

REFLECTIONS OF GRASSROOTS MIGRANTS AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS ADVOCATES ON THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REVIEW FORUM OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION

2 June 2022

We issue this statement with the presence of first and foremost the voices of grassroots migrant leaders as well as migrants' rights advocates who participated in the First International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (IMRF), held in New York City, U.S.A. on 17-20 May 2022 as well as the Multi-Stakeholder Hearing held in the same city on 16 May 2022.

The IMRF takes stock of the GCM implementation and guides the United Nations' work on migration.

Our experience of participating and engaging in the IMRF have led us to share these reflections. We co-organised and participated in various activities both in the lead up to the IMRF as well as during the IMRF.

We expressed collective joy when the IOM Director General Antonio Vitorino coined the main message we brought to the IMRF, "Nothing about migrants, without migrants." Indeed, this is an acknowledgment of the role grassroots migrants play in the migration discourse.

Please find below the respective messages and reflections from our delegation:

From Eni Lestari, International Migrants Alliance

The International Migrants Alliance is the first ever global alliance of organisations of grassroots migrants, refugees and displaced peoples. Eni Lestari, an Indonesian domestic worker in Hong Kong, is the chairperson of the IMA

As we acknowledge that the voices and presence of migrants in the First International Migration Review Forum have been recognised, the United Nations, much more home and host governments have a long way to go in actualising meaningful and effective participation of grassroots migrants in the over-all implementation, monitoring and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. As discussions and decisions are important at the international level, it is at the national and local levels that grassroots migrants, especially temporary migrant workers and more specifically women migrant workers, experience labor exploitation, social exclusion, racism and discrimination, and criminalisation. There is no denying that across the globe migrant workers suffer comprehensive human rights violations in the workplace, in the community they live in, and even persecution for organising themselves, practising their democratic right to assemble and voice their demands.

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For the GCM to be effective, it has to respond to the needs of grassroots migrants and involve them in every step of the way in discussing, designing and resolving the challenges of international migration. The migration we have right now is a forced one, with hundreds of millions being displaced by economic instability, political conflicts and climate crisis and disasters. At the very core of the migration discourse are the rights, lives and dignity of grassroots migrants and their families. As we say now: Nothing about discourse on migration without the grassroots migrants.

From Joanna Concepcion, Migrante International

Migrante International is a global alliance of Filipino migrant organisations. Joanna Concepcion, a returned migrant to the Philippines, is the chairperson of Migrante International.

The protection and upholding of the rights of all migrants, especially the most vulnerable and exploited, must be the core principle guiding the GCM. And yet during the first international review process, their voices, struggles and experiences were diminished.

For the past two years, grassroots migrants have exposed the exploitation, marginalization, discrimination and violence experienced by millions of migrants during the pandemic because of government neglect and unjust policies. But the struggles of migrants were not given the attention and priority it deserves and we did not hear governments holding themselves accountable to the human rights crises faced by migrants on the ground.

Majority of states and governments still view and adopt the framework that migration is inevitable, can bring about many benefits and bring economic and cultural prosperity, ignoring that the current migration trends reflect the socio-economic and political crises in the world. The IMRF could have been an opportunity for states to present concrete and comprehensive plans to strengthen the protection of all migrants and address the factors that force people to leave their homelands.

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From Asel Dunganaeva, Women's Public Foundation "Jipar"

Jipar is a women's organization working for improvement of vulnerable rural women's (migrants and former refugees) positions in the families, communities and societies challenging poverty, patriarchy and fundamentalism. It is based in Kyrgyzstan.

Heads of Governments and High Representatives met at the UN at the International Migration Review Forum to discuss and share progress on the implementation of all aspects of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, including as it relates to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. My country Kyrgyzstan recommitted to fulfilling the objects, actions outlined in the GCM and reported about implementation of the national plan on migration policy adopted last year. We demand accelerating efforts of States to integrate migrant and refugee women women's human rights into all aspects of migration policy to leave no one behind. States Migration policy-making must center the realities of migrants, we are principal stakeholders at all levels. Nothing about migrants without migrants - this demand was addressed to Governments.

Antonio Arizaga, Frente Unido de Inmigrantes Ecuatoriano (FUIE)

The FUIE is a national organisation of Ecuadorian immigrants and migrant workers in the USA. Antonio Arizaga is FUIE's chairperson.

