

Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**A RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA:  
A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE TO MIGRANT WORKERS  
AND REFUGEES IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

by  
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**I. INTRODUCTION**

"Open to me, my brother.  
I have knocked at your door,  
I have appealed to your heart,  
to have a bed,  
to have a little fire to warm me.

Open to me, my sister.  
Why do you ask me  
if I am African,  
or Asian,  
or European?  
I am not black,  
nor is my skin red;  
I am not oriental,  
nor white.

I am simply a man.  
I am simply a woman.  
Open to me,  
Open your door to me,  
Open your heart to me.

For I am like you,  
A stranger of all times,  
under every sky.

A man, a woman,  
Like you."

—Rene' Philombe, poet. "Camerrooms"

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This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshops of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC), convening, January 3-12, 2000, at "Baan Phu Waan," the pastoral formation center of the Archdiocese of Bangkok, Sampran, Thailand, on the theme: "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service."

The foregoing poem, used by a Sacred Heart nun<sup>1</sup> in reflecting the miserable plight of peoples in diaspora, essentially captures the urgent appeal of the "people on the move" who are knocking on the doors of the Church in Asia today.

## A NATION OF MIGRANTS

Approximately, there are 130 to 145 million people<sup>2</sup> worldwide living in countries they could not call their own. The estimate, showing a big increase from the 104 million in 1985, includes only legally registered immigrants. Around two to four million join this population every year.<sup>3</sup> It goes without saying that the figure would balloon if irregular immigrants were counted in.

Meanwhile, there are some 50 million people<sup>4</sup> who have been forced to flee their homes. This number comprises refugees, people displaced within their own countries or the internally displaced persons (IDPs), former refugees who need UNHCR monitoring and assistance once they have returned home or the returnees, and people who may receive temporary protection outside their home countries but do not have the full legal status of refugees or the asylum-seekers. Less than half of these (22.3 million) are "persons of concern" to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

## ALSO GROWING IN THE ASIAN REGION

As of 1995, the International Labor Organization placed at 10 to 15 million the number of Asian migrant workers, mostly based in the Middle East, North America, Europe, and, increasingly within the Asian region itself.<sup>5</sup> By 1999, migrant Asians working within the region (more particularly in the East and Southeast Asia) are more than six million.<sup>6</sup>

As regards migrant labor flows<sup>7</sup>, the perennial labor-exporting Asian

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<sup>1</sup> Dolores Aleixandre, RSCJ, "You too were strangers," in *Connections* (International Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, 1991), Vol. 1, No.1; p.119.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1999*. New York, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1999; p.32.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Martin. December 1996. "Migrants on the Move in Asia." *Asia Pacific Issues* (Analysis from the East-West Center, No.29), p.2.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR. [www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/numbers/numbers.htm\(7/21/99\)](http://www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/numbers/numbers.htm(7/21/99)).

<sup>5</sup> Asian Migrant Center and APEC Labour Rights Center. "Labor Nexus (Migration in Asia: A Decade of Change)". October 1997. (Poster). The figure accounts only for documented migrant workers.

<sup>6</sup> Scalabrini Migration Center, *Asian Migration Atlas 1999*, <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/amatlas.htm>. (as of 8/31/99).

<sup>7</sup> Graeme Hugo. 1998. "The Demographic Underpinnings of Current and Future International Migration in Asia," in *Asian Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol.7, No.1; p.17.

countries are the Philippines, China, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam. On the other hand, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Brunei mainly host migrant labor. Malaysia and Thailand both import and export migrant labor.

Some figures<sup>8</sup> may help illustrate migrant labor movements within the region. In 1997, there were 892,957 Indonesians working in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, while some 448,545 Overseas Filipino Workers were employed in the same countries. In the same year, the top receivers of migrant labor in the region were Japan (with 1,482,707 workers from Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, China, Bangladesh and other countries) and Malaysia with 1,120,172 foreign workers.

More or less, half of the Asian migrant workers hosted within the region are in irregular status.<sup>9</sup> The top receiving countries of irregular migrant workers in 1997<sup>10</sup> were Thailand, with 845,279 irregular migrants mainly coming from Myanmar and Cambodia, and Malaysia with 800,000, mostly from Indonesian and Bangladesh. There were also large stocks of irregular migrants in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. (It must be noted that the nature of irregular migration makes it impossible to come up with accurate figures of irregular migrants.)

Meanwhile, the Asian continent is host to 7,458,500 persons of concern to the UNHCR. This constitutes some 4,730,300 refugees, 15,000 asylum seekers, 824,100 returnees, and 1,889,100 IDPs and others in similar circumstances.<sup>11</sup>

These are the migrants and refugees that are the subject of this paper.

## HUMAN FACES BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Yet, figures fail to reflect the real situation of migrants, refugees and IDPs. They fail to illustrate the human side of these movements of people, which, to the Church, is of paramount value. The following migration-related accounts in 1998 and early 1999 in the Asian region may help us see the human faces behind the numbers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Scalabrini Migration Center, *Asian Migration Atlas 1999*, <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/amatlas.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Martin, loc.cit., p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *Asian Migration Atlas 1999*, op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR. [www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/numbers/numbers.htm\(7/21/99\)](http://www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/numbers/numbers.htm(7/21/99)).

<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, accounts for 1998 were taken from Maruja M.B. Asis. "International Migration in Asia in 1998 : A Review of Trends," in *Asian Migrant*, Vol. 12, No.1, January-March 1999, pp. 2-16; and those of 1999 from *Asian Migration News* (31 January 1999; 30 April 1999; 15 May 1999 and 15 August 1999).



- As of 17 September 1999, the United Nations said that some 600,000 of East Timor's 870,000 population were in need of emergency aid, in the wake of violent attacks made by pro-Indonesia militiamen when the East Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence from Indonesia in a referendum held on August 30. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees described the situation in East Timor as that of "total intimidation." There were reports on the forced deportation of the East Timorese to West Timor, which resulted in the separation of family members.<sup>13</sup>
- The famine in North Korea, which claimed some two million lives, resulted in the exodus of tens of thousands of refugees to Korean-China borders.
- Refugees move every time violence erupts between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. As of August 1998, the on-going conflict has displaced some 30,000 persons.
- To escape poverty in their country, more than 17,000 young Vietnamese women had married older Taiwanese men. The women ignored risks of being abused like the case of one woman who was made a sex slave. In 1997 alone, 4,800 such marriages were contracted. Matchmaking agencies charged the men NT\$35,000 each, NT\$20,000 of which goes to the agency, and the remaining amount to the Vietnamese woman.
- On average, 2,354 seafarers die on board ships each year. The International Transport Federation reported that in 1997 alone, it collected a total of US\$37.2 million in backpay for crews, and collected on behalf of the seafarers and their families US\$4.68 million worth of claims for personal injury and loss of life.<sup>14</sup>
- According to the Asian Migration Center in Hong Kong, 90% of the 31,800 Indonesian domestic helpers there have received salaries lower than the mandated rate, and have been denied the enjoyment of their statutory days off.
- Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong (estimated number: 141,500) had no choice but to accept a reduced monthly salary of HK\$3,670 (from HK\$3,860). Meanwhile, the United Filipinos of Hong Kong

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara Crosette, "UN prepares to send peacekeepers into East Timor," *New York Times News Service*, 17 September 1999.

<sup>14</sup> *Ahoy Newsmagazine*, April-June 1999, p.17.

reported the following maid-abuse cases in 1998: physical abuse such as repeated beatings (67 cases), serious physical assaults such as being hit with turned-on flat irons (34 cases), and forced to work overtime (397 cases).

- In Singapore, the incidents of abuse by employers of their foreign maids (total: 100,000) rose from 105 in 1994 to 192 in 1997.
- Denied refugee status, a Chinese woman was deported China where she was forced to abort her second baby — 10 days before its due delivery — because of China's one-child policy.
- Six Overseas Filipino Workers have languished in jail since 1994 for theft, despite the fact that they were sentenced to only 6 to 10 months' imprisonment. Meanwhile, in 1998 alone, 690 OFWs died in their host countries (up from 576 in 1997). There were 1,935 OFWs languishing in jails abroad. Human organ smuggling is reportedly one factor behind mysterious deaths.
- The July 1997 coup d'etat in Cambodia resurfaced refugee movements to Thailand. A total of 37,162 Cambodians have sought refuge in Thailand as of October 1998. In related incidents, some 300 Karen refugees had fled to Suan Pueng district in Thailand to escape violence ignited by an armed clash between Burmese troops and the Karen National Union rebels at the Thai-Burma border.
- Every year, around 15,000 women and children from Bangladesh are smuggled out. The women and girls end up working as sex workers in brothels or as virtual domestic slaves in India and Pakistan. Boys are made to work as camel jockeys in the Middle East.
- For the processing of their visas and travel, Thai women paid 4.5 million yen each to Japanese brokers involved in a prostitution ring in Tokyo.
- Twenty-four of the 42 Indian seamen who were abandoned by their ship's owners on the shores of Kalba in the United Arab Emirates were repatriated on 1 August 1999, after staying in their vessels for six months.
- In Indonesia, the number of people displaced by the violence in troubled Aceh province has grown to 130,000. The refugees' health condition has been described by aid workers as "very poor."



## II. MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: A CONCERN IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

Love of, and service to, these millions of migrants, refugees and IDPs is not, or ought not to be, new to the Church. For this is rooted in the Scriptures.<sup>15</sup>

In the Old Testament, we are commanded to welcome strangers, in very explicit terms: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt."<sup>16</sup>

In the New Testament, we behold our Lord Jesus Christ, who "has nowhere to lay his head."<sup>17</sup> He was born in a manger, was brought by Mary and Joseph to Egypt to flee from Herod, and lived as an itinerant preacher. Through the beautiful Parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>18</sup> we are shown what is expected of Christ's followers when faced with a stranger in need. For, at the end of time, this migrant Lord teaches us, our attitude towards strangers and refugees, will be one of the things we will be made to account for.<sup>19</sup>

This expressed care of the Church for migrants and refugees is made unequivocal in the Catholic social teachings, in encyclical letters, and in ecumenical council documents.<sup>20</sup> For the institutional church, the *Motu Proprio De Pastolari Migratorum Cura* can be of great significance as it outlines norms for episcopal conferences, dioceses, and parishes to observe in the pastoral care for migrants and refugees. A very comprehensive document on the pastoral and social care for refugees is "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity", issued by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples in 1992. In sum, the document stresses that, in dealing with refugees and internally

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<sup>15</sup> In an attempt to compile Biblical passages related to migration, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines—Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (CBCP-ECMI) listed 183 selected passages. These can be found in its Booklet No.3, "Migration in the Bible and Church Documents." Manila : CBCP-ECMI, 1995; p.13.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Leviticus 19:33-34.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Matthew 8:20

<sup>18</sup> Cf. John 4:1-30.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Matthew 25:34-36.

