



National Alliance for Filipino Concerns

February 5, 2013

To our families and friends,

Greetings of Peace and Justice! We are formally inviting you to the ***Solidarity and Fact-Finding Mission in New Orleans, Louisiana on February 22-25, 2013*** in support of the Grand Isle Shipyard Filipino workers and the families of the victims of the November 16, 2012 Black Elk oil platform explosion.

The *Justice for Grand Isle Shipyard Filipino Workers Campaign* is initiated and sponsored by the Philippine Forum (Phil-Forum) in New York, the Fellowship for Filipino Migrants (FFM) in Chicago, the Filipino Community Center (FCC) in San Francisco, the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (NAFCON), the International Migrants Alliance-USA (IMA-USA), and the National Guestworkers Alliance (NGA), which is based in New Orleans. These convening organizations of the campaign hope that you can join us later this month. Just off of the Louisiana Gulf Coast a grave injustice has occurred, and it is there that we must gather to demonstrate our strong support for the brave migrant guestworkers who are now standing up against discrimination, trafficking, wage theft, slavery, and fraud affecting hundreds of Filipino workers.

SUMMARY OF THE GRAND ISLE SHIPYARD SITUATION:

Conditions of Filipino Migrant Guestworkers

Highly skilled Filipino workers were trafficked by Grand Isle Shipyards (GIS) from the Philippines with promises of visas, wages above \$16/hour, and quality jobs as welders, scaffolders, and pipe-fitters. Most of these promises were not kept for the GIS workers in Louisiana. The reality of the situation for the Filipino migrant workers amounted to modern-day slavery along the Gulf Coast in the American South.

GIS profited handsomely by violating the basic rights of these Filipino migrant workers. The workers were paid just about \$5/hour for working 10-14 hours/day, 6-7 days/week, sometimes up to 4 months straight with no overtime pay. Workers also experienced ridiculous deductions for housing ranging from \$1000 to \$3000 per month for a bunkbed, and the company fraudulently stole their tax refunds.

Migrant workers were housed in cramped quarters (10x10 ft. rooms with 4-6 workers per room) , not allowed the freedom to leave the GIS compound, and were even restricted from practicing their religious faith. Workers were subjected to a 10pm curfew, bunkhouse lockdowns, constant surveillance from the 23 cameras around the bunkhouse, and restriction of their movement and communication with the outside world, even while they were not working. If they did not follow these rules, they were threatened with termination and deportation back to the Philippines.

Black Elk Explosion

GIS put the Filipinos to work on oil-rig platforms that were severely unsafe. On November 16, 2012 three Filipino workers died when the Black Elk Energy platform exploded, and three others were seriously injured. The incident brought increased attention to the practice of American companies hiring foreign guestworkers for potentially hazardous and unsafe jobs and the abuses and exploitation that often come from such arrangements.

To show our support for the more than 100 Filipino migrant guestworkers who have now come forward to stand up against their recruiters and employers, we've planned the following Solidarity and Fact-Finding Mission for February 22-25 in the New Orleans area:

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Lodging: Houses of Workers & Local Families in Louisiana; Local New Orleans Hotels (non-sponsored)
Airport: Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY)

Friday, February 22

All day Arrival of Delegates, Welcome, and Orientation
5:00 PM Visits to Homes of Victims, Their Families, and Current and Former GIS Filipino Workers

Saturday, February 23

9:00 AM Delegates Prepare
12:00-3:00 PM Workers Meeting - Filipinos Against Slavery & Trafficking (FAST)
4:00-6:00 PM Public Forum and Sharing with the Workers & Delegates
7:00-9:00 PM Freedom Concert and Cultural Program

Sunday, February 24

9:00 AM Delegates Prepare
11:00 AM Congregate in New Orleans
12:00-2:00 PM Caravan from New Orleans to Lafitte at Manila Village
3:00 PM Solidarity Mobilization and Program at Manila Village
5:00 PM Dinner Reception

Monday, February 25

Possible Delegations to GIS and Elected Representatives
Departure of Delegates

**** Schedule of activities subject to adjustment as needed ****

During this Mission to New Orleans and beyond, we are committed to building community and worker power to seek justice for the GIS Filipino workers and to ensure this injustice never happens again. Please, join us Feb 22-25 and visit www.j4gisfilipinoworkers.wordpress.com for more information and for other concrete ways that you can support this campaign.

To confirm your attendance, please contact the closest NAFCON Regional Coordinator in your area (<http://nafconusa.org/contact/>), or contact Anne Beryl Corotan at (516) 901-1832 or by email at j4gisfilipinoworkers@gmail.com. We hope to see you there!

In Solidarity,



Terrence A. Valen
NAFCON National President
On behalf of the Justice For GIS Filipino Workers Campaign,
National Coordinating Committee and Convening Organizations

