost their jobs in 2008<sup>4</sup>.
- More than half of the 40,000 jobs lost in the Philippines come from export processing zones, where 80 percent of workers are women<sup>5</sup>.
- Sri Lanka and Cambodia have each lost 30,000 mostly female garment industry jobs to date — in both countries, the garment industry accounts for at least half of export earnings<sup>6</sup>.
- Nicaragua's export processing zone, where female labour is prevalent, lost 16,000 jobs in 2008<sup>7</sup>.
- Growth collapses have a direct impact on development. For instance, in times of crises parents are likely to take their children, often girls, out of school and send them to work. Or they might be forced to feed their children less nutritious food or be unable to take them to the doctor when they are ill.
- In Sri Lanka, food took up to a quarter of migrant women

workers' wages in 2008, so women since then have reduced their meals from three to two times a day and/or reduced the quality of their diet in response to declining wages and dramatic increases in the costs of basic necessities.

- Female garment workers on abysmal wages in Bangladesh are still reeling from last year's food crisis — and the situation can only worsen as the effects of the economic crisis kick in later this year.



GABRIELA

## Women Migrant Workers

- Migration is crucial to development: last year, migrants worldwide sent US\$305 billion home to developing countries — three times the volume of aid<sup>8</sup>. Remittances from migrant workers are an important source of national income in countries like the Philippines and Bangladesh, and in Central America.
- Women constitute 50 percent or more of migrant workers in Asia and Latin America.
- While women increasingly migrate alone or as the primary income earners, female international migration is often under-reported.
- In Cambodia, more than 90 percent of garment workers are women and almost all of them are migrants from rural provinces who support their families back home<sup>9</sup>
- Women who have migrated to cities in their own country and abroad to support themselves and their families are being hit hard by the economic crisis. Female wages are an important source of income for families who depend on their remittances to put food on the table and relatives through education.

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