<sup>20</sup> Major Church documents with specific references to migration include the Apostolic Constitution "*Exsul Familia*" (1952), Vatican II (1965), the *Motu Proprio "De Pastolari Migratorum Cura"* (1969), the *Motu Proprio "Apostolicae Caritatis"* (1970), which decreed the establishment of the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Encyclical "*Laborem Exercens*" (1981), "Canon Law" (1983), the "Catechism of the Catholic Church"(1994), and the *Motu Proprio "Stella Maris"* (1997).

displaced peoples, the Church should say yes to a mentality of hospitality; no to forced repatriation and no to the silence of indifference.<sup>21</sup> Human solidarity is imperative, it asserts.

Significantly, the Church had not only sent missions to provide pastoral and spiritual care to migrants and refugees and establish offices and commissions towards the same end. Through the teachings of the Vicars of Christ, she went further as linking migration to social development, advocated for equality of rights among migrants and natives, and called for a humanistic approach in solving the problems of the migration phenomenon.

The concern for migrants and refugees embedded in Catholic social teachings is anchored on a valued "foundational truth": "The Church understands the human person to possess absolute dignity equal to none in the whole of creation and to have the inalienable right and responsibility to participate in the life of civil society."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the Church treasures the transcendent dignity of the human person, as she sees in each one the face of the Savior.

In more specific terms, the Church teaches that "all kinds of discrimination in wages and working conditions should be avoided in regard to workers who come from other countries or areas and contribute their work to the economic development of a people or region. Furthermore, no one, especially public authorities, should treat them simply as mere tools of production, but as persons — they should facilitate them in having their families with them."<sup>23</sup>

Quite substantially, Pope John Paul II has addressed the condition of migrant workers in his encyclical on human work. He acknowledges man's right to emigrate — and to immigrate — to seek greener pastures. Yet, he points out that:

...it (emigration in search of work) generally constitutes a loss for the country left behind. It is the departure of a person who is also a member of a great community by history, tradition and culture; and that person must begin life in the midst of another society united by a different culture and very often by a different lan-

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<sup>21</sup> Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity," (No.10,14 and 16). Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992; p. 12, 14 –15.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio B. Lambino, S.J. "Theological Reflection on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees," in the *Proceedings of the First Consultative Meeting on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees in Asia*. Vatican City: Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1992; p.158.

<sup>23</sup> "Gaudium et Spes," 66.



guage. In this case, it is the loss of a subject of work, whose efforts of mind and body could contribute to the common good of his own country, but these efforts, this contribution, are instead offered to another society which in a sense has less right to them than the person's country of origin.<sup>24</sup>

Aside from cautioning us regarding the consequential brain and brawn drain in the migrant workers' home countries, the Pope calls for just legislation to secure the emigrants' rights, and for efforts to ascertain that emigration "may bring benefit to the emigrant's personal, family and social life..."<sup>25</sup> Stressing that "emigration in search of work must in no way become an opportunity for financial or social exploitation," the Pope pushes for equality of treatment on matters of labor rights between native-born and immigrant workers.<sup>26</sup>

To the Holy Father, the fundamental value of the work of migrants is bound up with their dignity as human persons. Thus, he ends his brief commentary on migrant labor by reiterating the core principle of the encyclical: "the hierarchy of values and the profound meaning of work itself require that capital should be at the service of labor and not labor at the service of capital."<sup>27</sup>

In 1998, addressing the Fourth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (Vatican City, 5-10 October 1998), the Pope explained this valuing of the dignity of labor in the context of migration vis-à-vis globalization. He said :

The closing of borders is often caused not merely by a reduced or no longer existing need for immigrant work-force, but by a production system based on the logic of labor exploitation.

Until recently, the wealth of the industrialized countries was locally produced, with the contribution of numerous immigrants. With the displacement of capital and business activities, a major part of that wealth is now produced in developing countries, where cheap labor is available. In this way, the industrialized societies have discovered how to benefit from a cheap labor supply without having to bear the burden of immigrants. Thus, these workers run the risk of being reduced to new "serfs" bound to movable capital

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<sup>24</sup> "Laborem Exercens," 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



which, among the many situations of poverty, chooses from one time to the next those circumstances where manpower is cheapest. It is clear that such a system is unacceptable; in fact, it practically ignores the human dimension of work.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years, the Pope has regularly expressed the Church's concern for migrants and refugees through his messages for the annual World Migration Day celebrations. Considering that these messages were composed in the context of the time in which they were delivered, a cursory look at the selected messages may help us recognize the challenges posed by the changing migration realities to the Church.

The Pope has recognized that "migration has always served as a vehicle for transmitting the faith," yet he was quick to add that this perspective should not blind us regarding migration's aspects of suffering.<sup>29</sup> He has drawn attention to the difficult situation of undocumented immigrants, and added that "their adaptation to conditions of hardship is a further confirmation of the humiliating situation to which poverty reduces them in their country."<sup>30</sup> He has seen a direct relationship between the swelling migrant population and the "growing gap in the economic, social and political resources between the rich nations and the poor ones..."<sup>31</sup> He has also delved into the problems faced by immigrant families, saying that "the phenomenon of migration has in fact a considerable effect on the family nucleus."<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, he has pointed out the "urgent need to guarantee women equal treatment, both with regard to remuneration as well as to working conditions and security."<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, he has underscored the virtue of solidarity with the stranger. He has emphasized that "the Church's commitment to migrants and refugees cannot be reduced merely to organizing structures of hospitality and solidarity" as he called both for acts of charity and for acts of witnessing to Christ.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, he wrote: "For the Christian, acceptance of and solidarity with the stranger are not only a human duty of hospitality but a

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<sup>28</sup> As quoted by Archbishop Stephen Fumio Hamao, president of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, in his message to the participants of the Asian Regional Meeting on the Filipino Ministry, (8-9 June 1999; Manila, Philippines).

<sup>29</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1996.

precise demand of fidelity itself to Christ's teaching."<sup>35</sup>

More recently, the Holy Father has taught that "the presence of migrants challenges the responsibility of believers as individuals and as a community... as a parish..."<sup>36</sup> He stresses that it is not an option for a parish to welcome the stranger; it is an inherent duty. Towards the fulfillment of this duty, believers are expected to extend hospitality to strangers, regardless of religious beliefs, reject racial exclusion or discrimination, recognize the dignity of every woman and man, and further the migrants' inalienable rights. He maintains that "by a cordial and fraternal welcome they (Christian communities) witness by deeds even more than words, that the families of migrants...should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. This is a task stemming from the nature of the Church as being sign of unity in diversity."

The heart-rending situation of the world's refugees has been described by the Pope as a "shameful wound of our time."<sup>37</sup> In a talk before refugees hosted by the Philippines, the Pope underscored that serving refugees is an integral part of the Church's mission in the world... is a charity that makes no exception because of the other person's ethnic origin, religious allegiance or political preference, no exceptions whatsoever; a charity which sees the person as a brother or sister in need and seeks only one thing: to be of immediate assistance, to be a neighbor."<sup>38</sup> Even as he thanked governments, the UNHCR, and church groups helping the refugees, he made an appeal to nations for increased aid to sustain, strengthen and reinforce efforts to alleviate the plight of refugees.

### III. A CONCERN IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA

Caring for and serving migrants and refugees has been on the agenda of the Church in Asia since the 1980's, or much earlier on the part of particular episcopal conferences. The most recent reference to this could be

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<sup>35</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Message for World Migration Day, 1999. The term "parish" is used by the Pope to refer to "a privileged expression of community." In the light of the problems of migrants, he drives at the responsibility of the parish, which, he pointed out, etymologically means "a house where the guest feels at ease, welcomes all, and discriminates against none, for no one there is an outsider."

<sup>37</sup> Letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 25 June 1982.

<sup>38</sup> Pope John Paul II, Message to the "boat people" at the Refugee Processing Center in Morong, Bataan, Philippines, 21 February 1981. In Pedro S. De Achutegui, S.J., (ed.), *John Paul II in the Philippines: Addresses and Homilies*. Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology-Cardinal Bea Institute, 1981; p.151.



found in the message of the first ever Synod of Bishops for Asia, where<sup>39</sup> migrants and refugees have been particularly identified as beneficiaries of the mission of the Church at the turn of the millennium. The Asian bishops wrote :

Special attention must be paid to migrant workers. Millions of them leave their families to earn their livelihood in other countries. Pastoral care for them in their own ecclesial tradition is most necessary. If they are Christians, a proper formation will enable them to be evangelizers in their host countries.

Another group of people that should cause us concern are the refugees. There are millions of them in Asia who have left their countries and are in great need of all kinds of assistance.<sup>40</sup>

Significantly, the message is more or less a restatement of what the immediately preceding FABC Plenary Assembly (the 6<sup>th</sup>, Manila, Philippines, 10-19 January 1995), declared on this mission area five years ago:

Special attention is given to the displaced in our societies: political and ecological refugees and migrant workers. They are marginalized and exploited by the system, denied of their place in society, and must go elsewhere to seek a dignified life. In welcoming them, we expose the causes of their displacement, work toward conditions for a more humane living in community, experience the universal dimensions of the Kingdom (Gal 3:28) and appreciate new opportunities for evangelization and intercultural dialogue.<sup>41</sup>

In their Third Plenary Assembly (Bangkok, 20-27 October 1982), the Asian bishops had expressed concern about the refugee problem with particular reference to Thailand and other Asian countries that hosted displaced peoples from Laos, Kampuchea, and Vietnam. They said that for as long as remedies in countries of origin could not be found, "third countries" should continue helping the refugees, even as they asked themselves, and the faithful, what else could be done to solve the problem.<sup>42</sup> An explicit concern for

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<sup>39</sup> The synod was called Pope John Paul II in Rome, 19 April to 14 May, 1998.

<sup>40</sup> Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, 5.

<sup>41</sup> "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life", 15.5. Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly. In Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD (ed.). *For All Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 2. Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997; p.11.

<sup>42</sup> "The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia", Resolution No. II, (Statement and Recommendations of the Third Plenary Assembly). In Gaudencio Rosales, D.D. and C.G. Arevalo, S.J. (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. I. Quezon City and New York : Claretian Publications and Orbis Books, 1992; p.62.



refugees had earlier been expressed by the delegates of the International Congress on Mission (Manila, 7 December 1979), who, among other appeals, called on Christians "to translate into deeds... the many statements of our concern for the poor and the suffering, the deprived and the oppressed of the earth."<sup>43</sup>

Then, in a symposium on Filipino migrant workers in Asia organized by the FABC-Office of Human Development (Hong Kong, 18 September 1993), the participants acknowledged that migration for the improvement of quality of life is a human right.<sup>44</sup> Echoing "Laborem Exercens", they stressed that migration should not be a forced choice, and should not result in the loss of human dignity.<sup>45</sup> Concern over the negative consequences of migration to family life was also aired.

In 1982, the Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA III) stated that the "pastoral care for the great number of Asians who have emigrated from their homelands for economic reasons demands the serious missionary concern of the churches."<sup>46</sup>

On their own, the Bishops of South Asia have identified migrants and refugees as "among the groups who today are experiencing systematic violence used against them as a method of control."<sup>47</sup> Participants to the Colloquium on the Social Doctrine of the Church in the Context of Asia have also joined their voices in urging "our Christian communities as a matter of duty to strive for the improvement of working conditions and defend.... migrant workers from every form of exploitation."<sup>48</sup> Even the laity in the Church in Asia have acknowledged as one of their contemporary challenges the act of

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<sup>43</sup> Message of the Delegates, 30. In Rosales and Arevalo (eds.), *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>44</sup> Delegates were from the church of origin, the Philippines, and from the receiving churches of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Thailand.

<sup>45</sup> "Journeying Together in Faith with the Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia," (Final Statement of the Symposium).. In Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD (ed.), *loc.cit.*, p.52.

<sup>46</sup> "Letter of Participants and Syllabus of Mission Concerns (BIMA III)." In Rosales, D.D. and Arevalo, S.J. (eds.); *loc.cit.*, p.108.

<sup>47</sup> Final Statement (4) of the South Asia Bishops' Meeting, Kathmandu, 22 September 1996. In Eilers, S.V.D. (ed.), *loc. cit.*, p. 15. Convened under the theme "Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia," The meeting was attended by 26 bishops from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

<sup>48</sup> Appeal (no.5), "Walking Humbly, Acting Justly, Loving Tenderly in Asia" (Statement of the Colloquium on the Social Doctrine of the Church in the Context of Asia; Redemptorist Center, Pattaya City, Thailand, 20-24 January 1992). In Eilers, S.V.D. (ed.), *Ibid.*, p.45.

listening to the voice and responding to the needs of migrants.<sup>49</sup>

#### IV. CONCERN BEYOND RHETORIC

It is evident from the foregoing review of selected statements that the Church in Asia, in unison with the Universal Church, has been aware of the worsening condition of migrants and refugees. She has contemplated their tragic plight, identified their needs as among those of the "new poor" for which preferential option must be given, and seen the urgency of coming up with strategies to reach out to them with pastoral and social care.

It may therefore be of value to consider, in brief, what the Church in Asia has done so far, beyond the statements and declarations issued by the FABC and its offices, as well as its member-episcopal conferences. In this regard, it may be advisable to take a look at the pastoral recommendations for concrete action made by the first and second consultative meetings on the pastoral care of migrants and refugees in Asia. This process will be helpful as the Church goes through the process of formulating responsive strategies in the service of migrants and refugees in Asia in the next century.

The first meeting<sup>50</sup> was premised on the conviction "that the Catholic community in both the sending and receiving countries has to take appropriate action to express continued solidarity with the people of Asia who are forced to move."<sup>51</sup> In sum, it declared that solidarity with refugees and migrants naturally spring from our Christian faith, and noted the feminization of migrant labor and the short duration of contracts as factors that make workers very vulnerable to exploitation. Furthermore, the meeting identified the following as the causes of displacement: poverty, ecological disasters, wars, ethnic conflicts and other forms of oppression. It denounced illegal recruitment, the reduction of migrant workers to an "economic com-

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<sup>49</sup> "The Role of the Laity in Human Development," (Message of the Fourth East Asian Regional Laity Meeting in Thailand, 10 February 1996). In Eilers, S.V.D. (ed.), *Ibid.*, p.134

<sup>50</sup> Held in Manila, Philippines, 16-19 June 1992. Convened by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, in collaboration with the FABC Office of Human Development and the Episcopal Commission for Migration and Tourism of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. Participants included archbishops, bishops, priests, religious and lay persons from Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of China (Taiwan), Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United States of America, Vicariate of Arabic Countries and Vietnam.

<sup>51</sup> Final Statement, 2, in *Proceedings of the First Consultative Meeting on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees in Asia*. Vatican City: Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1992; p. 165.



modity", forced repatriation of refugees, and mail-order bride arrangements and, moreover, called attention to the plight of internally displaced persons as needing special protection.<sup>52</sup>

A call was also made for the Asian churches to make an appeal to Asian countries to ratify the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the additional Protocol of 1967, as well as the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families.<sup>53</sup>

As regards pastoral concerns, the meeting recommended the following: a) the Church's solidarity with migrants and refugees has to expand beyond those who are directly involved; b) the activities in Asia need to be coordinated, most probably through an FABC desk for migrants and refugees; and c) cooperation among Catholic agencies involved in mission should be encouraged."<sup>54</sup>

In 1996, before the start of the Second Consultation a look into concrete Church action based on the first consultation's recommendations was taken. The following developments were noted: 1. Anti-illegal recruitment campaign initiated in the Philippines; 2. The start of "the formation of active and creative migrant communities through occasional missions," lay leadership development and renewal groups; 3. The issuance of three or more collective pastoral statements of Bishops's Conferences regarding state policy shifts on the refugee problem; 4. The introduction of mini-courses on migration in some seminaries; 5. The organization of the Ecumenical Watch Committee to pursue the campaign for the ratification of the UN International Convention on Migrants and Their Families; and 6. The undertaking of steps towards the orderly exchange of clergy and pastoral workers between sending and receiving countries.<sup>55</sup>

Four years after, the second consultation for the pastoral care of migrants in Asia was held.<sup>56</sup> As expected, the participants noted that many changes had taken place in the migration landscape since the first consulta-

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<sup>52</sup> Final Statement, 6, 11, 12, 13,16, 19; Ibid., pp. 166-168.

<sup>53</sup> Final Statement, 10 and 17. Ibid., pp. 167-168.

<sup>54</sup> Sanedrin, Ibid., p.56

<sup>55</sup> Fr. Silvano Tomasi, CS. "Review of Conclusions of the First Consultation (Part I)," in *The Second Consultation for the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Asia*. Vatican City : Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1997; pp. 51-53.

<sup>56</sup> Held in Manila, Philippines, 13-18 May 1996. Convened by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, in collaboration with the International Catholic Migration Commission and Caritas Internationalis. Participants came



tion. Among the trends noted were: the shift of Asian migrant workers' destinations to Asia, particularly East Asia; the increase in the number of undocumented workers; a worsening human trafficking problem; feminization of migration; the occurrence of "silent emergencies" in South Asia which has resulted in the rise in the number of refugees and the internally displaced.<sup>57</sup>

Noting the above-mentioned trends, the meeting identified five major areas as priorities of the Church's pastoral commitments, from 1996 towards the year 2000. These are labor migration, migrant women, refugees and internally displaced persons, the family, and human rights. To address the issues in these areas of concern, the meeting formulated the following strategies:<sup>58</sup>

1. (On labor migration), continue to dialogue and negotiate with civil authorities for migrant-protective legislation, and ensure the enforcement of similarly-oriented existing laws;
2. (On migrant women), raise awareness among women regarding migration to morally-degrading occupations, and to offer shelter and counseling to those fleeing from abusive working conditions;
3. (On refugees and internally displaced persons), work for peace and reconciliation; facilitate the safe and dignified journey of returnees to their home countries, cooperate closely with NGOs, bilateral agencies, and the UNHCR; condemn the armaments industry;
4. (On the family), promote family reunification, and lobby for policies that will allow for medium and long-term residence permits and provide care and education for children;
5. (On human rights), study and disseminate applicable human rights instruments on migrants, refugees and IDPs; call on governments to sign and ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants and Members of Their Families, the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (The specific

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from Australia, Bangladesh, Burundi, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Ethiopia, Guam, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Macao, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Vatican City, and Vietnam.

<sup>57</sup> Final Statement, 2 and 3, in *The Second Consultation for the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Asia*. Vatican City : Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1997; pp. 15-16.

<sup>58</sup> Final Statement, 8, in *The Second Consultative Meeting for the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Asia*. Vatican City : Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 1997; p.17-19.

"Commitments for Implementing Pastoral Strategies" is attached as Appendix I).

Towards similar goals, concrete accomplishments have been achieved by the FABC's member-conferences, particular dioceses and parishes in Asia, Catholic secular organizations, as well as the various religious orders and congregations of women and men. For instance, the Church agencies in Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Malaysia have been recognized as among the first groups to have provided succor and support to refugees in the Asian region, and, among the religious, the Jesuits, the Maryknoll Missioners, the Salesians, and several congregations of religious sisters to have given significant help to the Khmer refugees in camps in Thailand, and in their journeying back to Cambodia.<sup>59</sup> The work of the Scalabrinians, particularly in research and advocacy, are also worth-noting.

#### V. AN ASIAN CHURCH OF ORIGIN: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

Perhaps the choice of the Philippines as the venue both for the first and second consultative meetings on the pastoral care for migrants and refugees in Asia is not just incidental. This is significant because, among other considerations, the Philippines holds the distinction as the only predominantly Catholic country in the whole Asian region. Equally important are the facts that the Philippines is now ranked as the second largest exporter of migrant labor (next only to Mexico), and is currently the "manning capital of the world," supplying 30% of the world's ocean-going seafarers.

The experience of the Philippines, as a Church of origin, has been cited for its "remarkable record in the provision of services and care for its migrants overseas."<sup>60</sup> In view of this, her pastoral and social work for Filipino migrants and her linkages with churches that receive Filipinos may provide some practical insights that may be helpful in the definition of the Asian Church's mission to migrant workers and uprooted peoples in the next millennium.

The Philippine Church's<sup>61</sup> work for migrants could be traced back to as early as 1955, when its Committee on Emigration reported to the Catho-

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<sup>59</sup> Sally O'Neil. "100 Years of Catholic Social Teaching (Relevance of CST to Development Agencies in the Northern Hemisphere and, in particular, to the International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity's Interventions in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia)," in *Colloquium on the Social Doctrine of the Church in the Context of Asia*. Manila : FABC-Office of Human Development and Claretian Publications, 1993; p.50. The author is connected with the Irish Catholic Agency for World Development.

<sup>60</sup> O'Neil, 50.

<sup>61</sup> All information on the CBCP-ECMI taken from the office's brochure.



lic Welfare Organization (the forerunner of the CBCP) the situation of Filipinos in the USA, Hawaii, and Guam. The 60's was marked by the formation of the Commission on Apostolate of the Sea and Air, and the Commission on Emigration, Immigration and Tourism, which subsequently gave way to the Episcopal Commission on Migration and Tourism (ECMT).

