

Migration and development front and centre in Manila

By Professor Susan Kneebone, Castan Centre Deputy Director



Professor Kneebone (right) at the GFMD with Susan F. Martin, Donald G. Herzberg Chair in International Migration Director, Institute for the Study of International Migration.

At the end of October 2008, as a representative of the Castan Centre, I joined 220 delegates in Manila from all over the world for the Civil Society Dialogue preceding the second Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The first GFMD, which was held in Brussels in July 2007 was criticized for being state led, and so the Civil Society Dialogue was initiated. But what is the GFMD and was the first Dialogue a success?

The GFMD is a new international informal process which arises from concerns about the high level of exploitation and irregular migration around the world. It is estimated that worldwide the number of people living outside their homeland stands at 200 million.¹ The majority leave their place of birth because they are unable to earn a living and because there is a demand for their labour elsewhere.² Although there are International Labour Organization Conventions and a 1990 Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers in place, together with a new international framework on trafficking created in 2000, intended to protect different categories of migrants, the problem of international migration has continued to escalate in the last two decades.

The UN recognised the problem with the 1999 appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. In 2003

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan set up a Global Commission on International Migration, and also a High-Level Dialogue on international migration, which led to the first GFMD in 2007.

Participants at the 2008 Manila Civil Society Dialogue were chosen as representing the concerns of those 200 million migrants. Specifically, during the two days of the Dialogue, we were to consider the rights and protections of migrants, the expansion of legal avenues for migration and the challenge of coherence within nations and across borders. In practical terms, the program was organized around plenaries, workshops and roundtables under three broad themes: migration and development, secure migration and governance issues. The papers for plenary sessions were available on the web prior to the conference, which ensured that discussion at the sessions was lively but controlled, with excellent rapporteurs making concluding remarks. Co-delegates represented grassroots NGOs, faith organizations, trade unions, international and UN organizations, including the International Labour Organization and UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and a sprinkling of academics. One of the most interesting sessions was an open forum called 'Beyond the GFMD: From Advocacy to Policy to Action', which received the reports of the rapporteurs and was chaired by Sharan Burrow (with an iron fist!).

The official report released from the Civil Society Dialogue includes the following statements:

We see the challenge to develop global architecture for recognition, respect, rights and protections for migrants as the responsibility of the UN and no less urgent than the need for transparent global governance of the financial system or that required to reduce carbon emissions. The ILO predicts that some 20 million workers will lose their jobs as economic growth stalls, and the number of people who struggle to live on less than \$2US a day will grow by another 100 million. Many migrant workers will be affected, and their families will be amongst the newly impoverished.

We must work to see that all migration is by free and informed choice.

But the Dialogue was not without controversy. Some were critical of the lack of opportunity for debate. There was criticism about lack of transparency in the choice of delegates, and a number of groups held their own dialogues in parallel to and in protest of the Civil Society Dialogue. Concern was also expressed over the weight that the Dialogue would have on the states' session that followed. It was suggested that the next GFMD (to be held in Greece) should include a day of interaction between the states and civil society.

Undoubtedly the GFMD is a useful process for sharing views and information, and for highlighting the issues. Naturally, given the scale and complexity of the issue, not to mention the GFMD process itself, it is difficult to achieve consensus. From my perspective, I was most interested in the involvement of the unions in the dialogue and by the personal stories of heroic struggles that I heard from several women activists for human rights. But one disappointing feature of the dialogue was the lack of involvement by the private (business) sector.

1. Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *The Age*, 11 December 2007, p13.
2. *Ibid.*