

From the 6,000-strong rally in January 28, protesters in HK against the new POEA guidelines swelled to 10,000 in the protest action last February 4 – a sign that nothing less than the total abolition of the guidelines will stop the tide of indignation against the latest scheme forextortion.

Filipino domestic workers in HK make clear their stand on new POEA guidelines: “No exemption, no suspension, SCRAP the guidelines now!”

Shaken by the strength of the protests in HK against the new POEA guidelines on deployment of domestic workers and caregivers, the Philippine government scrambled to come up with ploys to appease OFWs.

“Exemption” of current migrant workers was the scheme that the government, through the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE), thought would pacify the restive migrant workers.

They were badly mistaken.

On February 4, around 10,000 Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong took to the streets once again to declare their unwavering position to totally scrap the new POEA guidelines.

Organized by the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-MIGRANTE-HK) who was also one of the main organizers of the first protest action, Bangon Pilipinas Movement, the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) and church groups such as the Jesus is Lord Church, Philippine Independent Church, Methodist Church, International Baptist Church, Diocesan Pastoral Care for Filipinos of the Catholic Church and Alay Kapwa Catholic Group, the rally served as an even more powerful follow up action to the January 28 protest – the first abroad on this issue – attended by 6,000 OFWs.

Chanting “Brion, Baldoz, Arroyo: manloloko! (“Brion [DoLE Secretary], Baldoz [POEA Administrator], Arroyo: Tricksters!) and carrying placards declaring opposition to the exemption scheme, the protesters marched to the Harcourt Garden in front of the Philippine Consulate General in Admiralty.



Harcourt Garden became a venue for a multitude of OFWs to send their message to Philippine officials



Restive OFWs gathered strength at Chater Road

In the meeting of the organizers earlier in the week, the possibility of the government coming up with such a scheme was already discussed. When the actual decision came out, protest organizers were ready to counter the deception.

As early as 10:00 am on February 4, OFWs started to mass up at Chater Road. Speakers from groups such as the UNIFIL, Cordillera Alliance (CORALL), United Pangasinan in HK (UPHK), Abra Tinguian Ilocano Society (ATIS) and the Filipino Migrant Workers Union (FMWU) took turns in explaining to OFWs why the exemption scheme was dangerous and farcical. Some of the victims of the new guidelines also related their experiences with the policy.

The response of OFWs was immediate: they will not be deceived and they will fight until the guidelines are abolished.

By 2:00 pm, the whole stretch of Chater Road was filled to the brims by members of organizations and churches who took part in the protest as well as the ordinary OFWs who made a stand on the issue. Protesters were divided into sections (from A to G) and every minute, each section swelled until the assembly area became a sea of indignant OFWs all ready to make their voices heard.

Organizers of the rally negotiated with the Hong Kong Police to let all the protesters march. When about 2,000 people in section A – composed of about 3,200 people – marched out of Chater Road, the police ordered the march cut off. This, however, did not deter the rest of the protesters who then decided to head towards the Harcourt Garden in smaller, organized groups through different routes.

At Harcourt Garden, the torrents of people coming in were welcomed by around 300 protesters who were already in the venue since 1:30 pm. The whole Harcourt Garden was eventually bursting with protesting migrant workers.

In the program, Cynthia Tellez of MFMW and chairperson of Gabriela Women's Party (HK chapter), Rema Cunanan of GWP-HK and the UPHK, Dolores Balladares of UNIFIL and Pastor Edgar Robles of Bangon Pilipinas exhorted the OFWs to show the Philippine government that OFWs are not duped by the 'exemption' ploy. At the heart of matter still rested the extortionist ploy of the guidelines.

Mr. Apo Leung of the AMRC and himself an employer received cheers and applause from those gathered who were heartened by the show of support of the local people to the campaign.



Jovy shared her experience with the guidelines



The message of solidarity from Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN, New Patriotic Alliance) who urged Filipinos abroad to intensify the resistance against anti-migrants and anti-people policies of the Arroyo government was read. As well, Gabriela Women's Party also sent their solidarity message which was greatly appreciated by the protesters composed mainly of women.

MIGRANTE International, the global alliance of progressive Filipinos overseas, also sent a solidarity message and pledged to mobilize members in different countries to join the campaign.



The chants "POEA guidelines, Ibasura!" (Junk the POEA guidelines!) and even "Arroyo, Ibasura!" (Junk Arroyo!) reverberated all throughout the program. The sentiment against making OFWs milking cows was palpable.

Throughout the program, protesters were highly-organized. Protesters in front willingly sat down so that the thousands others at the back could still see the events on stage. Those who could not be accommodated in the venue stayed at the footbridge overlooking the garden and joined the chanting of those below.



Rally participants cheered even louder upon learning of the efforts of OFWs in other countries such as in Taiwan and Macau to also address the issue.

The protesters submitted petitions from various groups to Philippine Consulate officials. Though Consul-General Alejandrino Vicente, upon the request of the organizers, confirmed that he would be the one to personally receive the petitions, not even a shadow of him appeared.

Protesters were angered and gravely disappointed with the absent ConGen who represents the Philippine government in

Hong Kong. While he could make appearances in social gatherings, he could not even show his face to the mass of people demanding to address their most immediate concern.

The program ended with vows of even bigger actions to come.

The Philippine government failed delude the OFWs with their ploys. The ranks of OFWs remained united.

Only one call remained and only one call would be seen through the end: SCRAP the POEA guidelines now!

United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-MIGRANTE-HK)
February 6, 2007



"Exemptions"? Still thumbs down for the POEA guidelines, state exaction, and other anti-migrant policies