On 29 January 1988, the CBCP issued its first ever pastoral letter on migration, calling for protection of Filipino migrants and overseas workers. In gist, the letter acknowledged the positive contributions of Filipino migrant workers to their families, communities and to the economy of the country, but, at the same time condemned illegal recruitment for "trading human beings," and bewailed the cases of abuse and exploitation of the workers. The Philippine bishops also called on the receiving churches to treat the Filipino migrants with compassion, even as they thanked said churches for the "fine work that has already been done."<sup>62</sup>

In 1995, the ECMT was renamed the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI). In the same year, the CBCP issued its second pastoral letter on migration, titled "Comfort My People, Comfort Them (Isaiah 40,1), in the wake of the tragic deaths of two Filipino domestic helpers in Singapore. The pastoral letter called attention to the abuses suffered by OFWs, the often ignored psycho-social costs of migration particularly borne by the family, the need for gender-sensitive policies that will protect women migrant workers who are more vulnerable to abuse. It reminded government of its inherent duty to protect its people on the move, regardless of their regular or irregular status, and appealed to rich nations to protect the rights of aliens in their territories. Candidly, it pointed out poverty as the major push factor for Filipino migration, and thus called for the dismantling of socio-political and economic structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality.<sup>63</sup> The CBCP-ECMI also established regional migration desks for more accessibility.

Today, the CBCP-ECMI maintains the following service arms: Apostleship of the Air (for air travelers), Apostleship of the Sea (for sea-based workers), Center for Overseas Workers (for land-based migrant workers), Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (for refugees), the Pre-Evangelization Program (for Japanese migrants), and the Pastoral Center for Tourism (for pilgrims and tourists).

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<sup>62</sup> Cardinal Bea Institute – Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University. *Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Letters and Statements (1984-1990)*, pp.143-147.

<sup>63</sup> CBCP-ECMI. "ECMI Pastoral Letters and Instruction on the Pastoral Care of People who Migrate" (Booklet No.7). Manila : CBCP, 1995; pp.5-9.



On the basis of its avowed aims,<sup>64</sup> the CBCP-ECMI has translated into concrete terms its services to the migrants. Aside from the pastoral services, the interventions adopted vary. These include: counseling, crisis intervention, education on labor laws, legal aid and paralegal services, policy advocacy, preventive education, research and publications, training and seminars, language classes, temporary shelter, investigation and documentation of experiences for the formulation of effective responses, information dissemination, reintegration assistance, livelihood development aimed at helping migrants' families use their financial resources wisely, cultural orientation, prison visitation, vocational and skills classes, medical services, migrants's rights advocacy, referral services, among others. On top of these, the CBCP has coordinated with OFW-receiving churches the assignment of pastoral workers in their ecclesiastical jurisdictions.

The noble efforts of religious orders/congregations in taking care of migrant Filipino workers, however, cannot be ignored. Either in close coordination with the CBCP-ECMI, or independently relying on their own resources, the missionary work of these priests, brothers and sisters has significantly bolstered the Philippine Church's ministry to migrants and refugees. The works of the Scalabrinians right within ECMI and in the AOS, and through the Scalabrini Migration Center, and the Scalabrini Center for People on the Move are worth noting. Also of parallel value are the efforts of the Jesuits (through UGAT Foundation, the AOS, and Institute on Church and Social Issues or ICSI), the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers (through the AOS), the Religious of the Good Shepherd, the Scalabrini sisters, the PIME fathers — all of which have helped substantiate the Philippine Church's commitment to migrants and refugees. Significantly, Catholic lay organizations such as the International Catholic Migration Commission have added strength to the Church's force in the ministry to migrants and refugees.

What could be considered a significant accomplishment was the Church's direct involvement in lobbying for the Philippine government's ratification of the UN Migrants Convention and for the passage of a national

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<sup>64</sup> Specifically, CBCP-ECMI aims to 1. Facilitate the creation of opportunities for economic activity within the country, thus providing alternatives to migration; 2. Coordinate the delivery of pastoral and social services to "people on the move" through the establishment of a nationwide, regional, and diocesan migration desks; 3. Prepare and conduct formation programs for overseas Filipino workers "to make them more aware of their missionary role of witnessing to the Gospel in their employment overseas"; 4. Make studies/research on the phenomena of migration; 5. Ensure and prepare an adequate number of priests, religious and lay personnel involved in the ministry for "people on the move" through the bishops and the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines; 6. Promote and protect the fundamental rights and dignity of "people on the move"; and 7. Develop specific pastoral (e.g. building Christian communities among migrants' families at the parish level, religious services and sacramental care, etc.) and social programs (e.g. legal advice, policy advocacy, etc.).

law specifically promoting the welfare and protecting the rights of overseas Filipino workers. The law, now known as the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, was lobbied for by the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch (PMRW), a coalition of non-government organizations that counts among its members many church-affiliated groups.<sup>65</sup> The same coalition is now pushing for the improvement of the law and is advocating for the passage of Absentee Voting Law that would secure the political rights of the now approximately 7.5 million OFWs. It also campaigns for the ratification of the UN Migrants' Convention in the region, and monitors the adherence of the Philippine government to the instrument.

Since May 1988, a few months after the issuance of its first letter on Filipino migrants, the CBCP has been regularly holding consultation meetings with chaplains and other pastoral workers ministering to OFWs in various parts of the world, from Asia, to the United States of America, to Europe. These continental consultations served as preliminaries of International Meetings, the first of which was held in Rome in February 1994, the second, also in Rome, in October 1996. The latest worldwide meeting was held in Manila, Philippines in March 1998. These meetings generally had three main components: a talk on the Church's teaching on migration, reports on the situation of Filipino migrants, and resolutions responding to migrants' needs, as reported.<sup>66</sup> The meetings likewise became venues for the discussion of specific issues such as abuses suffered by Filipino workers, advocacy for the promotion of the welfare and protection of the rights of OFWs, pastoral needs in the Church's ministry to OFWs, roles and duties of the Church of origin and the receiving churches and the needed coordination between them and the role of the Philippine government. Significantly, these meetings yielded measurable results like the gaining of official recognition of the Filipino Apostolate by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in the United States of America,<sup>67</sup> and the establishment of an Asian Migration Desk. By the Third International Meeting (October 1998, Manila), 116 pastoral workers attended, coming from 20 states where the Philippine Church has already put up a ministry for OFWs.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> PMRW members include the CBCP-ECMI, the Apostleship of the Sea, the Scalabrini Migration Center, the International Catholic Migration Commission, and the Center for Overseas Workers (run by RGS sisters), and the Jesuits' Institute on Church and Social Issues.

<sup>66</sup> Gabriel V. Reyes, DD. "Recapitulation of the Previous Meetings," in *Proceedings of the Third International Consultation Meeting on the Filipino Ministry Overseas*. Manila: CBCP-ECMI, 1998; 12-17.

<sup>67</sup> Reyes, *Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> Participants included 5 bishops, 51 priests, 15 sisters, 2 religious brothers, and significantly 43 lay pastoral workers. They came from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Holy Land, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Norway, Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, the USA, and Vatican City.



In the most recent Asian Regional Meeting on the Filipino Ministry,<sup>69</sup> the participants resolved to 1) work for the ratification and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants and Their Families,<sup>70</sup> 2) support the Pope's call for a general "amnesty for undocumented migrants," 3) move for the total abolition of international debt, 4) push for the total abolition of the death penalty, 5) make migrants more aware of missionary role of witnessing to the Gospel in their employment overseas, 6) participate in the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 for Migrants and Refugees (June 1-2, 2000; Rome) and in the Fourth International Consultation Meeting on the Filipino Ministry (June 3-4, 2000; Rome), 7) aim for a more coordinated and cooperative ministry for migrants in Asia by supporting the Asian Migration Desk and its programs; and 8) come up with a "Third Millennium Pastoral Program for Filipino Migrants," bearing in mind the pastoral plan of every local church, in view of renewing and intensifying the evangelization thrust.

Back at home, the CBCP-ECMI has promptly responded to issues affecting OFWs by issuing press statements which disclose abuses inflicted on OFWs, and calling government's attention to such problems as the plight of OFWs on the death row or in jail, exorbitant fees collected by recruitment agencies, negligence on the part of Philippine embassies and consular offices, among others. The commission has significantly gained legitimacy in this area, as demonstrated by the fact that it is invited to consultations conducted by government policy-making and implementing bodies concerned with migrant workers' issues.

### **A Receiving Church, too**

It is also significant to mention here that the Philippines has been a receiving Church to Indo-Chinese refugees since South Vietnam's fall in 1975. When the Philippine government chose a forced repatriation of the Vietnamese nationals, following the withdrawal of UNCHR support in 1996, the Philippine Church, through the CBCP- Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons, Inc., took on the roles of the UNCHR. From her own coffers, the church purchased a lot in Puerto Princesa, Palawan, built residential units, an ancestral temple, and other facilities such as a health center. The place is now called Vietnamese Village, a result of the cooperative

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<sup>69</sup> Final Statement, Asian Regional Meeting on the Filipino Ministry, 7-10 June 1999, Makati City, San Carlos Pastoral Formation Complex, Makati City, Philippines. Participants came from the Philippines, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Vatican .

<sup>70</sup> Also recommended by the Second International Meeting (1996) and the Third International Meeting (1998). Proceedings of the Third International Consultative Meeting on the Filipino Ministry Overseas. Manila: CBCP-ECMI, 1998; pp.70-73.



work of the church, some Vietnamese overseas communities, the Vietnamese refugees themselves who poured their sweat out as counterpart, and government officials.<sup>71</sup>

## VI. THE EXPERIENCES OF OFW-RECEIVING CHURCHES IN ASIA<sup>72</sup>

The extent of the services provided by the Philippine church to migrants would have been very limited, if not for the collaboration of the churches receiving the overseas Filipino workers with open arms. In this regard, it is worthy to mention the efforts of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Asia, and around the world which tried to address the peculiar needs of migrant workers through commissions on migration, or on justice and peace, or on labor. Working towards the same goal are church organizations such as the Japan Catholic Commission for International Cooperation — Association for Solidarity with Migrants and Foreign Workers, the Diocesan Pastoral Center for Filipinos (Hong Kong), the Filipino Social Services of Caritas-Hong Kong, the Seoul Foreign Workers Labor Counseling Office and the Incheon Foreign Workers Counseling Office (Korea), the Seoul Archdiocesan Filipino Center, the Migrant Workers Concerns Desk (Taiwan), the Filipino Services Secretariat of the National Office for Human Development (Malaysia), Caritas-India and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India-Commission for Labor, the Episcopal Commission for Inter-Church Missionary Aid and the Caritas Migrant Center in Lebanon, among others.

On the whole, services provided by the receiving Churches, in close coordination with the Church of origin and with the religious communities working and living therein, could generally be classified into pastoral and social. Under the first are the celebration of masses, the dispensation of the sacraments, Bible studies, Marian devotion, novena masses, prayer meetings, and the holding of services for Advent or Lent, retreats and recollections, among others. As regards pastoral services, the missionary apostolate of lay groups such as the El Shaddai, and the Couples for Christ, are worth noting.

Social Services, on the other hand, include counseling, facilitation of financial remittances, a radio program ("Voice of Charity") in Tagalog on an FM station in Lebanon, that does not only deliver spiritual messages but

<sup>71</sup> The Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (CADP-CBCP), Inc. "The Vietnamese Village in the Philippines," in *Asian Migrant*, Vol. 10, No.1, January-March 1997, pp.35-36.

