

United Methodist Women Forum Promotes Migrant Women's Rights



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▲ Joycelyn Gill-Campbell (left) from Domestic Workers United and Catherine Tactaquin (right) from National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Migrant Rights International were speakers at the "Women, Migration and Global Turmoil" workshop, sponsored by United Methodist Women, for the 54th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations' New York City headquarters, March 1. Photo by Felipe Castillo.

By [Michelle Scott*](#)

Migrant women's vulnerability to exploitation and need for international protections dominated a panel discussion co-sponsored by United Methodist Women at its Church Center for the United Nations in New York City, March 1. Women and men from around the world and local United Methodist Women members attended the "Women, Migration and Global Turmoil" forum convened as a parallel event to the 54th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations' New York City headquarters, March 1-12.

"Our priority is to remind policymakers that labor is not a commodity. You can't move people like products," said Gemma Adaba, the International Trade Union Confederation's U.N. representative.

Oftentimes the only jobs available to migrant women are positions as domestic workers. In many countries, including the United States, housekeepers, nannies and other domestic workers do not have the same protections as employees of a business.

Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, organizational coordinator for Domestic Workers United, is working

through the union to establish a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in New York to ensure some standards for work. "I have to remind legislators that this is an issue of humanity and not politics," she said. A migrant woman and former domestic worker, Ms. Gill-Campbell organizes other migrant domestic workers to fight for their rights.

Ms. Gill-Campbell shared some common stories of women migrants -- how they can be summarily dismissed, denied days off or forced to sleep on the floor. "Slavery has not been abolished; it has been camouflaged," she said.

Women migrate mostly for the sake of their families. More and more women are migrating with their families because of climate change. Often people who are displaced by climate change belong to a marginalized group at the top of the "pyramid of abuse," explained Cathi Tactaquin, executive director of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. She illustrated how people who are pushed out of their homelands because of climate change are most likely also forced out because of unjust and environmentally irresponsible systems.

International women participating in the forum shared examples of migration in their regions, demonstrating that migration is a global phenomenon with common themes of exploitation and official harassment.

The session culminated with sharing ways women can organize to put migrant women's concerns on the global stage. Ms. Tactaquin noted the need to ratify the Convention on Rights of Migrants, which was formed in 1990 and ratified by only 40 nations since then. This year will see a global push for participation by all nations, including the United States.

Ms. Gill-Campbell introduced a global campaign for a domestic workers' at the International Labor Organization that would set global standards. Ms. Adaba said fulfilling U.N. Millennium Development Goal 8 -- to develop a global partnership for development -- would help poor nations develop and prevent the need for migration.

A new report, "[The Exploitation of Undocumented Migrant Women in the Workplace](#)," was released at the meeting. It features findings during the People's Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights in Athens, Greece, Nov. 4, 2009.

For more information on immigration or to see the full report, go to www.umwmission.org and click on the "Immigration" link at the bottom of the homepage. Also, join the immigration online community at www.umwonline.org.

***Michelle Scott is a freelance writer and former communications director for the United Methodist Committee on Relief.**

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The Purpose of United Methodist Women

The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.