

Migration, Mobility, & Displacement

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Eni Lestari in Conversation with Annalee Lepp

Eni Lestari is an Indonesian domestic worker and migrant rights activist who has been working in Hong Kong since 1999. She is the current chairperson of the International Migrants Alliance (IMA), the first global alliance of grassroots migrants' organizations, founded in Hong Kong in 2008. She is also the current chairperson of the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI). Lestari is also a current board member of the Global Alliance Against Trafficking of Women (GAATW). In January 2016 she sat down with Annalee Lepp, Chair of the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Victoria, to talk about her experiences as a migrant worker and activist.

Annalee: Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. First question. Why and how did you get involved in the migrant rights movement?

Eni: In 1997, when Indonesia and Asia were hit by the Asian financial crisis, I was a student at that time and just newly graduated, trying to find work. In my family, I am the eldest and my family always wanted its children to have a better education. My parents wanted us to go to college. But because of the crisis in 1996-1997, everything fell apart. My parents were only small sellers in the wet market and they relied on a very small profit from the market to sustain our family's livelihood. But because of the crisis, prices went up, then down, [and were] unpredictable; my parents lost a lot of profit and were even indebted because they were not able to sustain the income for the business and for the family. For a year they were struggling, trying and hoping that things would be better, but things did not get better at all. They were heavily in debt and they still wanted me to go to college. At that time, I was looking around for a cheaper college that would allow me to work while studying. Unfortunately, even the cheapest was already expensive. And the type of job I could work at was offering very low pay, especially if you were only high school or secondary school graduates. So it took me a while roaming around and finally I decided not to go to college, telling my parents, "if you insist on me going to college, all the more you will be indebted." And that meant my school was based on debt and I didn't want that because I still had my two younger siblings at school. It took money to finish their basic education.

I was doing part-time work and helping my parents in the market until,

in 1999, a friend of mine came to me and asked me whether I wanted to work abroad. It was a job as a domestic helper in Hong Kong and somewhere else, but my friend was asking me to go to Hong Kong because at least in Hong Kong, there would be better treatment and we could have our holidays once a month. At that time, no one knew what the law was here [Hong Kong]. It took me six months, I can't remember, but it took me a long time just to say yes to that. And then when I agreed to do it, in 1999, my friend and I applied to one of the brokers in our village. This broker was the one sending us to the licensed recruitment agency in the capital. We stayed at that agency and they told us to stay in the dormitory for training. For me, it took five months in the training camp. I was not allowed to visit my family; I was not allowed to go home, I was not allowed to go out. It was like confinement, 100 percent confinement. The only exception was for my family to visit me. Because the travel between agency's training camp and my parents' house was four hours, they were able to visit me every week at least. But some of my friends whose family lived very far away, even on a different island, in different provinces, were not able to have a visit regularly. Once a month was the best they could expect. So many of them were trapped in the agency. They had nothing to live on. They had to buy their own soap, their own personal items, but they didn't have money. And the food provided was very inadequate. It didn't have nutrition at all. I mean, it was basically only rice and a little bit of meat; sometimes it was just vegetarian food. If you did not have extra money to buy extra food, after a few months, you would suffer from anemia and your body would have a lot of problems. This was also the time when suddenly my body was weakening and I was suffering from a cough for at least three months because of the hygiene and the air pollution there. So anyway, it was horrible. When I flew to Hong Kong, I told myself, I would never want to go back to that kind of system again no matter what. I will try my best not to go back. It was once and that's all.