<sup>72</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all information here have been culled from the Country Reports contained in the *Proceedings of the Third International Consultation Meeting on the Filipino Ministry Overseas*, Manila : CBCP-ECMI, 1998.

also aids in tracing missing persons, prison visits that go to the extent of helping gather more information on the cases faced so that appropriate legal remedies can be explored, providing legal assistance to migrant workers who come in conflict with the laws of their host countries, aid for repatriation in emergency cases, providing temporary shelter to those who have been prematurely terminated or those with pending labor/legal cases, hospital visits and health services, funeral services, provision of recreation facilities and other venues for socialization during free days.

### **Serving Migrants, Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike**

The Churches have shown that service to migrants and refugees is blind to race or color. Hence, services have not only benefited Filipinos. This conviction of securing the inherent dignity of migrants and refugees is maintained whenever they speak openly against any circumstance that jeopardizes migrants' rights that go with this dignity. For instance, the Korean Bishops immediately issued a statement appealing to the United Nations and China to grant "refugee" status to the North Koreans crossing the Korean-Chinese borders to escape a famine that killed approximately two million people. In January 1993, the Bishops Conference of Japan issued a document titled "Seeking the Kingdom of God which Transcends Differences in Nationality," dealing with the presence of foreigners in Japan, the problems that go with it, and the need to accommodate them in the Japanese church. It made Japanese Catholics recall the time when Japan, too, was poor and had to be left by emigrants, and bewailed discrimination and exclusionary attitude as illnesses. The Bishops' Conference of Korea-Justice and Peace Commission also issued a message on the issues in the same year. Much earlier, in 1989, the Chinese Bishops' Conference in Taiwan issued a letter on migrant workers.

Interestingly, the counseling centers put up for migrant workers set up in focal points of Korea where there are migrant workers, run by Christian and Buddhist organizations, manifest the possibility of an ecumenical character in serving migrants. The holding of cultural programs and inter-religious prayer meetings (gathering migrant workers who are Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu) during major national holidays and festivals in Korea also supports this. In Hong Kong, the shelter houses put up by the Diocesan Commission for Pastoral Services to Filipino Migrants for migrants in trouble have not only accommodated Filipinos but also migrants from other countries such as Indonesia and India. In Lebanon, the services are not only for Filipino migrants but also for Africans and Sudanese.

Again, the contributions of the religious congregations of men and women have been very vital. The Association of Filipino Catholic Mission-



aries in Korea, comprising seven congregations of men and eleven of women, plus two lay catholic charismatic groups shows how coordinated efforts in serving migrant workers can be very productive. The same observation can be made of the Filipino Catholic Community of Singapore, whose activities are supported by the Archdiocese of Singapore. The St. Vincent the Paul Afro-Asian Center, run by the Daughters of Charity, has helped institutionalize services for migrants. Also worthy of mention are the apostolate of Catholic charismatic movements.

The courage of the Salesians, the Jesuits, the Claretians, the Canossians, the Carmelite Missionaries, the Religious of the Virgin Mary, and the Dominican sisters and members of other religious congregations of men and women who stuck it out with the distressed East Timorese, even when the United Nations already packed up, manifests a commitment to love and serve that gives life to that ultimate measure of great love laid down by the Scripture: laying down one's life.

In the particular case of refugees and internally displaced people, the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in the Asia-Pacific region is comparable to the initiatives of giants like the UNHCR.

## VII. FACTS AND TRENDS

Apparently, the Church in Asia has not been negligent in its duty to provide pastoral care to migrants and refugees in the region. However, this reassuring observation is no reason for her to be complacent. As she journeys with God's people towards the third millennium, a consideration of trends in the movements of peoples, and of the issues that necessarily arise from these trends, would be in order. This is necessary so she can chart the path well and formulate strategies that are truly responsive to the various needs of her migrant people.

It seems that the characteristics and issues on labor migration in Asia noted in the 1995 FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly are still prevalent today. Five years ago, labor migration in Asia was characterized by short contract duration, exorbitant fees, family break-ups, increased feminization and irregular migration.<sup>73</sup> More or less, the same trends, plus the so-called "Asianization" of destination, were observed during the 1996 Second Consultation for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees in Asia.

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<sup>73</sup> Graziano Battistella, C.S., "For A More Abundant Life : Migrant Workers in Asia." Paper prepared for the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (Manila, Philippines, 10-19 January 1995).

## Migrant Workers

1. As correctly projected by experts in migration studies, the number of migrant workers has continued to increase. The regular foreign workforce in Singapore, for instance, has grown from 249,000 in 1990 to 506,600 in 1997. Over the last five years or so, similar trends had been noted in other receiving countries such as Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, until the Asian economic crisis struck in 1997 till 1998. Meanwhile, there are now approximately 7.5 million from the Philippines.
2. Along with the rise in the number of regular migrants is the unabated flow of undocumented ones. Aside from illegal Asian migrants in the Americas and Europe, there are an estimated -1 million in Thailand and 700,000 in Malaysia.<sup>74</sup> As noted earlier in this paper, in 1997, there were some 2,094,484 irregular Asian migrants in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand.<sup>75</sup> Without legal status, these persons are highly susceptible not only to discrimination but also to outright denial of human rights. Often, they are left with no choice but to accept unjust wages for work that places them in subhuman conditions.
3. The practice of human trafficking cannot be divorced from irregular migration. According to the UNDP irregular migrants pay as much as \$35,000 from China to the United States. "Trafficking is a booming business, moving 4 million people a year, generating \$7 billion (another source says US\$13 billion)."<sup>76</sup> Irregular migration from the Philippines is characterized by, among others, the recruitment of minors, departure of so-called "tourist workers," the use of the e-mail for order-bride operations.
4. More and more Asian migrant workers are moving within the region in search of work, though temporarily affected by the Asian economic crisis in 1997-1998. In the early 1980's, there were just around one million Asians working in the region, about three million in 1996 (mainly in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand—and most of them coming from China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand).<sup>77</sup> By mid-1997, there were some 6.5 million migrant workers in Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1999*, p. 33.

<sup>75</sup> Scalabrini Migration Center, *Asian Migration Atlas 1999*, <http://www.scalabrini.asn.au/atlas/amatlas.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1999*, p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> Philip Martin, "Labor Migration in Asia," in *Asian Migrant*, Vol.9, No.1, January-March 1996, p.5.

<sup>78</sup> Maruja M.B. Asis. "International Migration in Asia in 1998: A Review of Trends," in *Asian Migrant*, Vol. 12, No.1, January-March 1999, p.2.



5. Receiving countries tend to be closing their doors to unskilled labor, while dangling good offers to professional or skilled ones. As the UNDP notes, "Global employment opportunities may be opening for some, but they are closing for most others. The global market for high-skilled labor is now more integrated, with high mobility and standardized wages. But the market for unskilled labor is highly restricted by national barriers, even though it accounts for a larger share of international migration."<sup>79</sup> In Singapore, government imposed new requirements that make it difficult for unskilled workers to get in. The monthly levy imposed for domestic helpers and unskilled construction workers has been increased from S\$330 to S\$345, while those for skilled foreign workers reduced from S\$200 to S\$100. Singapore's Prime Minister has been asserting the need to attract foreign talent. This trend raises issues on "brain drain" in countries, usually developing ones, from where the highly skilled workers come.
  
6. There is a growing number of women migrant workers. The gender face of migration is drawn by at least 50 million women, 30 million in developing countries.<sup>80</sup> In the Philippines, data from the government showed that 60% of the daily average of 2,000 Filipinos leaving for work abroad are women.<sup>81</sup> Up to 90% of Sri Lanka's foreign workers are women.<sup>82</sup> In 1990, approximately 800,000 Asian women left their countries to work overseas. In 1997, this grew to 1.5 million.<sup>83</sup> Yet, in Asia, Afghanistan, Brunei and North Korea have not yet ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
  
7. There appears to be a prevailing negative attitude among Asian states to ratify the UN International Convention on All Migrants and the Members of Their Families, which was adopted in 1990. As of this writing, only two Asian states have ratified the instrument, namely the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh only signed it. Twenty Asian States have not ratified it.<sup>84</sup> Worldwide, only nine states have ratified it. Twenty ratifying states are required to bring the instrument into force. While it is somehow easy to surmise why migrant-hosting states like Japan and Singapore are reluctant to ratify it, it is at the very least intriguing why sending countries like Indonesia, China, India, Paki-

<sup>79</sup> UNDP. Human Development Report 1999, p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> UNDP. Human Development Report 1999, p.33.

<sup>81</sup> "Alert up on women trafficking," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2 August 1999.

<sup>82</sup> *Asian Migration News*, 31 August 1999.

<sup>83</sup> Asian Migration Center and APEC Labour Rights Monitor Center. Labor Nexus (Poster). October 1997.

<sup>84</sup> Philippine Migrants Rights Watch. "Mga Karapatan Ng Mga Migranteng Pilipino(The Rights of Overseas Filipino Workers)." A primer, p.54.

stan, Myanmar and Vietnam have not adopted the convention, which would safeguard the rights of their migrant citizens outside their territories.

The same apathy has been observed as regards acceptance of International Labor Organization (ILO) instruments that secure migrant workers' rights, more particularly ILO Convention No. 97 of 1949 (concerning Migration for Employment) and ILO Convention No. 143 of 1975 (concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers). Likewise, the ratification of such international human rights instruments as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights — which, in principle, safeguard migrant workers' rights — leaves much to be desired.

It has also been noted that while considerable progress has been made in such countries as Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Korea in securing migrant workers' rights through domestic legislation, the matter of social security benefits is still a problematic area in most receiving countries.<sup>85</sup>

8. It appears that the problems faced by migrant workers, noted during the 6<sup>th</sup> FABC Plenary Assembly, are still the same: illegal recruitment, exorbitant fees, fake contracts, promises of non-existing jobs, poor working and living conditions; limited duration of contracts. If there were some changes, the list has just been lengthened, as new forms of abuses have surfaced. These include: a reported human organ smuggling syndicate, human trafficking, women being forced into prostitution, long working hours, and non-access to health and insurance benefits. The economic crisis that rocked the region in 1997 and 1998 also raised some issues regarding migrant workers' rights and welfare in situations of emergency in the workplace. It has been noted that during the crisis receiving countries, as expected, drew up policies protecting their nationals' interest, without regard for the condition of foreign workers. There were reports on unfair termination of services. The imposition of caning in Singapore and Malaysia to penalize illegal migrants raises the question of inhumane penalties.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Chris Manning, "Labour Markets in the ASEAN-4 and the NIEs," in *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature*, Vol. 13, No.1, May 1999, p.58. NIEs included Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea and Taiwan, while the ASEAN-4 constitutes Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia.

<sup>86</sup> Graziano Battistella and Maruja M.B. Asis. *The Crisis and Migration in Asia*. Quezon City, Philippines: Scalabrini Migration Center, 1999, 32-33.



