

Break the Chain of Oppression, Poverty and War

Today, as women all over the world mark the International Women's Day, hundreds of workers, women and men, from the Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL) and its fraternal organizations*, marched to Malacañang to celebrate the victories won by the Filipino women's movement and to collectively reaffirm our commitment to break the shackles of oppression, poverty and war that continue to bind women.

The struggle for women's rights has gone a long way. Still, we believe that there are more to be fought for. Even as our sisters have created inroads in terms of raising social consciousness about gender inequality and have claimed spaces in the political and public sphere, they remain to carry the bigger burden of our nation's impoverishment. Still and all, our sisters are marginalized in decision-making, while otherwise patronized by men even in unions and political organizations. And worsened by economic deprivation and political marginalization, our sisters are further victimized sexually in prostitution.

The ongoing Balikatan exercises make matters worse. Already, women in Olongapo and Angeles cities are drawn by the magnet of "customers" in Zamboanga City. The Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women (CATW) has recorded cases of women in the streets of Davao City recruited to serve as "waitresses" in Zamboanga City. And as protest against the Balikatan exercises mount, recruiters deceive the women that they will go to Cotabato instead, a few minutes ride by boat to Zamboanga City.

Needless to say, the presence, and now, entry, of US military forces creates the demand side, and determines the growth of the sex industry in the country. Yet, their entry was also an assault on our sovereignty as a nation. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo allowed their entry in connivance with the US-led "anti-terrorism campaign", in utter disregard of the integrity of our nation. Even as it would spell war, threatening the very lives of our people, especially our children. Even as it threatens the lives and integrity of Filipino women. Yet way before these Balikatan exercises, the signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1991 has already spelled the dire future of our nation, and women, politically and personally.

We also stand indignant at the continued violence inflicted upon the Filipino women – by the government's economic policies. The continuing liberalization of trade by the government, true to its commitments to the World Trade Organization, has meant the diminishing opportunities for employment to women workers and the displacement of women peasants. The privatization of public utilities meant the rising costs of living, while cuts in budget for social services meant that the women are expected to be the safety nets – to provide healthcare and education. This situation even pushes more and more of our children to all sorts of child labor even in its hazardous forms.

It is the anomaly and perversion of social structures that permit such violence to happen to women, and oppressive male consciousness contribute to it. Violence against women are inflicted by unequal relations economically, politically and personally. We, in APL, stand to fight the battle alongside them.

Lagutin ang kadena nang Karahasan sa Kababaihan – ng kaapihan, kahirapan at digmaan! Iatras ang Balikatan! Palayain ang Kababaihan!

Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL)

National Office: 102 Sct. De Guia St., Bgy. Sacred Heart, Quezon City
Contact Persons: Ann Garcia / Fatima Cabanag
Telephone Nos. : 9276991 / 9242295

* Other groups that joined the APL Women's Day March: Akbayan, BISIG, Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Samahan sa Kanayunan (PKSK), Movement for the Advancement of Student Power (MASP), Alyansa and the Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women (CATW)