



Joint Asia Pacific Interfaith Conference on Service and Advocacy and CWWM 12th International Consultation

Jakarta Communiqué

When Migrants and Refugees Speak their Truth and Seize their Agency

When the restrictions during the pandemic started to loosen up, many governments and intergovernmental bodies began talking about “recovery” or “building back better.” What they did not say was that “recovery” is getting migration to the same level very quickly, and “better” is not about the rights and well-being of migrants, refugees, and other displaced people. (Sringatin, Indonesian Migrant Workers Union – Hong Kong

Under very repressive migration regimes and the slogans of migration for development, the already undervalued migrant and refugee labor became cheaper, docile, and disposable... We need critical approaches when analyzing development and migration, realizing that most policymakers do not have the interest in protecting the human rights of migrants at heart.”
(Eni Lestari, International Migrants Alliance)

The global realities we are facing challenge us to amplify our solidarity. It necessitates that our efforts to support and be in solidarity with migrants and refugees who have built their global grassroots movement be linked with all other movements resisting neoliberal economic policies, corporate greed, land grabbing and plunder, government corruption, and imperialist wars. (Joanna Concepcion, Migrante International)

“We reassert that migrants and refugees are human beings with dignity and human rights. They are not commodities that are tradeable, like goods and services.”
(CWWM, New York 2013)

“Before, others spoke for us. Today, we speak for ourselves.”
(Migrants, refugees, and people in situations of forced movement)

“We will create platforms for migrants and refugees to speak their truths, give voice to their struggles for social transformation, and strengthen each one’s agency to build infrastructures of care and hospitality and an architecture of protection and solidarity.”
(Migrant-serving institutions and faith-based groups at CWWM12)

Between Feb. 26 and March 1, over six dozen participants joined in five days of interfaith affirmations, critical social analysis of the world’s condition, and laser-focused attention to migrants, refugees, and people in varied forced movement and migration situations. Panel discussions were profuse with testimonies of migrant and refugee contributions to achieving just, inclusive, and sustainable communities worldwide.

The meeting provided occasions for participants, including grassroots migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and people in varied forms of forced migration, including human trafficking, joined by representatives of migrant-serving institutions and faith-based groups, to share narratives illustrating their separate and joint

work for migration justice. Such work, they said, includes ministries of care and compassion and welcome and hospitality on the one hand and activities including education, advocacy, and political action on the other hand.

The five-day gathering included the Asia Pacific Interfaith Conference on Service and Advocacy, which focused on cooperation and solidarity for the rights, well-being, and empowerment of migrants, refugees, and displaced peoples, the National Forum on the Indonesian Situation, and the Twelfth Consultation of the Churches Witnessing With Migrants. The event was jointly organized by the Asia Pacific Interfaith Network for the Rights of Migrants (AP INFORM), the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), Churches Witnessing with Migrants (CWWM), the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), the Progressive Islamic Forum (PIF), Kabar Bumi, and Beranda Migran. The CWWM event doubled as a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, which hosts the secretariat of CWWM.

Participants came from Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, North America, and Europe. They met at Bait Allah Christian Evangelical Church (Feb. 26-28) and the GRHA Oikoumene of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (Feb. 29-March 1) in Jakarta, Indonesia. The presence and sharing of each one's life stories and work experiences at grassroots, national, regional, and international levels were empowering and uplifting.

The prayers and liturgies, keynote presentations, and panel discussions offered both descriptive and analytical looks into the contemporary realities and struggles of uprooted and displaced peoples, highlighting the various forms of social injustices, political oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural subjugation that people in situations of forced movement face and suffer from.

Different speakers emphasized the need to expand and strengthen the reach and breadth of services and the range of ministries of accompaniment and solidarity offered by migrant-serving and faith-based institutions. Participants were encouraged to build infrastructures of care and hospitality and design an architecture of advocacy and solidarity necessary for building up the capacity of migrants, refugees, and all who are in situations of forced movement in varied geographic locations and social contexts (local, national, regional, and international) to engage meaningfully in education, advocacy, and political action work.

Participants were reminded of the ongoing impact of the historical injustices of slavery, colonialism, and racism and how imperial wars of plunder and conquest and neoliberal economic policies conspire today to marginalize and invisibilize not just the lives and livelihoods of migrants and refugees but also their agency, to participate in bettering their lives, that of their families and their communities. To contextualize, a half-day focus on migration and migrant work in Indonesia was exceptionally informative. It underscored the importance of networking and coalition-building. Then a session on Palestine focused on massive displacement, dispersal, and dislocation in Occupied Palestine Territories resulting from Israel's war of aggression, aided and abetted by the United States of America. The participants expressed solidarity with Palestine starting with the call for an immediate and full ceasefire.

The metaphor of dispersal, displacement, and dislocation provided a robust theoretical and practical handle in understanding the biological nature and political agency of migrants who are part of the larger body politic. This body politic is characterized as "several intersecting but contingent conditions," including that it is "dispersed, displaced and dislocated"; "racialized and ethnicized"; 3) "gendered and sexualized"; and 4) "militarized and securitized."¹ Addressing these conditions of the body politic requires solidarity and political action, and organizing and mobilizing, that is, transborder and transnational—across nations, peoples, and cultures.

¹ Ruiz, Lester Edwin J. The Future(s) of CWWM Prospective and retrospective reflections, meditations, and musings on education, advocacy, and political action. February 2, 2024

The faith-based bodies, migrant-serving institutions, and grassroots organizations shared and learned from each other's concrete practices, experiences, and strategies on how to effectively deal with the issues of those who are uprooted and displaced. Cognizant of a world where the biological bodies of migrants, refugees, and uprooted peoples are commodified, and the goods and services they produce and offer are commoditized, the participants were urged to insist and persevere in advancing the narratives that claim and restore full dignity and human rights to all. This is while recognizing these contexts and concerns as multi-layered, multistranded, multifaceted, and intersectional.

Workshops and panel discussions were critical venues for collective reflection and discernment on working together in networks and coalitions at all levels of the organizational life of participants' institutions, coalitions, and networks.

“Crucial to the present and future work on forced migration is the recognition that under very repressive migration regimes and slogan of migration for development, the already undervalued migrant and refugee labor became cheaper, docile and disposable.” What needs to be done includes taking “critical approaches when analyzing development and migration, realizing that most policymakers do not have the interest in protecting the human rights of migrants at heart.” Also, to “continue challenging the neoliberal framework of managing migration for development and the treatment of migrants and refugees as a source of cheap labor,” and thereby “engage the international institutions and conventions as a grassroots campaign” rather than a multilateral engagement for its own sake.

The Jakarta tripartite² gathering expressed a firm resolve and determination to work in concert to achieve a peaceable, inclusive, and just world where economic crises, environmental disasters, and militarized communities do not anymore tear families apart but rather as occasions to struggle in solidarity to realize the freedom of movement and mobility as protected human rights constitutive of a just, inclusive and peaceable society. The solidarity required in organizing and mobilizing will be transborder and transnational, interfaith, and across cultures and ethnicities. Realizing such solidarity, perhaps a new form of global citizenship is possible, in which people, wherever and whoever they are, can “sit under their vine and their fig tree, and there shall be none to make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

² As previously mentioned, the tripartite gathering is composed of representatives of grassroots migrant organizations, migrant-serving institutions and faith-based bodies.