



Amman Center for Human Rights Studies - Public report



ACHRS representative participants: Madison Wells and Mélissa Testouri

Brief Introduction

Faith communities standing in solidarity with migrants in the Middle East is a virtual gathering initiative spearheaded by the Interfaith Network on the Rights of Migrants (INFORM) and Churches Witnessing with Migrants-Africa (WWMA). The event aims to bring together significant faith communities from around Asian and African countries in order to learn more about the situation of African and Asian migrants in the Middle East.

INFORM is a network of faith communities of Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist supporting the struggle of migrants for justice, human rights and decent work and against all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery. WWMA is an international tripartite network of grassroots migrants and varied religious and faith-based institutions dedicated to the proposition that all human beings have inherent, inviolable human dignity and protected human rights.

Faith communities standing in solidarity with migrants in the Middle East is in cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches, Word Student Christian Federation-Middle East, Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa and General Board of Church and Society of the UMC. The event was organized on July 30 2020 from 2:00 pm to 4 pm (Amman Time).

List of Panelists:

- **Cathy Chang** (Regional facilitator for Addressing Migration and Human trafficking, moderator)
- **Canon Kofi** (International mission director at CMS Africa)
- **Joram H. Calimutan** (reverend)
- **Ndagire Joanita Joshirah** (Uganda migrant)
- **Malick Sy** (Confederation of Trade Unions in Senegal)
- **Patrick Mundunga** (Executive director at ANCHOR Africa)
- **Frederick Carmelo** (Administrative pastor, UCCP-UAE Fellowship)
- **Doctor Ezekiel Lesmore** (Director Peace, Diakonia and Development in AACC)



- **Ziad El Sayegh** (Middle East council of Churches)
- **Mira Neaimah** (Regional executive, World Student Christian Federation-Middle East)
- **Doctor Liberato Bautista** (President of the Conference of non-governmental organizations in Consultative relationships with the UN)

Welcome remarks

Under the agenda item, following remarks were pointed out by Canon Kofi and Joram H. Calimutan:

- The event is focusing on **human trafficking** where faith communities and organizations must provide support, healthcare and shelter to migrants who suffered from human trafficking and exploitations.
- The panelists stressed out that Asian and African migrants in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf countries, are enduring **abuse, exploitation, discrimination** and **violence**.
- Social distancing should not impede faith communities from being united or prevent their silence their voices from speaking out about human trafficking issues.

Testimonies from African and Asian migrants

Ndagire Joanita Joshirah, a Uganda migrant, confessed about her journey to Oman and her difficulties while working there.

- She faced human trafficking in Oman. She applied to work as a receptionist, but she ended up as a maid.
- She got sick while working alone in the house. She was unconscious for 7 hours in Oman. She was told she was bound by a contract when she tried to leave from Oman, but she never signed a contract.
- She is using her voice to stand against human trafficking.

Panel 1: The situation of Western and Eastern African Migrants in the Middle East

For the first panel, the situation of Western and Eastern African migrants in the Middle East were overviewed and tackled by Malick Sy and Patrick Mundunga.

- Malick Sy expressed how it was very **hard to collect data** on how many migrants are migrating from Western Africa to Middle East.
- People migrate because of the **poverty, civil wars** and **corruption**. Many migrant women are suffering from exploitation, abuse and rape.
- It is necessary to **ratify and adopt** human rights and ILO conventions in order to protect the rights of migrants



- Regarding the **economic settings**, East Africa is the fastest growing region in the continent but experiences high-income inequality, growing poverty levels among subsistence farmers and high unemployment among youth.
- Regarding the social settings, low skills and education contribute to low quality jobs and poverty.
- Patrick Mundunga recommends **developing a regional plan on migration** and providing a **support for trafficking survivors** through establishing trust funds.

Panel 2: Context and situation on East Asian migrants in the Middle East

For the second panel, following items were questioned regarding the situation on East Asian migrants in the Middle East by Frederick Carmelo.

- Frederick Carmelo addressed the theme of **Filipino migrants** in the MENA. In 2020, there are 865,121 in Saudi Arabia and 648,929 in UAE. These numbers do not include undocumented Filipinos migrants.
- Filipinos migrants are more exposed to COVID-19 in the MENA because of poor living and working conditions, lack of adequate healthcare or no access to healthcare. Under lockdowns, migrants were not paid or have experienced a delay in pay or were fired from their jobs.
- **Three major responses** were discussed to provide a support to vulnerable migrants amidst pandemic crisis: food packs, cash assistance and repatriation program.

Short panel discussions

During this short session, Doctor Ezekiel Lesmore and Reverend Frederick Carmelo discussed the common concerns among Asian and African migrants.

- Migrants in the Middle East are facing **unhuman treatments** where they are treated as a second-class citizens and where their rights are deprived.
- Networks of churches and organizations must work each other to response to challenges and to build solidarity.

Panel 3: Response from the Middle East

In this last panel, following items were raised by Ziad El Sayegh and Mira Neaimah:

- COVID-19 is more than a health crisis. It is a socio-economic and labor market crisis. The Middle East is experiencing **lack of policy**, lack of common ethical grounds.
- Countries must **prepare with UNCHR** to think loudly together the ethical challenges.
- Middle Eastern countries must **integrate locally** migrants and refugees by welcoming and assisting them. Governments must shift their policy to be more **humanitarian** in order to reach more vulnerable people.