9. Migrant workers have been looked at as economic "commodities". There is a tendency among sending countries and even among families to look at migrant workers in terms of dollar remittances. This perspective seems to be perpetuated by sending countries that have transformed their people into virtual exported goods. A case in point is the Philippines, which presently considers its OFWs as "modern-day heroes" for saving the country's economy, particularly at the time when the crisis struck in 1997 and 1998. In 1998 alone, the OFWs remitted a total US\$7.5 Billion into the country. In some countries, migration has been pushed even to destinations known to be dangerous, while governments' efforts have been negligible in promoting the welfare and protecting the rights of migrant workers. Recently, in the wake of the crisis, Thailand and South Korea have joined traditionally labor-sending countries in eyeing overseas employment for their nationals.

The commodification of migrant labor can be seen also in the exorbitant fees charged by recruiters and brokers. The high placement fees in Taiwan have been subject to criticism on not a few occasions. Brokers in Singapore have introduced zero-scheme fees, which free employers and agents from financial obligations in hiring, but pass on the processing fees to domestic helpers. There is an apparent desire to cash in on foreign workers' lack of income-generation options. The US\$13 billion a-year human trafficking racket also speaks of this. Receiving countries, on the other hand, ignore the fact that they benefit from the work of migrants, who solve their labor-shortage woes, take on the dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs rejected by their nationals, and settle for fees relatively lower than that they would otherwise pay their nationals. In this kind of perspective, the psychological-social costs of migration are totally discounted.

10. All these are worsened by the consistently widening gap between rich and poor countries worldwide and within the Asian region, which has been identified by previous consultations and meetings as one of the major causes behind the movements not only of migrant workers but also of refugees and even of internally displaced peoples. In recent years, the globalization phenomenon has facilitated this widening gap. According to the UNDP, while globalization may have opened great opportunities for economic advancement, these have not been shared widely. In fact, there has been a concentration of income, resources and wealth among a few people, corporations and countries. In its 1999 Human Development Report, it revealed the following shocking realities that occurred in the late 1990's: the fifth world's people living in the highest-income countries had 80% of the world Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the fifth in the lowest-income countries just had 1%. Consistently, the disparity is also true as regards shares of export mar-

kets (82% vs. 1%) and foreign direct investment (68% vs. 1%). "The assets of the top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and their 600 million people," the UNDP reported. It is no surprise then that, in Asia, only Japan, Brunei, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea have been included in the high-human development countries. Laos, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh have low human development. Most are listed in the lower half of medium human development countries.<sup>87</sup> This gap is also prevalent within countries, especially in impoverished ones; this is more pronounced in China and in India.

11. As regards the plight of sea-based migrant workers, the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea<sup>88</sup> noted the following problems which, in the words of the Congress, "reveal an alarming lessening of attention to the human side and, by contrast, an increased preoccupation with profit": reduced crew sizes, increased isolation, longer working hours, proliferation of ships on open registers with a tendency to disregard standards of safety and terms of contracts, growing anonymity in today's complex dealing between management groups and seafarers, increasing number of multinational crews — often with negative consequences to human relations and safety on board, difficult life on board characterized by cramped living quarters, lack of privacy, insufficient rest or indiscriminate reduction of rest periods, prevailing fear of being blacklisted when they pursue their claims; the practice of transporting nuclear and other hazardous materials with or without the knowledge of the crew, often not properly trained to act in times of danger, is on the increase; proliferation of drug abuse, drug trafficking, alcoholism and prostitution in ports that constitute threats to family life, and uneven application of ILO Conventions and Standards on seafarers from developing and developed countries.<sup>89</sup> As regards the Church's work for seafarers, the following problems were noted: too many ports without AOS presence, lack of suitable people, clergy and laity, lack of forward planning which means that there is no guarantee that a port ministry will continue in case of the personnel's transfer or retirement; and need for a more intensive training program for AOS people.

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<sup>87</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report* 1999, pp. 257-259.

<sup>88</sup> Held in Davao City, Philippines (19-25 October 1997). Attended by 250 delegates from 54 countries.

<sup>89</sup> Final Statement, 20<sup>th</sup> AOS World Congress. In *Ahoy Newsmagazine*, January-March 1998; pp15-16.



## Refugees and Internally Displaced People

1. In 1991, the total number of people of concern to UNHCR was 17 million. This soared to 27 million in 1995. Although recent UNHCR records<sup>90</sup> show that the number of persons under its concern (refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and internally displaced persons) dropped slightly from 22,729,000 in 1997 to 22,376,300 worldwide, the UNHCR itself cautions that accuracy in refugee statistics is "extremely difficult." Besides, it must be noted that figures available only indicate those that receive direct assistance from UNHCR, who, as its records shows, represent less than half of the estimated world total. In Asia, persons of concern dropped from 7,925,000 in 1997 to 7,458,500 in 1998. The UNHCR further clarifies that the figures were to be considered valid only as of January 1998. Hence, not counted in these estimates are the persons displaced due to the recent crises in Indonesia, the ethnic clashes in India, and similar incidents. Also not included are the hundreds of thousands of Asians seeking refuge beyond the region such as in Western Europe and Australia. Meanwhile, Afghanistan and Vietnam are still on the list of countries where major refugee populations originate. Sri Lanka and Afghanistan are among the top places of internally displaced peoples (more than 100,000).
2. There has also been an increase in the number of internally displaced people. Worldwide, around 30 million people fall within this category, but only 4.5 million are assisted by the UNHCR. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted on 28 July 1951, and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted on 31 January 1967 do not cover victims of armed conflicts, erroneous economic policy or natural disasters, as well as internally displaced peoples. Fr. Mark Raper, S.J., JRS International Director, considers this a big problem that the JRS "is grappling with most."<sup>91</sup> Earlier, the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People called for the recognition of what they called "de facto refugees", specifically victims of armed conflicts, erroneous economic policy or natural disasters.<sup>92</sup> Sadly, states with IDPs put up walls to prevent external intervention by invoking "national sovereignty."
3. As regards the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), only the following Asian states have ratified it: Cambodia, China,

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<sup>90</sup> UNHCR. [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

<sup>91</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service. <http://www.jesuit.org/refugee>.

<sup>92</sup> Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," et.al., loc.cit., (no.4), p.8.

Japan, Papua New Guinea, South Korea, the Philippines, and Singapore.<sup>93</sup> The majority of the Asian states have not. Worldwide, some 60 states have not ratified nor signed the convention.

4. Support for the efforts towards helping refugees and internally displaced peoples appears to be waning recently. In January 1998, Hong Kong decided to abolish the port of first asylum policy. Meanwhile, concerned groups have described Japan's refugee policy as "too restrictive," pointing out that Japan admitted only one or two refugees annually from 1994 to 1997. This weakening support for refugees, not only in Asia but also in other rich countries, made Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, comment that there are today alarming inward-looking trends among global leaders, specifically Japan and the United States of America. She said that the sense of international commitment, as may be manifested in supporting the UNHCR activities, has been receding.<sup>94</sup>
5. Other similar problems noted are: arbitrary determination by States of the criteria for the application of their international obligations in relation to refugees, political decisions aimed at reducing the number of entries and discouraging new requests for asylum, reduction of the resources earmarked for the solution of the refugee problem, and weakening of political support for the structures purposely created for such humanitarian service.<sup>95</sup> The Jesuit Refugee Service, meanwhile, noted the use of refugees for political propaganda, the growing xenophobia among host countries, very restrictive legal systems that leave uprooted people with no choice but to seek refuge in human trafficking syndicates, and the lack of interest among governments in coming up with durable solutions to the refugee problem.<sup>96</sup>
6. The dispersal of refugees and internally displaced peoples has been largely pushed by dire circumstances. One push factor is the rising incidence of social tensions. According to the UNDP, of the 61 major armed conflicts fought between 1989 and 1998, only three were between states — the rest were civil.<sup>97</sup> Since the early 90's, discussions on causes of refugee and IDP movements have focused on poverty, imbal-

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<sup>93</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1999*, pp. 242-245.

<sup>94</sup> Sadako Ogata, "Japan, the United States and Refugee Protection," in *Migration World*, Vol. XXVII, No.3, 1999; p.5.

<sup>95</sup> Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", et.al., loc.cit., (No. 6), p.10.

<sup>96</sup> Quentin Dignam, S.J. "Refugees in Asia," in *Proceedings of the Second Consultative Meeting for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees in Asia*. Vatican City : Pontifical Council for the Pastoral care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 1997; pp. 182-183.

<sup>97</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1999*. P.5.



ance in the distribution of the means of subsistence, foreign debt, galloping inflation, structural economic dependence, and natural disasters.<sup>98</sup> Added to these are population pressures, uneven distribution of wealth within and among countries in the region, desire for economic betterment, internal conflicts due to group identity along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines, several violations of human rights and the persecution of persons because of their political opinion, ethnicity or religion.<sup>99</sup>

### VIII. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR CHURCH ACTION

The facts and trends just considered can provide guideposts helpful to the Asian Church as she attempts to plan her missionary roles to migrants, refugees and IDPs in the next millennium. From the trends emerge issues the Church has to address, for the resolution of these issues will determine the extent to which her social and pastoral plans, strategies, and activities will be relevant and responsive to the needs of her "people on the move."

First, the increase in the number of migrant workers, refugees and IDPs implies that the push factors, which the Church herself identified in the various consultations she held, have prevailed over the years. While acknowledging, as the Holy Father himself has acknowledged, that migration is a human right, the Church should maintain its stand against migration as a "forced choice." Thus, she must strive to have a comprehensive understanding of the causes of forced migration, so she can help in uprooting these. While Churches of origin work to ensure equity and justice in sending countries, they must join the receiving Churches in moving for the dismantling of socio-political and economic structures and processes that marginalize the many who are poor in the region. The Asian Church's call for the renegotiation of the foreign debt of impoverished states,<sup>100</sup> her condemnation of political regimes that deny people's legitimate claims for more freedom and greater respect for their basic rights, her warnings on the dangers posed by the growing armaments industry, and its echo of the Pope's call for "globalization without marginalization"<sup>101</sup> are all strategies towards this goal. It may be a consolation for the Church to know that she is not alone in this conviction. The same perspective is shared by the UNDP.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," et.al., loc.cit., (No.8), p.11

<sup>99</sup> Francis Fouinat. "Partnership Building: The Role of International Organizations in Dealing with Irregular/Undocumented Migration," in *Asian Migrant*, Vol. 12, No.2, April-June 1999, p.51-52.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, 6.

<sup>102</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1999*, p.11.

The rise in figures also has implications to the sufficiency of the resources, primarily human and financial, of the Asian church in this mission. From the experiences of the Philippine Church's ministry to migrants and the OFW-receiving churches, the problems with lack of resources have been noted in many reports. It challenges the Church to demonstrate her commitment to this mission by a readiness to provide the necessary resources. Furthermore, the fact that, to a great extent, much of the work in receiving churches is shouldered by religious congregations has also raised the issue of continuity in undertakings, given the regular change of posts among the religious. In this regard, close coordination among Churches of origin and receiving churches in Asia, as well as between and among the Churches and religious congregations engaged in this ministry, is imperative.