When I came to Hong Kong, I thought things would be better. Then I got this employer, my first employer was from mainland China. They owned a shoe store. The family was low to medium income. They only relied on selling shoes for a livelihood. They had a very small house, two rooms, and they had two children, boys; one was 14 and the second one was two and a half years old. I did not have my own room, but I had to share it with the 14-year-old boy. I was still quite young at that time and it was scary. Of course, the room was open and I slept on the lower mattress because it was a bunkbed. They didn't give me a mattress at all; it is just a wooden bed. They also asked the young boy to sleep with me, despite the bed being only enough for one skinny person. The size of a room here is very small anyway. And usually the bed only fits one body, you can just move around, but you cannot really share with another person. But the young boy slept with me so, practically, I was sleeping on the side of my body for months. That's one issue. The second issue was I was not given a day off at all for at least four months. And then, I was not allowed to go out. If I had to go out, I had to go with the boy and I was not

allowed to talk to another person. I was not given the key to the house. I had to eat in the kitchen. They gave me a separate spoon, a glass, and chopsticks, so everything was isolated. I was not allowed to use the washing machine. I had to wash my clothes by hand. At that time, it was winter. It was my first ever winter in the world and it was so cold and I didn't have enough clothes. I was struggling to understand what this was about? "Are they good people and if they are good people, why were they treating me this way?" They insisted that I had to eat pork. In the beginning, they allowed me to pray, but later on, the boy kept complaining that I was doing dirty stuff because I knelt down on the floor, kissing the floor. Finally, my employer told me, "you are here for work; you are not here to do other things." So I had to stop everything. They became bad to me because they didn't like the culture, the religion, and the lifestyle I used to have back home to be implemented in that house. So I was really in pain. I missed home a lot, but I keep telling myself, I need to survive for a better future.

After four months, I insisted on having a holiday because they said I was not supposed to have holiday. The first three months, they didn't give me money at all. They said the whole salary went to the agency for the placement fee. I was only given 200 Hong Kong Dollars (HKD); they said this was for your holiday pay because we don't give you a holiday. That 200 HKD were something like 21 or 22 US dollars (USD) a month. That was the only pay I got for the first three months. And then after that, they gave me like 2000 HKD, somewhere like 200 USD a month. The minimum wage at the time was sitting around 4000 HKD. But they only give me 200 US dollars. And I insisted I have holidays so they gave me a holiday twice a month. At that time, I mingled with my friends from the same agency back in Indonesia and each one of us had different experiences. Some of them had very good employers; they had full holidays, full pay, full in everything. But some of us were so underpaid, with no holidays, and were really struggling every day, for food, for treatment, and stuff. And I asked for their help, "can you please help me find a way to leave this kind of condition?" I could not sustain this for two years. It was too much for me. And I kept calling the agency for help and the agency kept telling me, "Be patient. It is part of your training. After two years, everything will be okay. You will be able to change employers." So I had enough of calling them after three months. I told myself, "I am not going to ask for help anymore from the agency." The agency also took away my passport; they kept my passport and contract with them. I only had my Hong Kong ID with me.

After five months, I was finally introduced to the mission for migrant workers. It is a local NGO. Many of their staff are Filipino and white people and Chinese. I was lucky because I spoke English a little bit at the time. So at least I could say what I wanted to say. And they told me, "oh the law in Hong Kong is that you are supposed to have every Sunday holiday, every public holiday, and you are supposed to have 400 USD a month pay. If you don't have this that means they actually violated the law." They told me I can file a complaint at the labour department. After six and a half months, I decided

to run away with only something like 25 USD in my hand because I already sent money to my family, whatever I could save for them. It took me awhile just to think of this choice because I knew I would be unemployed, I would not be able to easily find a new employer, and I would have my own court case. In Hong Kong and in different parts of Asia, if you have legal cases against your employer, you will not be allowed to work legally. You must wait until the case is settled and then you will be considered by immigration to file another application. So that's what happened to me. I ran away. I went to the mission for migrant workers for help and they put me in this veteran house shelter. I was so amazed because I saw there were so many Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Nepalis, and a few Indonesians who were also having shelter at that place. And as I was wondering, I was not the only one having this problem. There are so many out there. The only difference was, most of the Indonesians were always underpaid and very ignorant of our rights, but other nationalities, at least were aware of what is in the contract. So after that, it took me four months to file my case. And during that four months, I integrated with different organizations from the Philippines, Nepal, and Thailand. I realized they were so well organized. Why can't we? If they are so united on what they want, through their holidays, which they use to educate and empower the woman here, the domestic workers here, why can't we? And unfortunately at that time, Indonesia had the second biggest population in terms of domestic helpers, but yet we were the most unorganized, most pitiful in terms of working conditions and treatment. After four months, when I settled my case, we formed the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI), which is composed mostly of Indonesians from the mission house shelter and some of our friends who were willing to support our call. So that is how ATKI was formed in 2000. Since then, the movement has been part of my life. Then I became active in the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, which is a coalition of domestic worker organizations from Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Then in 2004, I became its spokesperson and also of MCB. From there, I engaged in the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) at the time, Asia Pacific for Women and Development, and other formations. In 2008, the International Migrant's Alliance (IMA) was first formalized and that's how I was elected to be the chairperson of IMA.

Annalee: What are some of the goals and strategies of ATKI and IMA? What, from your perspective, have these organizations accomplished? What are some of the challenges?

Eni: When ATKI was established in 2000, it was, I call it, the dark moment of our movement. Why? In 1998, Indonesia elected a new president after 32 years of what we call an iron regime under the old president. There were a lot of killings, random shootings, and no freedom of expression was there. People from the town to the village were so scared with the regime. Many of us, including myself, never knew what this organization was about. The only thing

we knew about was the traditional organization, (the school, the village) and this was well monitored and controlled by the government. We never had such an experience or understanding about a more progressive organization. When we formed ATKI, there was a lot of resistance among our own community not because they didn't agree to our call; mainly they were so afraid. In their minds, if they joined this ATKI, they would be blacklisted, employers would terminate, they would go to prison. That's the simple understanding they had. And when we told them about voicing our rights in Hong Kong, etc., they kept talking about their families back home. "What about our family? What will happen to them if I lose my job?" So we realized that everyone was still living under the fear of being organized and critical of the governmental policies. It took us, as far as I remember, three years just to offer calmness.

The first political action that we did, what we call a first breakthrough, was a rally held in 2001. At that time, we were thinking of how to link the problems we have in day-to-day counselling with the policies of our government. For example, underpayment. Why are Indonesians underpaid? Why not other nationalities? And we don't have holidays. Why? What is this about? If this is not the law in Hong Kong, why do most Indonesians not even have our holidays? This is a violation of Hong Kong law. Why is this a public practice among Indonesians in Hong Kong? Then we realized it was the scheme that the agency was proposing to the employer in the name of cheap labour. They were offering us to the employer with a 'discount,' which was actually a 50 percent discount on wages, a 50 percent discount on holidays, no rights for any relief or other public holiday. And a 100 percent discount on other rights. So practically, we are being sold in the cheapest way to attract the Hong Kong employers to hire us. And what was the benefit to the agency? The agency benefitted from an agency fee. The employer was benefiting from the discount that the agency gave on us. And that's why they were very paranoid with controlling us, making sure we don't have friends, making sure we don't have any connections in Hong Kong, making sure we were not going to be critical or file any cases against the employers. When we realized that, we tried to bring this to the Indonesian government. And what we realized, the government of Indonesia in those days would not do anything about this. We tried to file some cases for some Indonesians, but the only thing they said was, "okay, give me the name of the agency. We will call the agency." But nothing happened after that. We didn't get any news. And what we realized, there are a lot of government officials in the consulate who also own agencies. So it's like double interest for them. So we realized, no wonder that our call doesn't go anywhere.

