



Summary brief - The National Conference on “Migrant Policy: Balancing Economy, Health and Well Being”

March 21, 2008

Bangkok, Thailand

The National Conference on “Migrant Policy: Balancing Economy, Health and Well Being” held on March 21, 2008 in Bangkok, was organized by partners of the PHAMIT (Prevention of HIV/AIDS among Migrants in Thailand) Project. The conference was attended by over 400 participants coming from diverse backgrounds related to the issue, including civil society, migrant workers, government officials, the private sector and academia. For details of the meeting, and to find out more about the PHAMIT Project, please go to www.phamit.org.

Highlights from the conference included:

- Mr. Pornchai Yurapong, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labor, declared that the Thai Government was serious in accepting migrant workers from the three neighboring countries – Myanmar (Burma), Laos PDR and Cambodia, and asserted that all migrant workers, whether they were documented or undocumented, are entitled to the same rights (as Thais) under Thai Labor Law.
- Participants acknowledged that undocumented migrants have no bargaining power against their employers because employers use the ‘illegal’ status of migrants as leverage over undocumented workers’ appeals.
- Dr. Supachai Kunaratapruk from the Department of Health Services Support in the Ministry of Public Health pointing to the fact that an increasingly large number of undocumented workers has placed a major burden on the health system. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Public Health is still committed to the principle that medical treatment is for all, including undocumented workers.
- The speaker from Thai Labor Solidarity Committee, Ms. Wilaiwan Saethai, said that Thai workers are now standing in solidarity with migrant workers for the common goal of just labor wages and working conditions. The two sides have come to realize that when migrants are underpaid and made to endure poor working conditions, it will not only hurt migrants but will also hurt Thai employees, as employers will always choose migrants over Thai workers.
- A Migrant Health Worker, who works on the PHAMIT Project under the NGO implementing partner Ban Sook San in Songkhla Province, gave an example of the unfair treatment migrants receive by the law. “Thirty migrants were arrested and accused of making (Thai) fake documents. It is hard to believe though. Their Thai language skills are so low; they need an interpreter when communicating with Thais.”
- There was a rebuke of the Provincial Decrees announced by Governors in certain provinces that restrict migrants’ ability to gather in groups or organize cultural events because such events are believed to pose a threat to Thai culture. Promboon Panitchpakdi of Raks Thai Foundation said that the cultural domination that Thais are facing is not from neighboring countries but from modernized western countries. Additionally, cultural restrictions do not respect basic human rights.

Raks Thai Foundation
March 28, 2008