

PILAR (United Indonesians Against Overcharging) achieves the cancellation of unjust government policy.

Partners in the WEMC Crossborder sub-component Indonesia, ATKI-HK and ENGENDER worked together to analyze its research findings with 2,777 Indonesian migrant women workers in Hong Kong on the key issues affecting them, and to strategize for bringing about the desired changes, both to practice and policies of the government and agencies.

A major output at this point was the printing and dissemination of 5,000 copies of the primer, *The Truth Behind Illegal Salary Deductions to Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong*, (**See PDF attachment**) which contained the results and analysis of ATKI's findings. This publication became the main document for the education of Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong to explain how these fees came about, the individual components of these fees and how and why, this exaction was linked to the Indonesian government's policy on privatizing the export of labor and the monopolistic control of recruitment agencies. More importantly, this document contested the cost-components that added up to the high placement fees, many found to be duplications or that should be borne by other parties.

Small group discussions were initiated by ATKI-HK with a number of grassroots organizations before a workshop of leaders of 16 IMW's organizations was convened on 1 April 2007 to discuss the possibilities and methodologies to bring about attention and change. This workshop concluded with the collective decision among the 16 organisations to forge an alliance, PILAR or United Indonesians Against Overcharging, to work together to bring about the necessary changes to what was to them, an unjust system of extortion and source of oppression for poor women migrants. It was the first such organization of Indonesians migrant workers in the world.



1 April 2007: Founding of PILAR in Hong Kong among Indonesian women leaders of 16 grassroots organizations.



Collectively, the leaders embarked on a program to develop the necessary leadership skills for mobilizing and advancing the alliance's call for an end to high placements fees, education of IMWs within their organisations and an agenda for public protests to bring about understanding and awareness of this issue to the general population of IMWs in Hong Kong, the Indonesian government and the public in Indonesia.

Some of these activities included an education festival for leadership training and political education, attended by 100 women migrant workers. Writing workshops to increase their leaders' and members' abilities of writing, for public communication in newspapers, newsletters, blogs, the lyrics of song, poems and plays that carry messages of protest over exploitative practices in labor migration. Some of those involved in these exercises have gone on to develop their own work and newsletters carrying PILAR's call to end high fees. In public protests, new leaders were given opportunities to write speeches, practice public oratory and opportunities to learn how to organize and lead. A number of rallies were stage at the Indonesian Consulate where PILAR demands and the results of its 30,000 signature campaign among IMWs against high fees were publicly served to the Consulate, as the representative of the Indonesian government in Hong Kong.



One of a series of high-profile public rallies conducted by PILAR in 2007
This particular occasion was during the visit of the Minister of Manpower in Indonesia to Hong Kong in September 2007.



Various activities from cultural, education, religious to social gatherings led by PILAR and supported by WEMC have created space for the groups in the alliance to know each other better and this enabled them to strengthen their unity through their experiences and to cement relationships. This unity has attracted more groups to join PILAR, which currently has 23 member- organizations.

When the Indonesian Consulate released a new policy - SE 2258 - on 7 December 2007, prohibiting Indonesian migrant workers who worked less than 2 years to change agencies, PILAR members immediately launched a campaign to demand the abolition of SE 2258. The leaders realized that this policy was aimed at helping the agencies in collecting fees from Indonesian migrant workers by immobilising them by preventing them from changing agencies. The Consulate admitted that this policy was created in response to complaints raised by the Association of Recruitment Agencies who had complained that many Indonesian migrant workers had stopped paying their fees and moved to other agencies that offered cheaper placement fees.

To campaign for scrapping of this policy, PILAR conducted intensive meetings among leaders, organized group discussions and public forums, Sunday picket actions and rallies, dialogues with the Indonesian Consulate. In addition, it regularly released public statements and leaflets, released press releases in English and Indonesian language for the media, created songs and other form of cultural presentations to educate the Indonesian migrants on the impact of this policy.

To increase the pressure on the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong, the lead researcher of this component, Engender helped in reaching out to migrant concerned groups and advocates in Indonesia to support the campaign in Hong Kong against SE 2258. Groups like Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women, in Indonesia) and other advocates in Indonesia who were already addressing the issues of overseas Indonesian Migrant workers, also took actions through picket actions and dialogues with related government departments.

At the same time, through regular press releases in Bahasa and English, the campaign was soon aired and well exposed in different English and Indonesian media in Hong Kong and Indonesia. At its height, these efforts resulted in a collective show of unity of more than 2,000 Indonesian migrant workers joined public forum sponsored by WEMC on February 10, 2008 and rallied to Indonesian Consulate. A week later, the Consulate General called a dialogue with PILAR leaders and agreed to the cancellation of SE 2258.

Public rally to the Indonesian Consulate in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. The turnout for supporting the call to scrap SE2258 in this event was 2,000 strong