Then we decided to call a rally. But everyone was so afraid because, in Indonesia, never once did many of us go to a rally. Never. We had not even said things against anyone or the government. And now we are inviting them to the rally. So we told them, "Okay, for those who are afraid, you can cover up your face with mask or maybe with a scarf so they cannot take our photo." I can understand why they were so afraid because the consulate staff really went face-by-face to take close-up photos. It is like they go in front of you and take

your photo. It is highly intimidating for people like us who never engage, who do not know the law, and had never experienced this kind of thing back in Indonesia. But anyway, we took the challenge of calling that rally and it turned out there were more than 100 Indonesians who participated. The strategy we created was actually to invite other nationalities – the Nepali, Sri Lankan, the Filipino, the local Chinese to come with us. So they will see, “oh, there were so many people, not only Indonesians.” We had 120 people who participated and it was actually on a weekday. So it was the first breakthrough that the people, including myself, had. “Oh yeah, it’s okay. We can have a rally. See we are safe.” The Hong Kong government even said that everything is okay. Nothing happened to us. Our supporters from other countries who were willing to stand behind us to make sure we were safe and secure surrounded us. Since then, people realized, “no, we don’t have to be afraid in Hong Kong.” So then we recruited more people. People signed up for membership, then they joined different training sessions about the law in Hong Kong and we had a lot of education programs after that. The beginning of that breakthrough was in 2001 and, by 2003 people were brave enough to be publicly critical. So that was the first challenge.

If you ask us about what we want through this organization, practically ATKI is our vehicle to voice our rights. We want our rights to be recognized and protected. Unfortunately, it is not the reality that we have. We are being doubly, triply exploited by the employer, the agencies, both here and back home, and the government through their policies. And that is systematic exploitation, structural exploitation. Because of that we know that without strong organization, we will never go anywhere. We will never get what we want as migrant workers. Our rights will never be protected. I think the lesson that we have through ATKI, for example, the unity, the awareness that empowers migrants is the key to everything. Empowered and united migrants are the key to change and to reform the policies, the practice, and the treatment that have not been to our advantage. I think, over the last fifteen years, we were able to claim that as our victory. Without this organization, I cannot imagine how Hong Kong would look. It would be a pitiful place. Every law in Hong Kong is accessible. We have access to justice here. But not everyone has access. Forever under control and being bullied and being cheated by employers and agencies and the government intentionally trying not to educate us about our rights. I think we are the ones who are able to break through all these things put in place by all these people. So far, a lot of people are aware of their basic rights at least in Hong Kong and they are more critical of different practices. If the government is so mean to them, they will tell them that. If the agency is exploitative to them, then they will just fight back.

We also understand there are more structural issues in place that the government refuses to change. One of them is the policy on the placement fee. The high placement fee, which is leading to debt bondage, is still there, legalized by the Indonesian government, implemented by the agency, and we, under the law of Indonesia and even the law in Hong Kong, do not have bargain-

ing power. Especially when our government is telling us, “If you want to work abroad, you must go to the agency. If you don’t go to the agency, you are an illegal migrant worker.” And the agency will tell us, “you have to pay me this much, otherwise I am not going to process you.” So if you are poor and you are desperate, what will you choose? Of course, you will choose high fees. At least, you will have a chance at a better job. Everything is like gambling. “Hopefully, but we are not sure, but let’s try.” The fees are institutionalized, legalized, and enforced by our government on us by forcing us to go to the agency and second do not allow us to have access to justice under the law. That’s why, no matter how much you are cheated by the agency back home, you will never be able to claim that money back. So that’s become a big issue.

Annalee: Can you say a little more about the IMA. Does it have similar goals and strategies?

Eni: The IMA is similar, but at the global scale. It was established in 2001 and 2002 when we began to network with different organizations, grassroots organizations of migrants everywhere. At that time, we began from Asia and then we jumped into Europe, the Middle East, the US, and Canada. What we realized in 2001, for example, because I began my international participation at conferences or engagements in 2001, I realized at that time the voices of migrants were scattered. It is based on your own experiences in different countries. Some say better, some say good, some say so bad. And even the advocacy is very area based. It depends on where you come from. When we tried to find common things among all migrants, which are immigration policies, which is about wages, which is about the right to stay, and the right to settle, it is all very common. But at that time, there was no one unifying all of these things. And many of the advocacy groups at the regional or international level are actually NGOs. They are not migrant workers, but they work with migrants. A lot of the speaking out is on behalf of the migrants. To some extent, it’s still okay. But when it comes to very critical issues like immigration, I myself did not find any critical inputs on that. What I understand is because they are being tied to funding, funding gives them limited scope [with regard to] what to do. “If you want labour rights, you just focus on labour rights. You don’t say other things.” And plus if you have to engage on the issue of refugees, there is almost no one doing that. We only hear the stories of refugees, but we never know what movement and advocacy is being done.

What we realized, we really need a solid and strong international grassroots migrant refugee movement who can speak out loud. The advocacy can still be there in whatever capacity they are assisting; it’s still okay. But the migrants cannot hold our breath while speaking out about the truth on the ground. That means, we have to be ready to face the government and tell them, your policy is doing harm to a lot of us. And that’s how the idea of an international alliance of migrants came about. It took us six or seven years, from 2001 until 2008, to make that happen. We used different conferences to

talk to them, to throw around the idea, and then, by 2006, we worked on the constitution. And then, at that time, Dr. Irene Fernandez of Naginata was part of the whole effort. In 2008, we were ready to formalize and that was when I was elected as the chairperson. So practically, the aim of the IMA, what we said in our motto, is that it is time for us to speak for ourselves. I think that is the principle issue. That's why we are very proud of claiming whatever we say is actually the feelings, the voices, the aspirations of migrant workers and refugees. That's why we actually work more on consolidating our movements on the ground.

Of course, IMA has lots of limitations. One, we don't have human and financial resources. We only rely on conferences to make sure we are still connected. We only rely on Skype and email to stay connected. But so far, we were able to support each other in many ways. And we were able to share all the information despite all these limitations. Whenever there is a government meeting under the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), the anti-GFMD campaign is our main campaign so far outside immigration reform. Because GFMD meets every year. This year, for example, they will meet in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, GFMD is the only body in the world that is actually talking about migrant workers. But, of course, their line is about using migrant workers as cheap labour for the sake of maintaining the globalization agenda. That is what we don't agree with. They are not a formal body; they are just an informal body that formed itself in order to trade in, trade out migrant workers in certain conditions that they agree on. But we say that, it does not include the sense of protection that we want: the right to work, the right to move, the right to settle, but all these rights are not considered as part of the agreement. The tricky part about GFMD is they don't come up with any formal agreement. They only come up with what they call recommendations. So practically, migrant workers have no way to file cases against the GFMD because they are not a legalized or formalized body. They are just an informal regular meeting of governments and stakeholders. So that has become our biggest challenge. Where migrant workers can voice our call.

Of course, I went to the UN. I went a lot to the UN from New York to Thailand. But again, the UN has a lot of bureaucracy and limitations on enforcement. They cannot come up with anything. At the same time, what you see is, while a lot of organizations, even the UN through the Sustainable Development Goals and also the GFMD, keep talking about the protection of migrant workers, you are actually witnessing the enforcement of trade agreements that displace people from their land and allow the use of the labour of migrants on a global scale. There is no accountability from any government to anyone even if they kill their migrant workers. It continues to be intensified, and unbalanced. One is what we call lip service to protection. And the second one is the enforcement of trade agreements that destroy the life of everyone. The number of migrants increase, refugees increase, cheapening us. Even professional migrant workers now become cheap workers under all of this. So that is what we see and it is ironic. What to believe now? Of course, we rely

on the truth of government practice, of trade agreements compared to the UN language of protection. But we see what is happening on the ground based on those agreements. But we don't see any actual implementation of protection based on the UN or the GFMD, whatever agreement on protection that they have.

I have talked to some good people at the UN and they express a lot of disheartenment. They say it is going nowhere. Even people who have very good intentions working within the UN system, they have not lost hope, but wish to change the whole thing. Because that becomes very difficult to the point of almost impossibility. There is also a silencing of everyone in the UN, those who are very progressive, and very critical. The lucky part of me, I can say about our movement, is that we have ourselves. We rely on ourselves for strength. If no one can help, we will find a way of helping ourselves. That is the commitment that we put into IMA or even in our organizing work in different parts of the world.

Annalee: What would you like people in Europe and North America to know about current migration trends and the struggle for migrant rights and justice? What is your message to that audience?

Eni: I think, for the longest time, there has been a culture of ignorance among the recipient countries' communities. They take advantage of the idea that migrant workers are enjoying a better life in their land. They take advantage of the fact that they get cheap services. Government propaganda also deludes them that these migrant workers are lucky because they get a better life in the land; they get better pay and some of them can be reunited with their families. One thing that governments and a lot of people do not recognize is, and governments intend to cover this up, – is the truth – why are these people moving out? I think, in the past, almost no people asked that question; they never ask why do you even come to this place or what happened to your place? This migration is not only individual migration. It's whole community migration. There is a huge number of Filipinos working in Canada and there are a huge number of people from the Middle East moving to Canada as refugees. The problem is, the community doesn't even ask what happened and who caused all these things. Can you just imagine if this happened to your own community and you had to be dispersed, to move out, and settle somewhere else. It would be a big disaster, of course.

I call it an ignorant culture simply because it is not the mistake of the recipient community in the receiving countries. It is not about who is at fault. But rather, it has been made to blind them and to keep them in the dark so they don't even care about the people around them. I think that this has to be changed. It is time for everyone to question why migration, forced migration, forced refugees never stop and are growing. It is a big crisis. All this fire in the neighbourhood will burn you some day. There is fire in your neighbouring country or neighbourhood and you don't help them, it will burn you some day.

So I think this is what happened because when there is war in the Middle East, there is impoverishment in our countries in Asia. All these people will have to move out for safety or for their livelihood. Then where will we go? We still go back to the country that exploits our land that creates the war in our land. Like it or not, that is the only solution. If the number of migrants increases in your own land, there will also be more crisis in your place. If you want to solve all of these problems, you have to go back to the root.

People do not need to migrate if they are secure enough to live in their own land. If the livelihood gives them enough to even live there, they do not need to migrate. I think, I can say, unfortunately, all these things have something to do with the government: government policy on war, government policy on free trade, government policy on services. All this global exploitation has actually been done through these policies. So we are very critical of policies. We believe that becomes the root of such exploitation, impoverishment, and war in certain parts of the world. I think that is the message that I would like to bring to the First World countries. You have to start to care, ask around, and understand people. In Hong Kong, we now have the youth community who actually come to us and ask, "Why are you here? Do you like it here? What happened in your family?" There are more youth who are interested in who we are. After many years, they enjoy the services. Many of them actually had nannies before; they grew up with domestic workers. But never once did they ask them, "what happened?" But now, when they are growing older, they have a lot of experience somewhere else, they start asking. So that is why we are able to create more solidarity between migrants, refugees, and even the local community. And a lot of the fight of migrants is also being supported by the local community. And one of the lessons that we realized, in the past two or three years, because of this intensity of temporariness of migrants. We always lose the job. We have to live. We can come, but it is very difficult. We rely on good employers. And many of us always change employers, sometimes we are lucky and sometimes we are not. Government has now become so stiff. They don't even want to listen to what you are saying at all. In the past, they can still put up a good face with diplomatic answers, but now they don't even want to talk to us. So when we mobilized the local people to speak out, that made the difference. Because now it is the local people who say, "hey you, government, you better attend to what they ask otherwise you will have these things in this land." Something like that. So the local people who are very active in advocacy work become our main allies and supporters to make sure that whatever we call for is going to be accomplished.

