COVID-19 2020



Ang Migrante

Official Newsletter of Migrante-Albert

On International Migrants Day

The Pandemic of Migrant Workers' Exploitation

It is undisputable that temporary foreign workers (TFWs) fill the demand gaps for jobs that are not being filled by Canadians or Canadian residents. It is also unquestionably government neglect to allow their exploitation and then dispose of them as it claims no obligation to provide citizenship or other state benefits under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP).

The COVID-19 pandemic did not only expose but intensified the already deplorable situation of TFWs.

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney did not only blame racial aspect of a South Asian community as a driver for virus, but placed foreign workers in a perilous situation by closing the TFW program in the province. In April, Filipino workers were told not to carpool to Cargill meatplant, turning a blind a eye to their plight and the economic conditions, and possible shortcomings or abuses of employers. The fact is, TFWs have a high chance of contracting the disease due to socio-economic inequities, be it in workplaces or in their living arrangements.

The economic effects of the pandemic are also hard felt by the TFWs whose jobs have been affected by measures to control the spread of the disease, such as lockdowns, and whose status are now in limbo. The severity of the impact to the migrant workers may depend on their work permit situation and the requirements for the long-awaited permanent residence application.

Many workers are also held "hostage" in their current jobs, in fear of losing their employment and status. Among them are caregivers who could be working more hours and more than their job description for less wages in order to not disrupt the required 24-month work experience needed for their permanent residence application.

Worse, undocumented workers have further plunged into still greater misery, helpless and ever more vulnerable to the effects of a crisis. Unlike other migrant workers who could still avail of the government's financial assistance once their jobs have been affected, undocumented migrants are left with no choice





but to risk their lives continuina to work under table the to survive daily. The lack of assistance to them disregards their immeasurable contribution to Canadian the society for several years they previously

worked until they fell through the cracks of the ever-changing Canadian immigration system.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, it has proven time and again the irrefutable value of migrant workers in the survival of not just the Canadian economy but even of each Canadian in his/her everyday life.

In this time of pandemic, everyone has witnessed the undeniable value of migrant worker sector as one of the backbones of the Canadian agricultural industry. The agriculture sector's productivity and produce price inflation has a high correlation to the presence of migrant workers who toil to harvest, pack and process agricultural products for consumption of the Canadian families.

Despite this stark reality, the government hasn't announced any drastic and substantial changes to future migrant workers' hiring and immigration policies, much more to uplift the deplorable situations these migrant workers are currently in. The Canadian government only unveiled what they call their "ambitious" three-year immigration plan that targets to bring skilled workers, family members and refugees into Canada. Yet all the same, migrant workers who will be coming into the country will still be under the label "temporary."

Several jobs have been hiring TFWs for decades. Yet, the government refuses to recognize that these are permanent jobs that require permanent workers.

Meanwhile sending countries have also failed to support migrants. For Filipino migrant workers, the consulates in Canada fall short in providing the needed financial assistance for these migrants to survive. Many of them, especially the undocumented migrants, need food and other assistance. These migrants continue to be milking cows for governments, like the Philippines.

We call on the Philippine government and the Canadian government to defend and protect migrants especially in this time of global pandemic. We call on migrant advocates to strengthen our resolve to fight against racism and discrimination against migrants, to stop the deportation and fight for immediate regularization of undocumented migrants.

We must raise the level of awareness to address the root causes of forced migration and build a movement among host working class peoples!

Stop the exploitation of migrant workers under the TFWP! Regularization Now! Status for All! End Forced Migration!



Migrante Alberta in Action during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Migrante Alberta has been reaching out to affected migrant individuals and their families through Kapit Bisig Laban COVID, a national project initiative to support vulnerable and marginalized communities in Canada in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the help of Breakfast Club Canada, sponsors and donors like Cobbs Bread, Migrante Alberta has provided outreach programs to migrant workers and their children at JBS meat plant in Brooks, Alberta since May 2020. Migrant workers in Okotoks and High River also benefited from the relief operations.

