

UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

A Sourcebook

Compiled by
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Asian Partnership on International Migration (APIM)

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About the cover

The illustration on the cover is by Anwar Fazal, Regional Coordinator of Asia Pacific 2000, United Nations Development Programme. It was drawn at the founding of Asian Partnership on International Migration (APIM) on April 8 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand. It is inspired by the form of a 'Mandala', a graphic presentation that is based in eastern rituals to focus consciousness towards both cosmic and individual action. It links and it energises – two attributes so important for the work on international migration issues.

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Foreword

THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS

I have some very rapid appraisal ideas about civilised societies, and one of the indicators I use is how societies treat visitors and foreigners generally and especially those who take up economic activities. We test their local host's pride, generosity and their humanity.

Today, if we look at how migrant workers and their families are treated, we often see the real and worst sides of people and institutions.

It took 11 years and 1 day from the time the General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled 'Measures to Improve the Situation and Ensure the Human Rights and Dignity of Migrant Workers' on 17th December 1979, to the time on the 18th of December 1998, when it adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.'

It was an ingenious convention reaffirming and packaging existing standards of human rights in other international instruments while incorporating ideas unique to the context of migrant workers.

Perhaps because it was so thorough and bold that so few countries have ratified it, and there seems little enthusiasm globally.

A group of us have decided to change that, or at least try to.

Margaret Mead, the greatest socio-anthropologist, once said:
"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens, can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Firstly, a new network has been formed. It is called the Asian Partnership on International Migration (APIM). A core activity of APIM is to get the world to pay attention to the issues of migrant workers.

Secondly, we agreed that December 18th be celebrated world-wide as the International Day of Solidarity with Migrant Workers and Their Families. That day marks a historical landmark for a popular campaign for global solidarity with migrant workers and to get the Convention in place firmly all over the world.

And thirdly, this Sourcebook on International Migration was compiled to ensure that there is easy access to the wealth of resources that are now available to assist those working to defend the rights and dignity of migrant workers.

In doing so, we address five particular challenges:

Firstly, we are addressing a cluster of human rights issues. No human should be treated the way many migrants are. A regime of criminality is emerging and taking root. We need to ask more loudly 'what are rights and what are wrongs?'

Secondly, we are addressing the reality of a cluster of issues concerning values, family and other community relationships, which sadly, have undergone much disintegration. We need to ask 'what lives, what dies?'

Thirdly, we have a range of economic issues, billions of dollars are being remitted monthly.

Local economies are transformed, even distorted. We need to ask 'what kind of economies' are breeding and feeding on this issue. We need to ask 'who gets rich, who gets poor?'

Fourthly, we have the challenge of environmental and health issues, of the transmission of old diseases and of new ones, (e.g. sudden death syndrome). We need to ask 'Who lives? who dies?'

Fifthly, we have the challenge of partnership – these issues need the combined humanity and concerted action of a whole range of stakeholders including governments, researchers, civil society, UN agencies and employers. We need to ask 'who is responsible, who is irresponsible?'

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We must use all the power of popular mobilisation, bringing together diverse interests and energies. We must be prepared to be in for the full long haul. APIM, the network, The International Day of Solidarity with Migrants, and this sourcebook provide us with the process and the tools for that.

- They provide us with the unifying and creative opportunity to share and build on the stated commitment of the global institutions and to share the competence of many actors in government, business and civil society;
- They provide for us a platform for specific 'do-able' actions;
- They remind us of the core universal values about dignity, human rights, fairness and justice.

In a world driven by so much greed and criminality, a world that seems to thrive on disorder and dislocation, a world that breeds violence and racism, developing both universal standards of humanity and justice and meeting human needs are ever more essential.

In the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), we call this kind of new world order, 'Sustainable Human Development'. Through APIM, the International Day of Solidarity with Migrants and this Sourcebook, we hope to further our agenda of hope and action.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its initiative, 'Asia Pacific 2000', is pleased to be of assistance to all those who want to walk their talk on the issues of migrant workers.

My special thanks are to the two compilers of this book, Saira Shameem and Elizabeth Brady, who brought caring, commitment and competence of a rare kind to make this package. My special thanks also to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) teams in Kuala Lumpur and Manila and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Regional Office for Asia, without whose support this book could not have seen the light of day.

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