

Migrant-led People's Forum Challenges Governments on Human Rights Abuses

NNIRR / MRI

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For Immediate Release
Thursday, 29 October 2009

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Migrant-led Peoples' Forum Challenges Governments
on Human Rights Abuses against Migrants

(Athens, Greece, 1 November 2009) On the eve of a global summit on migration, migrant communities from around Greece and the world, converge into Athens to launch their own "Peoples' Forum" and challenge the policies being deliberated. The 4th Peoples' Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights (PGA) – organized by an international coalition of migrant groups in Athens alongside migrant groups from around the world, human rights organizations, trade unions, development NGOs and other civil society – criticized the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) for not heeding the critical conditions migrants face, and exacerbating ongoing abuses against them.

In conjunction with the 3rd GFMD hosted this year by the government of Greece, the PGA kicks off on Sunday to denounce ongoing government policies to criminalize immigrants and use them as scape-goats for the crippling global financial crisis. This year's GFMD convenes in the midst of a worldwide economic recession that has witnessed increasing crackdowns against immigrant communities who have already been deeply impacted with loss of jobs in their home countries and countries of destination.

"The governments must not consider migrants as disposable commodities – developing policies that use and dispose of us according to their economic whims", declared William Gois, President of Migrants Rights International (MRI), Coordinator of Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) and a lead organizer of the PGA. "After some progress last year in Manila to affirm the dignity and human rights of migrants, this year's GFMD has regressed into exploring how migration can benefit the economic growth and development of countries, without considering the ongoing abuses and violations of migrants' rights."

For the first time in decades, 2009 will witness a drop in the amount of remittances migrants send back to their home communities, reversing a trend that was previously unforeseen even by top economists at the World Bank. The global economic crisis has caused migrants, especially those who are most vulnerable due to their status, to face even harsher economic predicaments.

At the same time, this year also marks the highest number of dead migrant bodies being recovered from volatile border regions such as the EU-Africa and US-Mexico borders. Even in Athens itself, migrant communities face constant harassment, physical attacks and targeted police crackdowns. Meanwhile, neighboring governments such as Italy's Berlusconi and Libya's Gaddafi governments, enter into economic partnership agreements that not only exploit migrant workers in vulnerable positions, but also cause further onslaughts on migrants who are seeking a way out of crippling poverty and conflict.

“The GFMD only looks at migration through the lens of economic gains, has not improved much in its mechanism, structure and discussion, and continues to restrict participation of migrants and civil society organizations”, added Gois. “Parallel events like the PGA allow migrants and other civil society actors to actively articulate the critical conditions being faced by migrant communities worldwide, and find joint solutions.”

The PGA will be held from 1 to 5 November at the Technopolis Cultural Center in the Gazi district of Athens, Greece. Activities include large plenaries with world-renowned speakers, workshops, cultural events, regional caucuses, sectoral summits, visits to local migrant communities, public actions and demonstrations, and side meetings related to the issues of migration, development and human rights. The 2008 PGA in Manila witnessed more than 4000 participants in its activities and at least hundreds are expected this year from around the world.

For more details, visit www.mfasia.org/peoplesglobalaction