Through the generous donations and untiring support of Canadian Zalmi Society in Calgary, Migrante Alberta was also able to deliver not only food supplies \but also care packages, including disinfectants. The organization also recognized the valuable contribution of Migrante Alberta in responding to the needs of the marginalized and vulnerable migrants during the pandemic.

In Edmonton, Ken's Catering sponsored lunches on Tuesdays last summer in recognition of frontline workers. Volunteers also made "bread runs" courtesy of Eco's Panaderia

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Kapit Bisig relief operations to migrant workers in Okotoks and High River, May 2020.









Canadian Zalmi Society of Calgary recognizes Migrante Alberta's valuable contribution to vulnerable migrants in the province.











Outreach programs to migrant workers and their children at JBS meat plant in Brooks, Alberta.

MIGRANTE AB PHOTOS

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...Migrante Alberta in Action continued

From October to December this year, Migrante Alberta provided assistance to migrant workers who have limited access to government support during this time of pandemic through a joint project called Serve the People Brigade with City of Calgary's Social Support Services.

The project has benefitted over 300 kababayans, by delivering packages, rent subsidies and mental health support to migrants in Calgary, including those who were positive with COVID-19, temporary foreign workers who lost their jobs to economic slowdown and those who lost their status in Canada.

Every weekend, volunteers in the project also called "STP brigadiers" packed and delivered groceries every weekend. A support group was also initiated for non-status migrants to help for their mental health and wellbeing, by sharing experiences and provide emotional support.

The project also catered to other immigrants from Mexico, Caribbean and East Indians communities.

Aside from the relief goods, STP online support group also runs every other week since October. The session aimed to provide psychosocial support to affected immigrants and foreign workers in the city.

On December 13, in commemoration of the International Human Rights Day and International Migrants Day, Migrante Alberta's STP Brigade distributed special food packages and gifts to about 80 non-status migrant workers and their families as "Pamaskong Handog" in Calgary and Edmonton.





"Migrante Volunteer

profit organization that advocates for migrants' rights and welfare. I, myself, was a victim of an abusive employer back in 2010. I decided to join Migrante Alberta when it was formed in 2013, knowing that the group will help migrants like me.

Migrante had made a very good impact in migrants' life here in Alberta and other parts of Canada. Like in the situation we are in today, the whole world and economy suffered from the effects of COVID-19. Migrante reached out and helped members of the community that is hardest hit by this pandemic, people who lost their jobs and income. Migrante launched the Kapit Bisig project by giving assistance and groceries to affected migrant individuals and families. And before this year ends, Migrante gave Christmas packages to some families here in Alberta which made them feel the spirit of Christmas is still here even though we're in a lockdown. - Danilo, Edmonton

"Taking the CELPIP review class offered by Migrante volunteers was very helpful to me in passing the exams. Sure, there are numerous online reviews being offered on different websites, like on the CELPIP page itself and even more on YouTube. However, for me, I was not looking much on the content but more on the approach to the review. This is where the Migrante CELPIP review class separates itself from the others. They offer first-hand experience and updates about the exam. This is due to the fact that they keep in touch with their former reviewees. There is a care-and-share bond between both parties that extends even after the reviewees have passed the language test. This relationship is genuine since Migrante has always been composed of dedicated and passionate volunteers that believe in carrying on their cause of helping migrants achieve and sustain a better social environment in Canada. This personal social interaction helps the reviewees develop the self confidence in believing they can pass the test, knowing that there are legitimate perfect strangers who care about their welfare. After all, having the knowledge and skill without selfconfidence is merely a theory without essence.'

- Eli, Edmonton

Red-taggers Show Rottenness against Migrante Alberta

Red-taggers have shown their rotting fangs to discredit and bully members of Migrante Alberta, the despicable act whose origin can be traced back to peddlers of anti-communist campaigns in the Philippines. Red-tagging in the Philippines implies that individuals or organizations critical of the government is seemingly connected to the communist or terrorist or both regardless of the person's political belief or affiliation. Red-tagging has a damaging effect on its targets.

