

The Stairway Foundation Pushes for Improved Recognition of Children's Rights at International Migration Conferences.

The international development sector of migration is not typically an arena where Stairway puts on its advocacy gloves. However, over recent years it has become apparent that the rights of the child in this sector have been increasingly neglected. The rights of the child within migration has therefore caught our attention as being an area where Stairway can both share experiences in abuse prevention training and play a part in influencing policy reform. By stroke of luck, two of the world's key conferences on migration and human rights were being held in the Philippines this year providing Stairway with convenient access and ability to make its concerns heard and also to network amongst organizations with similar mandates. The International Conference on Gender, Migration and Development (ICGMD) and the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) Civil Society Days, held in September and October respectively, saw broad international representation and provided a chance to give voice to the children affected by the Philippines' high rates of internal and external migration.

Stairway took two particular issues to Manila and already we have seen a positive outcome from our participation. September's ICGMD was held with the intent of producing a gender focused document for presentation at the GFMD's government forum where the representatives of over one hundred governments would be in attendance. At the ICGMD, alongside UNICEF and Save the Children UK in particular, Stairway made the call for the improved government provision of services focused on abuse prevention and trauma support for children of migration related broken families, and for a closer collaboration with civil society organizations able to provide such services. Furthermore, the unfortunate persistence of child sexual abuse within such families was acknowledged and it was asked that future psychosocial support provisions would have the capacity to accommodate child sexual abuse prevention and counseling alongside other vital services suggested. It was therefore rewarding to find that in the conference's resulting document, titled "The Manila Call for Action", Stairway's contributed issues and recommendations were recognized and would be presented to not only the government of the Philippines, but to all governments represented at the GFMD.

At the GFMD, an annual conference established by the U.N. in 2005 to provide a forum whereby the policy recommendations for migrant rights would be collectively and formally heard, we changed tack slightly to focus our contributions on the prevalence of child trafficking within internal migration patterns. More specifically we called for increased government attention in targeting 'demand'; those employing/exploiting children in formal and informal labor, and those who provide an avenue for the trafficking and exploitation of children such as the adult sex industry. Much to the chagrin of some workshop participants, this call also included targeting foreign tourists who keep the adult sex industry afloat and also contribute to the normalization of commercialized sex in the Philippines - which all too often includes children. While we will have to wait for conference publications to see whether these contributions actually gained much traction, they nevertheless received the endorsement of long time anti child trafficking advocates Visayan Forum.

Children's rights are often overlooked in migration literature, migrant rights advocacy and resulting migration policy. But pleasingly this year's events revealed that the child is becoming ever more a focus for civil society organizations working to maximize positive outcomes from a social phenomenon all too often a result of political persecution and economic poverty. Lets just hope that governments worldwide, and particularly here in the Philippines, will now also set their sights on the child when forming migration related policy and support.

See the "Manila Call to Action" at:

