



February 5, 2008

WAC, recipient of Justice & Peace Award

05 February 2008, Rosario, Cavite — Impressed by the organization’s continuous advocacy for the rights and welfare of the labor sector, the Workers Assistance Center (WAC) was chosen by the Tji Hak-Soon Justice and Peace Foundation in South Korea as the recipient of its 2008 Justice and Peace Award.

“We were very impressed by your organization that has been continuously fighting for the rights and welfare of [day] laborers, no matter what hardships your organization has undergone,” said Msgr. Kim Byung-Sang, chair of the foundation, in his letter to WAC on January 28, 2008.

WAC is the 11th Justice and Peace awardee of the foundation since it was founded in 1997. The award consist of US\$ 10,000 and a medal which shall be formally presented to WAC in a ceremony to be held in Seoul, South Korea on March 10, 2008. WAC’s Executive Director Rev. Fr. Jose Dizon will accept the award on behalf of the WAC’s Board of Directors and staff.

The award is a fitting tribute to the more than twelve years of WAC’s unwavering advocacy for the rights and welfare of the Filipino working class, said WAC’s Chairperson Bishop Ephraim S. Fajutagana of the Philippine Independent Church.

He further expressed that “the principles practiced by WAC for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of workers who are exploited, manipulated, harrassed and exposed to various forms of human rights violations is worth of the prestigious award given by the foundation.”

The WAC is not only honored by the award. It is also deeply inspired by this kind of recognition coming from a Korean foundation whose own compatriots investing at the Cavite economic zones are the most handled cases by the WAC in terms of labor rights violations.

With this award, our late beloved Chairperson Bishop Alberto Ramento, who was murdered in 2006, had already been provided a share of his justice even not from the rule of law but by way of recognition for what he had fought and died for as one of the staunchest advocate of the workers rights.

The Justice and Peace Award is presented annually by the Tji Hak-Soon Justice and Peace Foundation to individuals and organizations who fight for justice, peace, and human rights even in the face of an oppressive system and at the great risk of their lives.

The Tji Hak-Soon Justice and Peace Award is the only international human rights award in South Korea that is entirely funded by the public to commemorate the life, works and beliefs of the late Most Reverend Bishop Daniel Tji Hak-soon who stood and fought for social justice and democracy during the military dictatorships in South Korea.

It is sponsored by the Tji Hak-soon Justice and Peace Foundation and supported by the Korea Broadcasting System (KBS), Pyonghwa Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), the Hankyore newspaper, the Catholic Times, and the Pyonghwa newspaper.



Aside from WAC, the other ten past awardees of the Justice and Peace Award since 1997 were as follows: Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) (1997); Raphael Clinic – a medical outreach project for migrant workers in Korea, 1998; Ms. Rosaline Acosta, Bangladesh human rights worker, 1999; Ms. Ibu Sulami, Indonesian human rights worker, 2000; National Commission for Justice and Peace of Pakistan, 2001; Peoples Action of Revise Unjust Status of Forces Agreement between South Korea and USA, 2002; Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples in Hong Kong, 2003; Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association in Burma, 2004; Ms. Kathi Zellweger, director of International Cooperation for Caritas Hong Kong, 2005; and Dr. Salai Tun Than, exile from Burma, 2006.

The Workers Assistance Center was established in 1995 in Rosario, Cavite to empower, assist, and defend the workers against all forms of human and labor rights violations for the realization of their socio-economic well-being. The WAC in its advocacy focused on three core rights of the workers – the rights to free association, strike and other collective actions, and collective bargaining. The Center has offices in Cavite and Batangas Provinces.

In a related development, **WAC was among the three organizations honored by the Canadian Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) for the year 2007 as “Heroes of the Anti-Sweatshop Movement” in recognition of “the heroes of ... the grassroots labour, women’s and human rights organizations that defend the rights of the young women and men who labour behind the brand-name labels”.**

The Honor was a recognition of WAC's resolute advocacy of the workers right to form unions and fight for their basic rights and welfare notably for higher wages, better working conditions and respect for labor and democratic rights.

MSN took particular note of WAC's assistance to the striking workers of Chong Won Fashions, Inc. amidst unrelenting harassment and violent attacks on the striking workers by the police and security forces of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) and the company. Chong Won is a Korean-owned garment factory located at the Cavite Export Processing Zone in Rosario, Cavite that produced garments for a US Giant retailer Wal-Mart.

The campaign for the striking workers of Chong Won Fashions was the first time ever that WalMart admitted to a violation on the workers' right to organize in one of the factories in its supply chain. The campaign was a collaboration between the MSN, the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF), the WAC, and the Nagkakaisang Manggagawa ng Chong Won (United Workers of Chong Won), the workers' union.

The Maquila Solidarity Network is a labor and women's rights organization that supports and works in solidarity with organizations to uphold the right of the workers for better wages and working conditions on the belief that manufacturers and retailers must held accountable for the working conditions under which their goods are produced.

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