Despite the allegations devoid of proof, Migrante Alberta positions itself to defend the rights of its members and officials – that is, the right to serve the Filipino people who were forced to seek greener pastures abroad because of the same reasons the armed struggle trudges on – poverty, landlessness, corruption and various forms of socio-economic injustices that still grip the majority of the Filipino people.

A certain Roque Lito and Rosadino Roque Elizabeth have recently red-tagged the group, alleging it aims to destroy the government instead of supporting it. The malicious redbaiting went on to cyber-attack Cynthia Palmaria, Migrante Alberta finance officer, in the form of sexual threats.

"I joined Migrante because of its track-record as a true servant of the Filipino people. Our activities throughout the years will speak for our organization and its members' reputation as indefatigable defenders of our people's rights and welfare," said Palmaria.

Migrante reiterates what activists from progressive groups such as Bayan and Makabayan have repeatedly said about redtagging - what makes it dangerous is it provides justification for gross human rights violations. A person critical of government can now be subjected to harassment, surveillance or even extrajudicial killings. Activists like Palmaria, can be vilified on social media, for their beliefs.

Asked what he thought of the red tagging of Migrante Alberta, Marco Luciano the Director of the organization said "I'm upset that our members were cyberbullied. Cyberbullying is a crime in Alberta and has legal consequences. But red-tagging or redbaiting is not new. This has been happening in different regimes. Harassment of critics the Duterte government in the age of social media is different but has the same dangerous effects". As for the alleged connection with the CPP-NPA Luciano said "they are rebels in the Philippines fighting for what they believe in. We're in Alberta fighting for the rights of our kababayans that is easy to understand right?"

Migrante Alberta has been advocating for the rights of migrants since 2013. The organization kickstarted a campaign to have a career consul general in Alberta in its formation. Migrante was a key figure for the installation of the Philippine Consulate Office in Calgary in 2015. Thousands of kababayans have been benefitting from that. In 2016, they also campaigned for the rights

of Canadian-born children of undocumented moms who cannot access health care because of the (non)status of their mothers. It was another victorious campaign that is now being used by many of these children of different nationalities. In 2018. Migrante Alberta once again gathered and united Filipino community to have June designated as Philippine Heritage Month in the



Province of Alberta. Another successful campaign and lobbying efforts to recognize the economic and cultural contributions of Filipinos in the province. These are only some of the accomplishments of Migrante Alberta.

So why don't Migrante condemn CPP-NPA if they are not part of it so people will not think they are. Luciano responded "the legitimacy and quality of work that Migrante Alberta do here in the Province

and in Canada will not be determined whether we condemn the CPP-NPA or not. That is not our job, and no one will tell us how to do our job except our members and the people that we serve. Perhaps these people who have been red tagging Migrante and other activist groups should ask themselves why is there rebellion in the country that continues to grow in the last 50 years. Perhaps it will also resolve the question of why they left, and many other Filipinos kept leaving their families behind to work abroad."

Red-tagging progressive groups also serves to distract the attention of the Filipino people from issues the Philippine government has so far failed to adequately address, such as the mishandling of the government response to COVID-19, and of late, the next-to-nil response to typhoon-ravaged areas affected by the supertyphoons Rolly and Ulysses.

Migrante Alberta along with Migrante Canada on the other hand, revived Sagip Migrante, a fundraising campaign for the victims of the super typhoons and sent over P128,000 to date and continue to raise funds for those affected by the calamity. In Alberta, the organization intensified its pro-people services acknowledging the ill-effects the pandemic has on poor immigrant communities. The Kapitbisig national project against Covid-19 and Its local Serve The People brigade in the city of Calgary and Edmonton has benefitted tens of families of different nationalities and undocumented migrants through deliveries of food hampers and workshops addressing issues of mental health.