The solution to forced migration will not come from the heads of state or from the United Nations that promote the economic interests of corporations and with their neoliberal policies only seek to increase profits with the over-exploitation of migrants - for which they cannot decide for us. Because the life and future of migrants must be decided by migrants themselves and human rights and justice must be at the center of the Global Compact for Migration.

(La solución a la migración forzada no vendrá de los jefes de estado ni de las Naciones Unidas que promueven los intereses económicos de las corporaciones y con sus políticas neoliberales solo buscan ampliar las ganancias con la sobre explotación de los migrantes -por lo que ellos no pueden decidir por nosotros , porque la vida y futuro de los migrantes debemos decidir los propios migrantes -y los derechos humanos y la justicia deben estar en el centro del pacto global.)

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Ka Mei Lau and Karsiwen, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development is a regional platform of women and feminist organisations in the region. Ka Mei Lau is the programme officer on migration of the APWLD. Karsiwen is the chairperson of Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia (KABAR BUMI), a member of APWLD and IMA.

The IMRF and the progress declaration fail to address the root causes and structural factors that compel women's migration. The lack of decent work opportunities, poverty, violence, land and resource grab, conflicts as well as climate crisis causes people to flee for safety and to secure a sustainable livelihood for themselves and their families. The urgency of the multiple existing crises confronting the condition of women migrants and refugees should be highlighted in the IMRF. However, what we saw in the IMRF and GCM review process, member states are cherry-picking the objectives and policy without concrete actions and measures to eliminate all adverse drivers and structural factors that compel women to leave their country of origin. We urge the governments to take up political will and make significant steps to advance the human rights of women migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

To effectively monitor the GCM implementation, grassroots migrants should be at the center in all the GCM and IMRF processes at all levels. However, this IMRF reflects the absence of meaningful participation opportunities for grassroots migrants. No mechanism, guideline and dedicated space for migrants to tell the realities on the ground. We urge the governments, regional and international mechanisms to develop platforms and mechanisms to facilitate the direct dialogue with grassroots migrants and create space for regular consultation to include migrants voices in implementing the GCM and the review process.

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Anisur Rahman Khan, Awaj Foundation

Awaj Foundation is an institution working on labor and migration issues in Bangladesh. Anisur Rahman Khan, a returned migrant worker, is the director of the migration department of Awaj Foundation.

As per the definition of UN Migrant Workers Convention 1990, the migrants contribute a lot to the development of countries of origin, countries of destination and history of human civilization. These migrants are not simply remittance machines, development tools, or just statistics. They are human beings. Lots of good sentences were uttered in the IMRF, and a lot of good works have been done. However, we have a long, long way to go. In this journey, we have to include migrant workers, "Nothing about migrants, without migrants".

Mervin Toquero, Churches Witnessing With Migrants

The Churches Witnessing With Migrants (CWWM) is a tripartite network of grassroots migrant organisations, migrant-serving institutions and faith-based organisations. Mervin Toquero is part of the CWWM's international secretariat.

Migration today is entangled with historic injustices of slavery, colonialism and racism. Contemporary migration, including forced migration, mimics the routes of these historic events (from [CWWM Talking and Doing Points](#)) and therefore no migration talk should diminish the impact of these events on grassroots migrants.

CWWM believes in the need to prosper common global public goods such as human dignity and human rights. We must ensure that these continue to be the central undergirding principles of global processes like the IMRF with the grassroots migrants being the principals among various stakeholders.

Let us strive together to "build a community that empowers the grassroots migrants' movement, to build a better society where forced migration is but a thing of the past, and where migration is a choice by every person and not a consequence of failed economic and development policies" ("Nothing for and About Migrants Without Migrants", [CWWM Statement](#) on the GCM Review Process).

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Atty. Edwin dela Cruz, International Seafarers Action Committee and Migrante International

The International Seafarers Action Committee works on the advancement of rights of seafarers and sea-based migrant workers especially from the Philippines. Atty. Edwin dela Cruz is ISAC's president.

The group also raised the need to include the plight of sea-based migrants including 1.5 million seafarers and fishers in the IMRF. Sea-based migrants suffered months of being stranded on board ocean-going ships away from shore during the pandemic and have been abandoned in many instances by their employers, and denied assistance by their home state, the flag state, and the port state that refused to let them come to shore.

