



Global Justice

Spring 2009

Human Rights in the Philippines: A worker to worker Solidarity Exchange



PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS in the Philippines are on the front lines in the struggle against privatization of public services. But in the Philippines this fight exposes union activists to political repression, threats, even abductions and killings. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) 2008 annual survey of violations of trade union rights, states that “the Philippines continues to be one of the world’s worst offenders in the numbers of murders, abductions, arrests and imprisonment of trade unionists”.

With assistance from the Global Justice Fund, CUPE Local 4600 at Carleton University and its community partner the Ontario Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (OCHRP) will move forward to strengthen the relationship of support and solidarity with the Confederation for Unity, Recognition

and Advancement of government Employees (COURAGE) and the Alliance of Concerned Teachers-Philippines (ACT). This project stems from contacts established by previous Philippine tours to Canada in 2007-2008. Philippine parliamentarians visited Canada to speak to Canadian politicians about human rights abuses in the Philippines and to meet with activists in the labour movement. A tour by the Workers Assistance Centre in the Philippines also met with unions across Canada.

The first phase of this project is to bring unionists from COURAGE and ACT to speak to CUPE members’ and the public. We will discuss ways to support each other in our fight for public services and respect for workers rights. It is anticipated that CUPE members will

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Global Justice is published by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and is available online at www.cupe.ca/globaljustice. Send suggestions to rspence@cupe.ca

CUPE

CUPE Supports Emergency Assistance for Palestinians in Gaza

CUPE RESPONDED to the appeal from International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to provide emergency assistance to the Palestinians living in Gaza. A donation of \$10,000.00 was sent to the 'Trade Union Aid for Gaza' fund for humanitarian aid, including medical supplies and other basic essentials.

The devastation of Gaza from the Israeli attack is enormous and the death of Palestinian civilians has surpassed 1,000. The aid has been shipped through the International Transport Workers' Federation in cooperation with the PGFTU Palestine and the GFJTU Jordan.

In early January, CUPE National President Paul Moist wrote to Prime Minister Harper 'demanding that the Canadian government, as a member of the United Nations, condemn the

serious violations of humanitarian and international law by the State of Israel [...] and to lend Canada's voice to those nations seeking immediate ceasefire and a renewed commitment to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East'.

CUPE policy demands that the Israeli Government immediately withdraw from the occupied territories and abide by UN Resolution 242 and 338 and actively work towards an end to all acts of violence that take the lives of innocent people, whether they be Palestinian or Israeli. CUPE believes in the development of a peace process based on equality between Israelis and Palestinians and based on the implementation of United Nations resolutions and international law.

To view Paul Moist's letter to Prime Minister Harper go to www.cupe.ca/npo/Paul-Moist-writes-Ha

Human rights in the Philippines

Continued from page 1 participate in a return exchange to the Philippines to witness first hand the challenges of our sisters and brothers. The goal is to establish an ongoing and sustainable partnership with both ACT and COURAGE. These partnerships will be of mutual benefit through the sharing of ideas and campaigns that affect public sector workers on a global scale. The relationship will help to expose the threats faced by these organizations in their struggle for

the rights of working people.

CUPE members should be proud that international solidarity has really started to take root through the initiatives of the Global Justice Fund. The continued support of CUPE locals and members has meant that we can really make a difference. Now is the time for your local to support the fund – through a yearly gift or a sustaining monthly donation. More information can be found at www.cupe.ca/global-justice.



World Community Film Festival

ACTS OF HOPE and **Courage** was the theme of the World Community Film Festival held February 13 to 15 in Vancouver. The annual festival is produced in part by CoDevelopment Canada whose staff are members of CUPE1004. Over 30 documentaries about social justice and environmental issues set around the globe were featured. "The film festival is a great time for social justice activists to get re-energized and inspired," said Carol Wood, CoDev Program Director. "It is a time to reach out to the community and to get more people involved with CoDev," added Wood. Check out the list of films: www.codev.org/filmfest.

Que Viva Cuba! A Solidarity Visit to Cuba in December



THE CUBAN National Union of Public Administration Workers (SNTAP is the Spanish acronym) held their 9th National Congress in Havana, December 3-5 2008. Our delegation to the meeting included Brothers Paul Moist, Claude Généreux, Barry O'Neill and Sister Lucie Levasseur.

The relationship between CUPE and SNTAP has existed for well over a decade. CUPE BC's project with the Havana provincial office started as a result of SNTAP's desire to improve their steward training. At the national level, CUPE was quick to understand the value of supporting our Cuban brothers and sisters, and the project soon expanded with funding from the Global Justice Fund. SNTAP represents 64,000 workers in the Cuban federal ministries, public energy, municipalities, courts and

banking sector. Hundreds of these workers have been through training courses with CUPE support.

This is the first time CUPE leaders have attended SNTAP's Congress. Brother Paul Moist brought solidarity greetings, calling on US President Obama to close the Guantanamo Bay military prison; free the Cuban Five and to open dialogue with the Cuban government towards ending the economic embargo. He praised the strength of the Cuban people in the face of political and economic adversity, especially following the devastation of the recent hurricanes. The 300-plus workers assembled in the convention centre outside Havana rose to their feet several times, applauding his words of solidarity.

On the last day, the delegation met with two of the wives of the

Cuban Five. These five men have been incarcerated by the US for the past 10 years for alleged terrorist activities. The Five were in the US to investigate American-backed clandestine efforts to spark unrest within Cuba. Their wives have been denied all requests to visit their husbands.

This visit was followed by a meeting with the international secretary of the Cuban Workers' Central, (the CUT); representing 3.4 million workers from 19 affiliate unions. And from there, the afternoon was spent at SNTAP's training centre seeing first hand where CUPE's solidarity has made a difference.

CUPE's delegation committed to continue to support the call to end the US embargo of Cuba and in addition, pledged our support for the cause of justice for the Cuban Five.

NEW PROJECT SUPPORTED BY THE GLOBAL JUSTICE FUND

Building Capacity of Human Rights Defenders from Burma



BURMA has been ruled by a succession of dictatorships since 1962. The current military government stifles dissent, restricts freedoms and through its economic policies has turned Burma into one of the poorest countries in Asia. The actions of the military dictatorship have led to widespread human rights abuses, and the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, mainly ethnic minorities. Many more have fled to Thailand as refugees or illegal immigrants. There are a number of refugee camps in the Thai-Burma border region where some Burmese have lived for over 20 years. Those who have fled to Thailand find themselves either in refugee camps of eking out a precarious existence as illegal

migrants. Ethnic minorities have responded to these challenges by organizing themselves into community-based organizations with bases in northern Thailand, many of the groups are human rights defenders.

CUPE will be supporting a project in cooperation with CUSO-VSO to bring together eight of these organizations for training and mentoring so that they can improve their ability to advocate on behalf of Burmese refugees, illegal migrants and displaced peoples inside of Burma. Workshops and training will be provided through the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), a non-profit organization based in Thailand. HREIB was the first Burmese organization with a

primary focus on human rights; leadership training and community based organizing. Members of these eight organizations will have the opportunity to develop advocacy strategies, deepen their understanding of human rights and international law, and build their skills in research and documentation as well as lobbying. By assisting with strengthening these organizations CUPE will contribute to the benefit of ethnic minority populations on both sides of the Thai-Burma Border. There are estimated to be 130,000 registered refugees and 1,350,000 undocumented migrants in Thailand, and a further 500,000 internally displaced people in eastern Burma.