"We will not stop doing what we're doing because were doing it for our people. Cyberbullying and sexism against my colleagues must be condemned. These red-taggers. the blind supporters of the regime only exposed themselves and the violent and misogynistic nature of the government they are supporting," said Nellie Alcaraz, Migrante Alberta's Calgary Organizer. "Activism and community work are not terrorism nor a crime" Alcaraz added.



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Migrante-AB Member in Calgary's Anti-racism Body

Migrante Alberta's Nely Alcaraz was chosen to be part of the 11-member Anti-Racism Action Committee of the City of Calgary announced in October.

The city was looking for members who had experience in anti-racism wo'

rk and an understanding of human and civil rights. Being able to build relationships and community connections was also vital.

The committee is tasked with identifying systemic barriers to city programs and services, language barriers, ways to address structural racism on a community-wide level, as well as developing the community-based strategy.

Committee members will have a twoyear term, or serve until the city adopts an anti-racism strategy.



is the official newsletter of Migrante-Alberta



MIGRANTE-Alberta is an organization working for the rights and welfare of Filipino migrants and immigrants in Alberta through various initiatives such as organizing, education, training and advocacy. Under the alliance Migrante-Canada, we work closely with other migrant groups in Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, BC, and the Maritimes. We are a member of Migrante International - a global alliance of Filipinos abroad with strong presence in Asia, the Americas, Europe and The Middle East.

Migrante-Alberta Facebook Group Page https://www.facebook.com/groups/migrantealberta/

<u>Rights and Welfare Action Committee</u> migrantealberta@gmail.com

<u>Compass PH: Safeguarding Global Migrants</u> https://compassph.com/



Migrante Alberta joins Black Lives Matter rallies across the province



PAGBALIKWAS

Ni Cel (non-status)

Umalis ako ng bansa, hindi dahil sa aking kagustuhan.
Napilitan akong lumayo sa aking pamilya dahil sa kahirapan.
Dala ko ang pangarap para sa aking magandang kinabukasan...
Inaasam-asam na darating ang ginhawa sa aking bansang dinatnan.
Sa karamihan ay naging madali ang pagtahak
at kaagad ay nakamtam ang magandang buhay na inaasam.
Ngunit sa ilang katulad ko ay hirap at pasakit ang kinahinatnan.

Sa aking pagtatrabaho ay dugo at pawis ang puhunan. Ngunit ang hatid sa akin ay maling pagtrato at pang-aabuso na hindi ko hinangad na maranasan. Niyurakan ako at hindi itinuring na tao. At nang umangal ako ay itinapon na parang trapo.

Sa kabila ng lahat ng pagsusumikap ko, hindi ko akalain na darating ang araw na hindi na pala ako kabilang at kaisa

sa bansang akala ko ay yayakap sa akin at mamahalin ko nang husto.

Hanggang isang araw ay nakulong na ako sa isang madilim na mundo. Mundong hindi nila ako nakikita at naririnig kahit pa humiyaw ako. Wala akong ibang nararamdaman kundi takot at pangamba na baka dumating ang araw, sisipain nalang nila ako basta basta kapag ako ay nakita.

Sa kawalan ko ng pag-asa at sa mga pagkakataon na ako ay suko na... At sa gitna ng higanteng dagat ako ay lunod na sa mga problema. Hindi ko akalain na may sasagip pa pala at magdudugtong ng aking hininga.

Mga taong hindi nangako na bibigyan ako ng hustisya, ngunit nangako na ipaglalaban ako sa abot ng kanilang makakaya, na para sa akin ay sapat na at nagbigay ng pag asa.

Kaya ang tanong ko sa sarili ko ay tatahimik nalang ba ako at hahayaang manaig ang pandaraya at pang aabuso?
O wawasakin ko ang lubid na nakagapos sa akin at lalaban ako para tuluyan nang matuldukan ang hindi pa rin nagbabagong kasaysayan?



