

# Mainstreaming the Combat against Exploitative Migration at the World Social Forum

IMADR INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT



*IMADR director Burnad Fatima Natesan at wsF workshop "Mainstreaming the Combat against Exploitative Migration Including Human Trafficking: Challenges in Africa and Asia" (January 2007, Nairobi)*

Exploitative migration is a complex global problem intimately tied to other problematic issues including racism, development, economic justice, gender and anti-patriarchy movements, HIV/AIDS, environmental problems, and, as become more and more clear over the past several years, the war on terror and war more generally. All of these issues intertwine and make possible the exploitation of people as they are forced or enticed to move from global south countries to global south countries, from the global south to the global north, or within the global north. Exploitative migration is not a stand-alone phenomenon; rather, it ties together issues that up until now have appeared separate, and provides a focal point for many seemingly disparate actors to work together in new ways, with common goals. The struggle against exploitative migration allows for the possibility of a larger, stronger, and more persuasive network of actors, all working to end exploitative migration and the systems of injustice tied to it.

IMADR takes this comprehensive, mainstreaming viewpoint as its starting point in the struggle against exploitative migration and human trafficking, and, in working with colleagues across the globe, plans to develop several concrete actions to combat exploitative migration and further develop a network of people working on similar

issues. As one such event, IMADR organized a multi-day, two-part event on exploitative migration and related issues at the most recent World Social Forum, held in Nairobi, Kenya, January 20-25, 2007. The primary objective of the two-part event was to fill out the mainstreaming analysis and develop practical strategies for how different actors—NGOs, faith-based organizations, and other activists—can work together in different parts of the world to end exploitative migration and its multiple intersecting issues, including HIV/AIDS work, refugee protection, poverty alleviation, and environmental protection.

The first of the two sessions, which took place on January 21, focused on two points: 1. developing a basic analysis of exploitative migration and human trafficking; and 2. hearing successes, struggles, and experiences of similarly engaged organizers from around the world. The second session, two days later, used the analysis and varied experiences as a way to frame a discussion about comprehensive strategy for combating exploitative migration in a coordinated way. The combined attendance for both sessions was some 150 people, and featured more formal presentations from Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi (Executive Director of the Women's Consortium of Nigeria), Antinuke Odukoya (Center for Women's Health and Information, Nigeria), Bernard Founou (Third World

Forum, Cameroon/Senegal), Penda Mbow (Professor, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal), Burnad Fatima Natesan (President of the Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, India), and Nimalka Fernando (Lawyer and President of IMADR, Sri Lanka). The events were chaired by Kinhide Mushakoji, Vice-President of IMADR.

#### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CAUSES OF EXPLOITATIVE MIGRATION**

Human trafficking and exploitative migration are related but different phenomena. Human trafficking is a specific type of exploitative migration, one in which the migrant's agency is severely diminished. Exploitative migration itself is a larger problem, inclusive of human trafficking, encompassing many forms of coercion and enticement that cause people to leave their homes. It is clear that combating exploitative migration highlights the importance of refugee relief, but it also demands more: it demands an analysis of the various underlying and interlinked socio-economic and political causes of exploitative migration. If these underlying causes are not addressed, the situation will continue and there will always be refugees and disempowered migrants to assist. Similarly key, the process of exploitative migration is not merely a relationship between the global north and south. Rather, it is frequently a three-stage process, starting in the south, moving from there to another part of the south, then to the north, and then within the north. Realization of this fact demands an analysis of the ways in which multiple factors work to deprive people of their security in southern countries and in northern countries, as well as in their travel among these locations.

The first session at the World Social Forum highlighted several socio-economic and political causes of exploitative migration, both looking at the global phenomena and the specific actors that create locally the conditions causing exploitative migration and by extension human trafficking. Given the present circumstances of the world, the issue of globalization and insecurity loomed large. Both the systematic and prolonged denial of development to southern countries and the wars on terror and against "organized crime" put people in less secure situations and create the incentive for them to move elsewhere, in search of purportedly greener pastures. This power differential, dividing poverty from wealth and insecurity from security, is a structural problem based on a holdover

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economic system from the colonial period, and continues now with little improvement. To make matters worse, this form of globalization is cunning: it provides the allure of equal access to work and incomes and the same time that it devalues certain kinds of jobs, particularly those that require little training. People then leave their homes in search of income and instead find themselves tracked into jobs without futures, without health care, and without basic standards of living. The dream of capitalism and neoliberal globalization proves false for the vast majority of migrant workers, who leave their homes and families in search for more opportunities, not knowing that the door is shut before they even begin the journey.