Annalee: Is there anything further that you wanted to share?

Eni: The last thing I would like to say is migration is our reality, our everyday reality. Everyone can be migrant workers. All migrant workers are exploited. Now it is no longer exploitation against the unskilled migrants. Now the exploitation is actually targeting the skilled migrant workers. Because while

the government is throwing (out) all of unskilled, they are actually using the skilled migrants to fit into the work of unskilled migrants with their level of pay and treatment. So now instead of recruiting uneducated migrants, they are recruiting educated migrants with very limited rights. And a lot of governments now are removing the right to settle in many countries. At least, they make it so difficult to, almost impossible to apply. This is something that you have to be more aware and more critical of because slowly the government is taking away the right of settlement to all, not only from unskilled, but even from skilled migrants. What they need now is more temporary migrants or cheap migrants and the way they do it is through outsourcing. They work with agencies and governments to make sure you come here for six months and then you go; you come here for one year and then you go. And this becomes contractual. Unfortunately what they need is not only unskilled, but also skilled workers. This is going to be the same treatment that they will impose on all migrant workers. I think that's why, all the more, the people in the receiving countries have to be prepared to take this challenge and beyond that to be more critical of whatever changes are in the government and whatever new thing is around them. One thing that I know from Canada, when I was in Quebec, a moviemaker told me that the government is actually importing six month workers for a rail station project. These workers only work at night; they don't work in the day. And after six months, they are gone. So what is this? Like a ghost worker or invisible workers? This is going to be the new trend and that means that there will be a lot of cases of human trafficking. You just don't know what has happened to them. After they work, they are gone. The people enjoy the new rail station, but what about the people who built all these things.

In Canada, this form of exploitation is intentional. The government works with private agencies to hire all of these people. That's why I call it outsourcing. But they do not want to inform the local people about this because you will say, "why is this so inhuman?" Many of you will complain because you want to enjoy the service, but you don't want to put these workers into a trafficking situation. Because they can be a victim of trafficking. The fact that they are coming from a poor country, they need a job, and there is this opportunity of a six-month job making a railway station, for example, of course, they will take it. But at the end of the day, how much do they really have, their pay, the treatment that they received, and they will be disposed. We just don't know how they are going to be disposed. Maybe they are being terminated, or maybe they are even being killed or thrown somewhere because they are crossing the border. A lot of governments, in Canada, and in Europe, will not show you because if you know this in writing, then there will be a lot of criticism of the government.

What we do now is actually monitor on the ground. And from that ground, we put questions to the government for an inquiry, "we saw this worker, etc." Somehow the government will try to go around and not say what is happening, but when you insist on using the existing law and the right to information,

then one can get more details. That is what we do now even in the legislative council discussion. We try to access the discussion. That's how we know their design, how they try to replace Filipinos, Indonesians and Hong Kong people with Vietnamese, Bangladeshi, Burmese and Chinese domestic workers. From there, we were able to confront that because the local people will be the ones saying, it is not a matter of changing one nationality for another. But making sure all of these people who come here are enjoying the same rights. The idea of changing people means you want to dispose the old one who is expensive, who complains too much with the new one who is powerless. And that is not something you agree on.

Right now, the challenges on the ground have been very intense. The one thing about our organizing work, we keep losing members because of termination. After the global crisis of 2008, there are a lot of things happening on the ground. A lot of deportation through silent means so immigration has become our biggest problem now. Because they are controlling who can stay and who should leave. So that actually affects our number of members. We are trying to find a way to have a cross-border coordination, because they can be moving to Indonesia, Singapore, the Middle East, wherever, so we want to make sure that they stay connected with us wherever they go.

Annalee: Thank you so much, Eni, for speaking to me about your personal and organizing experience.

Eni: No problem. Thank you, Annalee. Keep in touch, okay. Bye!

Annalee: Bye!