From another viewpoint, the numbers may also be considered opportunities for a new evangelization in receiving countries,<sup>103</sup> specially since in these countries Christ remains a stranger to most people. Towards this end, the Philippine Church's<sup>104</sup> duty to give the proper formation to her faithful who go abroad to work so they can witness to Christ through their words and deeds is vital. However, the wisdom behind respect for the cultures should not be overlooked in this regard. Thus, the Bishops Synod for Asia highlighted the value of inculturation in this call for evangelization, so that

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<sup>103</sup> As defined by the Symposium on Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia (Hong Kong, 18 September 1993), the roles of the receiving churches are 1. to be welcoming and caring; to provide a venue for migrants to be able to relate, participate and integrate themselves to the local Church in the various activities, and at the same time be able to share their faith and cultural heritage with the local church and people; 2. Accompany the migrant as a human person, following the example of Christ himself (as a sign of unity and solidarity); 3. Promote unity but recognize the diversity of expressions (mutual acceptance; inculturation); 4. With compassion, discern continuously the various needs of the migrant workers; 5. Provide sacramental and spiritual services, which are the source of strength of migrant workers in overcoming trials and difficulties; 6. Have concern for the integral human development of migrants for which appropriate programs must be set up; 7. Protect rights and promote dignity (by working closely with host government); 8. Link with sending church, noting the migrant can be another link between the Church of origin and the receiving church; and 9. Provide a venue for migrants to strengthen the faith of their fellow migrants through gatherings of small communities of migrants or basic ecclesial communities.

<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, sending churches have the duty to: 1. Evangelize migrants through a proper integral faith formation to they too can evangelize; 2. Ensure that people legislation has been set up to protect the dignity and the rights of all; 3. Make clear statements about policy matters; 4. Ensure just policies; 5. Reach out to civil officials to make them aware of the needs and aspirations of workers; 6. Establish and maintain lines of dialogue with the receiving churches; 7. Take seriously the implications of migration on marriage and family life.



(quoting from "Redemptoris Missio", 52) "the Church becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is and a more effective instrument of mission." In the desire to share the saving message of Christ, "the Church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia, and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, specially the poor."<sup>105</sup> The formation of pastoral workers, both in the Churches of origin and receiving churches, for this social process is important, specially because, Christians are a tiny minority in the continent which is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural. In the particular case of refugees, the Church, while seeing the need for spiritual care, "deplores all forms of proselytism among refugees that take advantage of their vulnerable situation, and upholds the principle of freedom of conscience even in the difficulties of exile."<sup>106</sup>

Second, the increase in the number of irregular migrants raises problems. For one, it is difficult to identify them and trace their whereabouts. For another, given their illegal status, the Church faces the risk of being accused of condoning an illegal activity in the host society. In this regard, the question posed in the second consultative meeting on the pastoral care for migrants and refugees in Asia deserves pondering: "How far can a pastoral worker go in assisting an illegal migrant? Should pastoral workers risk the penalty of the laws if the laws are injurious to the basic rights of the illegal migrant?"<sup>107</sup> It appears, though, that this issue is moot and academic if we anchor the Church's work for illegals on the inherent dignity of the human persons, which transcends his or her illegal status. Thus, there is a need to support the Pope's call for a "general amnesty for undocumented migrants." Aside from helping in the prevention of irregular migration through information and education programs, other ways in which the Church can ensure respect for the dignity of irregular migrants are to campaign for the ratification of the UN Migrants Convention, and to appeal to the signatories of the Bangkok Declaration on Irregular Migration (April 1999), since both documents call for a humane treatment of illegal migrants.

Third, since the United Nations adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Migrants and Their Families in 1990, the Church — from the Pontifical level down to the episcopal conferences, has been issuing several statements pushing for the ratification of the landmark document. Yet, until now, only nine states in the whole world have ratified it.

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<sup>105</sup>Message of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, 5.

<sup>106</sup>Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," et.al., loc.cit., (no. 28) ; p.21.

<sup>107</sup>Silvano Tomasi, CS. "Review of Conclusions of the First Consultation," in *Proceeding of the Second Consultation for the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Asia*. Vatican City: Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 1997; p.52.

Eleven more are needed to bring it into force. This raises a question on the effectiveness of the approaches in lobbying for its ratification. Perhaps, statements are not enough. Other venues for this campaign should be explored. Strategies like the one recently identified by the Maryknoll Missionaries — which plan to make use of their consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council as an opportunity to bring the urgency of ratifying the measure<sup>108</sup> — should be encouraged and replicated whenever possible.

Where states have not ratified the UN Migrants Convention, and while an intensive campaign for its ratification is being undertaken, other remedies that will make states accountable for their acts towards migrant workers and their families can be explored. The Church should keep abreast of what universal human rights instruments, or International Labor Organization instruments have been acceded to by states in the region, and appeal to these accessions, when concerned states have not yet ratified the Migrants Convention. After all, the UN Migrants Convention is, to a great extent, a restatement, in the context of the situation of migrants and their families, of what have been stipulated earlier by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other widely accepted international human rights instruments.

This approach was recently adopted by the International Labor Organization which, noting the dismal ratification by the ILO-member states<sup>109</sup> of the its migrant workers' instruments (e.g. Conventions 97 and 143), declared that "All members even if they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation, arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization, to respect, to promote, and to realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions ..."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> "Maryknollers in Asia Continue Solidarity with Migrants," Statement of the 1999 Asia/Pacific Maryknoll Meeting on Mission to Migrants. *NewsNotes*, March-April 1999, p.13.

<sup>109</sup> In this paper, member-states considered are Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea (South Korea), Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam. (Although included in the phrase "countries in the region," Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam and North Korea are not ILO member-states. Taiwan is not included because it is not considered to be an entity possessing statehood in international law. This Declaration was made during the 86<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference in Geneva, last June 1998.

<sup>110</sup> Ryszard Cholewinski, "International Human Rights Standards and the Protection of Migrant Workers in the Asia Pacific Region," in *Asian Migrant*, Vol. XII, No.1., January-March 1999, p.20.



Also, in this campaign, the Church should find allies among member-states that attended the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and which signed the Vienna Declaration. The Declaration explicitly urged all States ratify the Convention.<sup>111</sup> In this campaign, perhaps, the Church should persuade states by echoing what that Pope said regarding the benefits derived by receiving states from the work of migrants.<sup>112</sup>

Fourth, the Church should make a stand on the trend towards the exclusion of unskilled workers in migration, considering, among others, her expressed recognition of the persons' right to migrate and her observation that "people used to emigrate in order to create better possibilities in life; today people emigrate in many countries merely to survive."<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, she must also make a stand on the tendency among rich countries in Asia selectively to accommodate only highly skilled workers from their poor neighbors which need these human resources more, considering the negative effects of brain drain.

Fifth, considering the growing feminization of migration, the Church should continue to address issues in migrant labor with sensitivity to women's concerns and rights. She should advocate for migrant women's rights by, among other ways, convincing more states to ratify the International Convention on Women's Rights. This is part of the Church's expressed concern for women's dignity and equality with men<sup>114</sup>. The same special attention and sensitivity must be given to the rapidly burgeoning population of women and children among refugees and internally displaced peoples.

Sixth, the Church should perform the prophetic role of making states, both sending and receiving, more aware and concerned about the psychological and social costs of migration. Noting the tendency of some countries to "export" their nationals for the purpose of boosting foreign reserves and improve their balance of payments, the FABC-OHD unequivocally underscored that the values of family life and marriages should not be made secondary to political and economic agenda.<sup>115</sup> It has also been noted that in some instances, migration for work is resorted to for the wrong values, such as materialism and greed. Studies on this aspect of migration — showing consequences such as marital infidelities, broken marriages, deviant children — that have been already started by various Church groups should be replicated, and the results widely disseminated. According to the Asian

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<sup>111</sup>Vienna Declaration, 33-35.

<sup>112</sup>"Laborem Exercens," 23.

<sup>113</sup>Pope John Paul II, Message for World Migration Day, 1992.

<sup>114</sup>Cf. "*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*," 51; also the Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, 5.

<sup>115</sup>in Franz Joseph Eilers, SVD (Ed.), *loc.cit.*, p.52.

Bishops, today, 'the family is the most endangered institution in Asia...We must save the family which, because it welcomes and protects human beings, is the basic cell of society and the Church."<sup>116</sup> The Church "knows, in fact, that leaving one's country to settle in another is always a big trauma, often a real tragedy, especially if the emigrant is married, with a family to take care of."<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, while the Church raises awareness on the psycho-social costs of migration, existing services — such as counseling for the families left behind by the migrant workers, training for the wise use of remittances in anticipation of the time when migration would no longer be a necessity for work, counseling for migrant workers themselves — should be maintained and expanded. The need for this has been voiced out by pastoral workers of OFWs in their country reports to the CBCP-ECMI. Reminding states and families themselves of this often-overlooked side of migration should be a persistent task.

In the same vein, while the Church works for the wide adoption of international legal instruments securing migrants' rights, she should continue with the provision of other social services such as pastoral visits to those in prison, provision of health care and temporary shelter, provision of legal services, among others.

Seventh, as regards the case of sea-based migrant workers, the AOS chaplains in East and Southeast Asia, have identified the following issues and corresponding strategies for the pastoral work for seafarers: need for greater sensitivity and awareness from the part of the Church (both faithful and hierarchy) of the very important mission of the Church for the people of the sea; need to address the illegal recruitment of fishermen who currently are not covered by protective mechanisms of the International Maritime Organization and other agencies, exploitation regarding work hours and wages, among other abuses; need for bishop promoters, national directors and AOS chaplains in more areas such as Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia and others; need for integration of AOS into the pastoral plans of the Church at various levels, including the FABC; need to establish a regular and more efficient regional system of communications (using e-mail and the Internet) among AOS Centers and Chaplaincies within the region for fast communication and immediate sharing of information and data as well as to facilitate communication between seafarers and their families; and the

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<sup>116</sup>Message of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, 5.

<sup>117</sup>Archbishop Stephen Fumio Hamao (President, Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples). "The Migrants' Plight at the End of the Second Millennium." Message delivered to the participants of the Asian Regional Meeting on the Filipino Ministry. (Manila, 8-9 June 1999).



need to continue to motivate and form more lay people in order to respond better to the increasing needs of the "People of the Sea."<sup>118</sup>

The fact that, more or less, the same recommendations were made by the AOS 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress in 1997, implies that there is still a lot to be done in this apostolate. In the World Congress, other needs were identified such as the development and strengthening of cooperation between port and state authorities so laws and regulations affecting seafarers are enforced, and the training of AOS people for better proficiency in pastoral and social care and in the advocacy for seafarers' rights, and the need to address the various seafarers' problems cited earlier (*VII: Facts and Trends*).