This global dynamic is perniciously exacerbated by racism and misogyny. Racism and misogyny both structurally devalue certain types of people, saying that some lives do not matter as much as others. These issues, and related forms of discrimination, undergird the entire process of exploitative migration. It is not by accident that those who are forced out of their homes in search for security are frequently those who are less white, and who are not men. Furthermore, racism and misogyny structure security and economics at every step along the way.

Within south and north countries alike women and children are systematically devalued. Gender discrimination results in a lack of education for many women, which in turn makes them less likely to be employed and less able to generate an income in wage labor jobs. Instead then, these women are frequently sold off, even by their own families or communities, to traffickers, to be made use of as sexual objects. Or perhaps they are sent away simply in the hope that they might send back remittance money. At the same time, gender discrimination demands of men that they adhere

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to ideals of masculinity that include treating women like objects; this increases the occurrence of rape, makes it easier to send away women, and brings harsh backlashes against any man who does not conform to stereotypical forms of masculinity.

This basic structure of neoliberal globalization, poverty, insecurity caused by unequal development and war, coupled with racism, misogyny and other forms of discrimination, be they caste-based or related to sexuality, then intersect with other pressing issues to make matters even worse. HIV/AIDS affects the entire world, but do not affect the entire world equally. People, particularly women, in Africa are at increasing risk for this disease that destroys one's ability to work or care for a family even as it dismantles one's body. While it is still unclear the extent to which global warming, due mostly to the carbon dioxide emissions of North Atlantic countries, will change the world environment, it is becoming increasingly clear that global climate will change significantly. These changes are already affecting the ability to grow crops in certain areas of the world and the ability to sustain one's livelihood. Any analysis of exploitative migration needs to keep in mind the ways in which global warming is going to affect the movement of people as people's homes become increasingly insecure and unlivable.

#### **RALLYING TOGETHER**

While such a mainstreaming approach might seem daunting in its complexity, it also opens new doors for collaboration among activist organizations and networks, as many people from across the world attempt to address fundamentally linked issues. There were two concrete plans of action proposed at the meetings in Nairobi: the

establishment of a worldwide network that would allow for information exchange and be able to make coordinated, global action in countering exploitative migration; and the drafting of a document that would draw together the experiences and analyses of these various global organizers.

The meetings in Nairobi are a launching point for an international campaign to combat exploitative migration and human trafficking. They provided an opportunity to hone analysis, develop strategy, and network a wide variety of similarly oriented political and civil society actors. As part of this international campaign, IMADR and the network organizations will prepare open letters addressed to the forthcoming G8 Summit Meeting in Germany and to the Global Forum on Migration and Development\*, scheduled for June and July 2007 respectively. The network will also create, as stated above, a document on global exploitative migration, containing analyses and recommendations from different perspectives. Similarly, organizations who are part of the campaign will share information and experiences of their own through the Database on Human Security in Global Migration. This database is to include statistics, legal documents, scholarly papers, reports, migrants' testimonies, as well as NGO's statements, advocacy papers, project proposals, and other materials describing concrete activities conducted by IGOs and NGOs to reduce the insecurity of migrants.

IMADR, along with this burgeoning network, call upon you to help expand this network of organizers committed to bringing exploitative migration, and all of its interlinked issues, to an end. For more information about IMADR's international campaign to combat exploitative migration and human trafficking, visit [www.imadr.org](http://www.imadr.org).

\* The Global Forum on Migration and Development, scheduled for July 10-11, 2007 in Brussels, will be hosted by the government of Belgium, as a follow up to the United Nations High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development held in New York in September 2006.

\* Drafted by Joseph Doyle Hankins (IMADR intern).