Migrante Canada Helps Kababayans Affected by Supertyphoons in Phils



Migrante Canada mobilized its chapters and member organizations across Canada to collect donations in support of the victims of the latest typhoons to hit the Philippines.

The group has donated over P126,000 to communities devastated affected supertyphoons Rolly and Ulysses. In coordination with Migrante International in the Philippines, organizers have been visiting communities in Rizal (Montalban, Rodriguez, San Mateo, Cainta, Taytay) Marikina, Pampanga (Masantol, Macabebe) Bulacan (Hagonoy, Malolos, Calumpit). Support in the form of relief goods and monetary assistance to the further provinces of Isabela, Cagayan Valley, and Bicol have also been conducted.

In Rizal, some 33 hectares of farmland were destroyed with crops and vegetables ready for harvest. Members of the Sta. Ana Farmers Association and volunteers and staff of Damayang Migrante who visited the area also found that all the huts and resting shelters were washed away by the flood.

The help will be needed for an extended period as rehabilitation is seen to take months. Donations could still be sent to migrantecanada@gmail.com.

Workers, Immigrants Stay Connect-ED during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Connect-Education series is an initiative launched by Migrante-Alberta and Alberta Workers Association for Research and Education (AWARE) in September 2020 to provide resources to workers on different concerns that impact them as workers in Canada.

The series started with a session on worker's rights, immigration updates especially in the times of COVID-19 pandemic, precarious housing situation of migrants and ended with a week-long film festival on human rights and migrant workers' situation.

To respect the pandemic restrictions, the sessions were held online which allowed participants from different parts of the province and Canada to attend the event. It was held every 2nd Saturday of the month at 1:00 pm. It was collaborated with a network of resources such as unions, academic partners, such as York University professor Ethel Tungohan and the Student Law Society of the University of Alberta, community organizations, such as Association of Mexican workers in Calgary (AMexCal), and Filipino settlement workers from Catholic Social Services. Watch for further details of the 2021 Connect-Education series!

From December 10 to 18, Migrante Alberta and AMexCal organized and hosted the Migrant Rights Film Festival (MRFF) to commemorate the International Human Rights Day and the International Migrants Day. For our organizations, MRFF is the culmination of a year of community work, which was one of the most difficult years for millions of migrants in the world. The films featured highlighted the stories of racialized migrants in Canada and amplified the voices of those migrants who have been abused and disposed by the system since times of Confederation. MRFF was an opportunity to be inspired and learn from activists, community organizers and migrant workers who shared their experiences and words of wisdom during the discussions held after each screening. We are honored to have organized and host this event and we are hopeful to continue working in this endeavor during the coming years. - Vanesa Ortiz, AMEXCal



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Thanks to the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights team for getting Migrante-Alberta involved in this mural project at the Clareview LRT Station in Edmonton. Local artists AJA Louden, Dana Belcourt and Matthew Cardinal came together with Edmonton's Chinese, Sri Lankan, Latin American and Filipino communities to learn about the local moments that matter to each community identity. In addition to local stories, the artwork is inspired by textiles, fabric, clothing, blankets and woven cultural items shared from each cultural community's diverse traditions.

Suppression of Philippine Press Discussed in Malaya Alberta Forum

An education series on defending democracy led by Malaya Movement Canada – Alberta chapter tackled how the Philippine press is facing persecution that has led to muzzling the media, and in effect, the truth.

With support from Migrante Alberta, the webinar "Persecution of the Press: Suppression of Truth" was held on December 11, to also commemorate the International Human Rights Day.

Guests were staunch press freedom defenders Prof. Danila Arao and Inday Espina-Varona in the Philippines, and Toronto-based journalist Mila Astorga-Garcia who was a victim of human rights violations and a political prisoner during the Marco's martial rule

Prof. Arao, an associate professor in Journalism at the University of the Philippines, gave a glimpse of the state of journalism and press freedom in the Philippines. "It has been an ongoing trend for journalists to be arrested late at night until about 3 am on trumped up charges and "planted" evidence such as grenades or explosives to make the offense non-bailable," he said.



The Bulatlat.com editor also emphasized that the state of Philippine media "reflects the state of Philippine society as it mirrors society and is a microcosm of the same." "The press is currently under attack from the government with the phenomenon of laws and bureaucracy being weaponized against truth-telling journalists and the citizenry, red-tagging and fake news," he added.

As the managing editor and co-founder of the Philippine Reporter in Canada, Astorga-Garcia has had her share of her rights being violated under the Marcos regime. She related her experiences during the Marcos Martial Law era as a young journalist fresh out of school.

"I and my husband were arrested along with their fellow journalists on made up charges after reporting on cases of landgrabbing and student protests," she said. They were released from jail after a concerted campaign by fellow journalists.

"it is very important that government abuses towards press freedom should always be exposed, challenged and stopped; otherwise, reporting and telling about inequities and abuses in society will be significantly suppressed," she said.

Speaking on "Repression through the Use of Social Media", ABS-CBN contributing editor and writer Inday Espina-Varona explained that the Philippines has 70 million internet and social media users. "The Duterte administration has used this medium to attack voices of dissent and journalists who aim to expose the abuses of government," she said.

Social media is being used to spread fake news, red-tag and demonize journalists and openly threaten via a massively funded network of trolls, fake media accounts and government agencies.

Using terms such as "presstitutes", "bayaran", "dilawan", "komunista" and the likes, the current Philippine government has built and continue to propagate hate speech and deliberate lies against journalists, she added.

The government, according to Varona, has built a you-areeither-with-us-or-you're-against-us mentality aimed at killing or paralyzing media institutions. - MARTIN GATAN



School-age cousins Emilia Penton, 6, and Nacho Trinidad, 7, are learning the value of helping the ones in need. The cousins donated the proceeds from selling their favorite toys to help in relief operations by Migrante-Alberta to members of the Filipino community affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. After their initial success, the cousins have been making their own candies, cookies and chocolates to sell, first to their extended families, giving up their treats to earn more money for donation.





We would like to thank Migrante Alberta and all the staff for the support, helping us during this pandemic situation, specially to Jay Zapata and Fely for reaching out and being always there. All the goods and financial support mean a lot to us, lessen our burdens in our daily life thinking that it is very hard for our situations to work and earn for a living in this current COVID-19 crisis. Looking forward to continue supporting Migrante Alberta with its mission to "Serve the People brigade"...Thank you very much!

- Romeo and Delmar (Calgary)

Maraming salamat po sa Migrante sa maagang pamasko para sa amin, lalong lalo na po sa anak namin. Malaking bagay po sa amin itong mga binigay ninyo sa pang-arawaraw. Pagpalain po kayo palagi ng Panginoon para madami pa po kayong matulungan. Merry Christmas po sa lahat!

Thank you. - Marge (Edmonton)

Na shock ako, naiyak ako konti, hindi ko alam may kasamang cash na agad kala ko mag -aapply pa. God answered my prayers last night, birthday din ng mom ko yesterday sa Pinas, nag-burn ako ng white candle and nag-pray din ako sa kanya to help me. It was answered right away, praise the Lord. Ginagamit n'ya kayo para matulungan those in need. Thank you so, so much! Na-shock ako talaga.

God bless you and your group. - Jonathan (Calgary)

I just finished the last delivery! You're so welcome. As an adult I am now reflecting on how difficult it was for my parents to move here. I can't imagine what it is like for those folks. Merry Christmas and please let me know if there's anything else I can do to help.

- Heidi Calderon Ghelfi

Thank you so much sa Migrante Alberta!!! Sobrang na appreciate ko na my mga taong kagaya n'yo na may malasakit sa kapwa. The organization and the people is such a blessing. Sobrang nakaka-touch ng puso.

Thank you so much. – Cherry (Edmonton)

Maraming Salamat po Migrante-Alberta sa Pamaskong handog na aming natanggap,at sa munting regalo para kay Louise Nicole