Lastly, with particular reference to refugees and IDPs, there is a need to understand the problem from a systemic perspective. The UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service offer insights on this. From the experiences of the UNHCR, the following lessons could be drawn: That most mass population flows are mixed in nature and that it is vital that any effort to resolve and prevent these crises should take this into account; 2. These displacements are usually, if not always, illegal and undocumented; 3. The need for a screening mechanism —in order to determine who requires international protection and who does not—is essential if any effective solution is to be found for such movements; 4. In order to address the issue of coerced population movements, an integrated strategy based on protection, solutions and prevention is necessary.<sup>119</sup>

Sharing about the experiences of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Fr. Mark Raper, S.J., said, "JRS discovered that the refugees are not just an emergency but are the results of very complex and deeply-rooted imbalances in our world. In order to address the problems effectively, you obviously need a group of core people who dedicate themselves to working for the solution of permanent human ills."<sup>120</sup> Apparently, the most urgent challenge to the Church is to attack the root causes of mass displacement of people: inequality between and within countries, militarization and an armaments industry that prioritizes bullets and bombs over bread and books, a kind of globalization that is devoid of a human face, blatant and widespread violations of human rights, among others.

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<sup>118</sup>Statement the First East Asia and South East Asia Regional Meeting of Bishop Promoters and National Directors of the AOS. Kaohsiung, Taiwan, ROC (2-5 June 1999), in *Ahoy Newsmagazine*, April-June 1999, pp.11-12.

<sup>119</sup>Fouinat, loc.cit., p.54.

<sup>120</sup>Fr. Mark Raper, S.J., had been the Regional Director of the JRS in the Asia Pacific. He shared these observations in an interview conducted by the *Asian Migrant*, Vol.III, No.1, January- March 1990, p.31.

In the meantime, the Asian Church must continue to campaign for the ratification of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol among the many Asian states that have not yet ratified this. Along this line, she should strengthen her linkages with the signatories of the Vienna Declaration which "reaffirms that everyone, without distinction of any kind, is entitled to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution, as well as the right to return to one's own country."<sup>121</sup> The possibility of an international legal instrument that specifically secures the rights of internally displaced persons should also be explored, together with other human rights advocates and other members of civil society.

There is a need to pool the resources of her episcopal conferences, dioceses, and parishes for this mission area. As succinctly stated by Asia-Pacific director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, "if we are serious about pastoral care and justice for refugees, then we must give suitable personnel, money, buildings, planning time, organizational support, recognition and legitimacy to this work."<sup>122</sup> There is also need for close collaboration with religious orders and congregations of men and women, which consider this a priority missionary work, and also with secular organizations, both voluntary and governmental. There is also a need to raise people's consciousness about the miserable plight of refugees and IDPs, and eventually for public opinion that is sensitive to this plight. This sensitization may well start in parishes, Catholic schools, seminaries and formation houses. Just as the Pope exhorts the parish community to welcome strangers, so the Pontifical Council teaches that "the responsibility to offer refugees hospitality, solidarity, and assistance lies first of all with the local Church."<sup>123</sup>

In brief, the local Church's tasks in regard to service to refugees include: personal contact; defense of the rights of individuals and groups; the denunciation of the injustices that are at the root of this evil; action for the adoption of laws that will guarantee their effective protection; education against xenophobia; the creation of groups of volunteers and of emergency funds; pastoral care. On the other hand, she must also instill in refugees a respectful behavior and openness towards the host country.<sup>124</sup>

In serving and defending the rights of refugees, in having a dialogue with them, in giving them pastoral care, education, employment, housing, venues for artistic and cultural expression, resettlement and integration assistance, social services and counseling, health care, and legal assistance, a recollection of some guiding principles laid down by the Church is in order.

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<sup>121</sup> Vienna Declaration, 23

<sup>122</sup> Dignam, S.J., loc.cit., p.186.

<sup>123</sup> Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" , et.al., loc.cit., (No.26), p.20.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., No.26), p.20-21.



First, in dealing with the problem of refugees, the primordial consideration should be the human person, not the State.<sup>125</sup> Hence, the Church calls for support to the right of first asylum and maintains that repatriation shall be allowed only when it is voluntary. Second, the refugee is not "an object of assistance, but rather a subject of rights and duties,"<sup>126</sup> hence states are expected to treat them in the same way as their citizens. Third, protection for refugees "must not be limited to a guarantee of physical integrity but must be extended to all the conditions necessary for a fully human existence."<sup>127</sup> Thus, aside from basic necessities, they must be helped in their efforts towards self-determination, in their observance of their own cultures, in the free expression of their faith. Family reunification must be an important consideration.

Indeed, as Fr. Mark Raper noted, "what the refugees need is more than food and shelter. They are very keen to understand their problems and extremely open to a message of hope in their otherwise hopeless situation. Providing this hope is no easy task. We need perhaps to become more Church."<sup>128</sup>

#### IX. JOURNEYING WITH MIGRANT WORKERS AND REFUGEES TOWARDS THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

To conclude, the mission of love and service to migrant workers, refugees and internally displaced peoples is a call to solidarity. It is journeying with the "people on the move" towards the Kingdom, where human dignity transcends territorial borders, where "the statute is the law of love." In this journey, a source of hope are the words of the Holy Father:

"The whole of Christian life is like a pilgrimage to the house of the Father....<sup>129</sup> "By her nature, the Church is in solidarity with the world of migrants who, with their variety of languages, races, culture and customs, remind her of her own condition as a people on pilgrimage from every part of the earth to their final homeland."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., (No.9), p.12, citing the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, "Instruction on the Pastoral Care of People Who Migrate" (22 August 1969), 6:AAS 61 (1969), 617.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., (No.11), p.13.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid (No.12), p.13.

<sup>128</sup>Raper, S.J., op.cit. p. 31.

<sup>129</sup>Message for World Migration Day 1999, citing "Tertio Millennio Adveniente," 49.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid..

## X. POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As Church, receiving or sending:

1. What have we done in the service of migrants and refugees?
2. What have we failed to do?
3. What more can we do to serve migrants and refugees?

### APPENDIX I

## COMMITMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING PASTORAL STRATEGIES

The Second Consultation on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees in Asia has identified several priority issues that call for action at this particular moment in the development of migration trends and of involuntary displacement throughout the continent. In order to ensure proper planning and implementation, the participants in the Consultation commit themselves to promote and undertake the following pastoral strategies at different levels of the Church's organization and of the societies within which they operate.

### 1. Diocesan level

1. In dioceses where the phenomenon of emigration and immigration is more acute, a point of reference (a center, a specifically trained person) should be made available with responsibility to provide information, counseling, spiritual care and legal advice for migrants before leaving the home country, during their stay abroad and finally upon their return home. Migrants present in the diocese should be provided with pastoral and social care.
2. An important dimension of the mission of every parish is the education of the local community to become aware of the plight of its migrants and to welcome strangers arriving in its territory. In diocesan pastoral and clergy meetings and during training in the seminaries the issue of migration and involuntary displacement in all its forms should be included. Lay leaders should be provided with training and sensitized on these issues.

### 2. National level

Training and conscientization is already provided in several countries with concrete positive results. In places where national Bishops Conferences have not been able to establish a program there should be a service in the form of an Episcopal Commission of Human Mobility or



a Bishop made responsible to address this concern. The task of this service is spelt out in detail in the basic Church document on this ministry, "On the Pastoral Care of Migrants" by Pope Paul VI. Among other provisions, such a service would include:

1. *Coordination and networking:*

- + coalition building with other NGOs and especially with other Christian groups involved with migrants
- + dialogue of life with other faiths

2. *Information exchange:*

- + publications
- + use of communication media
- + training on advocacy work
- + campaigning for a country's legislation aimed at preventing exploitation
- + creating a public opinion that would support the appropriate delivery of diplomatic services in favor of migrant workers in the country where they reside
- + appropriate observance of a national Migration Day to sensitize Church and society regarding migration issues (migrants, refugees, Internally displaced, immigrants)
- + work for the ratification of the U.N. Conventions (on refugees, labour, immigrants) when these instruments have not yet been ratified by the countries concerned.

3. *Pastoral personnel*

- + preparation of pastoral agents to serve migrants
- + exchange/sending of pastoral personnel to the migrant communities with appropriate formal agreements between the sending and receiving Episcopal conferences, dioceses, religious provinces, as the case may be.

**3. Regional level**

1. Regional sharing of information. During the Consultation it has become evident that there is a need for regional networking among the local Churches in the area of migration and involuntary displacement of people. A similar concern emerged in the First Consultation; at that time the participants called for the establishment of a regional information/coordination service in the area of the pastoral case, protection of human rights and advocacy for adequate

services for all uprooted and displaced people, migrant workers, refugees, immigrants, internally displaced people. To achieve this objective, it has been recommended that a specific proposal for such a service be circulated in the name of the Consultation by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants to all the Presidents of the Bishops Conferences of Asia. The proposal requests their concurrence on this matter within the structures of the FABC. In the meantime, as an experiment, a leading migration country would carry out the following activities for a year.

- (a) Foster better awareness among the churches on migration services, activities and programs carried out by the different Episcopal Conferences or through other implementing bodies;
- (b) Create an effective information-sharing system (Newsletter, Internet) about programs and services as well as migration policy developments in Asia;
- (c) Help in preparing advocacy initiatives regarding migrants rights, undocumented workers and in the trafficking of women;
- (d) Prepare a meeting inviting the Bishop Episcopal Commissions on Migration, ICMC, Caritas, APHD, Religious Congregations and others who are already working in the field of migration, for sharing of information, experiences and planning.

During this first year, communications will be sent to people in the field (executive secretaries, directors) as well as to the Bishops responsible for migration questions.

2. Coalition building with other migration and refugee NGOs in the Asian continent will strengthen the service to all uprooted people and it should be encouraged.
3. There is a need to pursue a dialogue of life with other faiths concerning the dignity, human rights, and conditions of work, cultural and religious traditions of migrants and refugees.

#### **4. Information exchange**

- + Dissemination of information at all levels
- + Publications
- + Use of communication media (utilizing Catholic resources like Radio Veritas, Diocesan newspapers, TV channels where available, Internet)



## 5. Advocacy

1. The participants in the Consultation have called for a campaign for the ratification of the U.N. International Convention on the Rights of Migrants Workers and their Families. A small committee of persons will be convened by ICMC and draw up a plan of action to be circulated to all participants. This effort will be carried out in collaboration with the Migrants Rights Watch Committee (Geneva).
2. Training on advocacy work
3. Human rights issues have been debated with a sense of urgency. They have focused on the need to make local human rights groups aware of the situation of migrants regarding family reunion, freedom of religious practice, equality of treatment, the abuses of recruiting, confiscation of Passports, violation of contracts (which should be standardized in a language understood by the migrant worker).

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