Manuel Hidalgo, Coordinadora de Inmigrantes de Chile

The Coordinadora de Inmigrantes de Chile is a network of migrants and advocates in Chile. Manuel Hidalgo is its secretary.

The holding of the First International Migration Review Forum could yield no other result than the observation of the worsening of the material conditions of survival and work of migrants, the increase in the flows of forced migration and refugees, amid trends of increasing discrimination, racism, xenophobia, the criminalization of migrants and the militarization of borders. All this, despite the 4 years of signing the Global Compact on Migration by more than 150 countries.

Not only does this Pact lack effective mechanisms to ensure its implementation and to guarantee the active and relevant participation of the communities and organizations of migrants, who are directly affected, in its monitoring and evaluation; but the world continues in the presence of the aggressions, blockades, wars and interventions that US imperialism deploys in an increasingly desperate way by direct hand or through NATO. With the consequent generation of humanitarian crises that throw new millions of human beings around the world into forced migration and refuge.

In its decline, US imperialism does not hesitate to provoke a new relapse of the world economy into recession, accompanied by an inflationary escalation of prices, especially of energy and food. All of which already brutally affects the incomes of workers around the world, and in particular their most vulnerable sectors, such as migrants. Thus, migrants also face a panorama of hunger and prolonged misery.

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Rey Asis, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants is a regional platform hoping to empower grassroots migrants and support their movement building in Asia Pacific through their programs. Rey Asis is the program coordinator for APMM's advocacy and campaigns.

Through the IMRF, international migration continues to be painted as an opportunity to improve national economies and people's lives and that its many challenges can be resolved through management and international cooperation among states, the private sector and many other stakeholders. APMM shares the perspective that it is the grassroots migrants, especially temporary migrant workers, who are the principal stakeholders in the migration discourse and deserve to define and shape international migration to be truly a migration of choice, anchored on human rights and dignity of peoples, and accountability.

The COVID pandemic has exposed the loopholes in the neoliberal framework of managing migration for development as migrants fall through the cracks of state response to crisis resolution and with governments denying accountability to migrants' human rights, lives and dignity. Migration is not only about movement but also about people. For as long as migrants are relegated to token participation at best, cooperation on migration will fall short of its rights-based ideal.

We will continue to advocate for grassroots migrants' meaningful and effective participation in the GCM process at all levels. They too are experts and can articulate the human rights of migrants. All stakeholders, especially the States, need to enable and continually expand the space for their involvement in shaping migration and addressing its challenges.

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Denise Spitzer, University of Alberta

Denise Spitzer is a professor at the University of Alberta who has partnered with many grassroots migrant organisations in Asia Pacific and other global regions on various researches on migration.

While movement and migration has long been an artifact of our human heritage, contemporary migration under conditions of neoliberal globalization is unprecedented in its breadth and depth. Borders act as semi-porous membranes where some migrants, particularly those entering high-skilled jobs, are able to pass through whilst other (predominantly racialized) migrants are more likely to become temporary foreign workers allocated to lower-skilled jobs regardless of education, skills, and work experience. These divisions are also highly gendered. An intersectional lens as called for by the Canadian Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Hon. Sean Fraser, is needed to uncover the disparate experiences, vulnerabilities, and strengths of grassroots migrants and their respective relationships to the GCM. The diversity of migrants demands attention to migrant communities—plural—and a rejection of the homogenizing term, ‘the migrant community.’ Space, therefore, is needed for a multiplicity of migrant voices to be not only heard, but also to be meaningfully engaged in policy-making processes at all levels of migration governance. Moreover, the call for ‘nothing about us, without us’ also applies to the repeated calls from government and other stakeholder groups for more comprehensive data to inform evidence-based policy-making. Grounding research in the lived experience of migrants is critical to this enterprise and will only strengthen the information base upon which policies, programs, and Conventions can be constructed with the ongoing participation of a diversity of migrants. This work must also consider not just the economic benefits of migration, which also requires more in-depth examination from the point of view of transnational migrant households, but also its social costs for both migrant families and sending countries. The GCM speaks to the need to address forced migration. While some attention has been paid in the IMRF to the impact of climate change on the movement of peoples, under-development due to the forces of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and neoliberal globalization and the resulting lack of decent work in migrant sending countries, has not been adequately addressed. We, therefore, call for an intersectional and people-centred approach to migration that acknowledges the dignity and diversity of migrants and that works towards migration as a right and as a true choice.