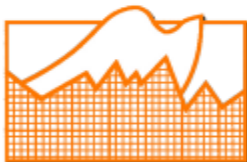




## Bringing Migrants' Voices to the GFMD: International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) A Narrative Report



BY:



**IBON**  
INTERNATIONAL

## Introduction

**“For many years, many have spoken on our behalf. This time, we will speak for ourselves.” This was the resounding voice of the migrants.**

On October 28 to 30 this year, more than 214 representatives coming from 152 migrant organizations and other groups in 35 countries gathered in Manila to participate in the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) as an alternative event to the meeting of the inter-government-led Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

Leaders from grassroots organizations of migrants and other sectors in the regions of Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Europe, North America, Africa and Latin America talked about the issues affecting them, issues which were not tackled at the official meeting of the GFMD. These issues ranged from labor export policy, impact of remittances, state exactions, government accountability, human rights violations, racism and xenophobia, health rights, communication rights to strategies in the meeting the challenges ahead and in building the international migrants’ movement against the neoliberal agenda of the GFMD.



The IAMR was organized by a steering group led by the International Migrant Alliance (IMA), when the latter resolved to be the main organizer at its Founding Assembly in June 2008. IMA is the first-ever global alliance of more than a hundred grassroots associations, organizations, unions, networks and alliances of migrant workers, immigrants, refugees and displaced peoples.

The steering group is composed of IMA, Migrante International, IBON International, and Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM). Budgeting and financial management was made by IBON. Most of the expenses were individually generated by own travel expenses by most migrant participants. Cooperating groups like Asia Pacific Forum of Women in Law and Development (APWLD) and CARAM-Asia also supported by spending for their delegations and workshops.

The IAMR did not just hold a conference or an event. The conference and the different activities held were the beginnings of a long engagement which the IAMR developed in the course of the struggle for migrants rights and genuine human development. In the IAMR gathering, migrants from all over the world spoke. The Migrant Declaration made clear its position to the GFMD: No to forced migration. No to labor export. Create jobs back home. End poverty. Defend and advance our rights. Nothing less. This report will echo the voices of migrants.



## I. Processes leading to the GFMD and the IAMR

1. IBON International wanted to engage in the GFMD process through the latter's CSO dialogue and hopefully its official session with the aim and hope that relevant core issues of migrants be brought to the GFMD's attention and agenda.

- a. As the CSO dialogue had its own process, IBON underwent a series of applications in order to participate in the process. There was only one consultation in Manila last August which we attended. After a whole day discussion, organizers of the CSO dialogue announced the selection of those who will be part of the official participants in the CSO dialogue. IBON was not selected. Those selected were individuals coming from the religious sector, NGOs with little track record of advocacy for migrants rights, representatives from recruitment and manning agencies.
- b. Many of our partners and networks underwent similar experiences – they sent applications to participate. Some were allowed to attend consultations. However, Migrante International (MI), International Migrant Alliance (IMA), CARAM-Asia and many other migrant organizations that we know were not even informed what happened to their applications.
- c. An invitation to the GFMD and the OECD for a dialogue. No response was received by either of them.



2. IBON International participated in the founding assembly of the International Migrant Alliance (IMA) in June 14-16, 2008. It is an associate member of IMA. A resolution was passed for IMA to be the main organizer of IAMR and to hold dialogues and fora on the GFMD in their respective areas.



Shortly after the founding assembly, IBON International was invited by the IMA-ICB (International Coordinating Body), the highest policy-making body of IMA in-between general assembly, to discuss about plans on the GFMD and the IAMR.

3. There was also a workshop sponsored by the Study Commission on Migrant & Refugee Concerns by International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) which was attended by more than 50 migrant organizations regarding the GFMD. IBON International spoke as a resource person to this forum. Participants also passed a resolution to support and participate in the IAMR and to hold dialogues with GFMD officials and organizers of the GFMD process in their respective areas.



4. IBON International was invited and participated in two international conferences in Madrid, Spain last September: a) the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Social Forum on Migration (WSFM) in Rivas Vaciamadrid, Spain on September 11-14, 2008; and b) the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Democracy and Cooperation in Caceres, Spain on September 15-18, 2008.



a. In the WSFM, new contacts were made with Latin American migrant organizations, three of which sent their representatives to participate in the IAMR. It was also in the WSFM that initial contact with Mr. Jorge Bustamante, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, was made. Persistent follow-ups and communications with him paved the way for him to speak and attend the IAMR and other activities in Manila.



b. Other rights-based organizations were contacted at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Democracy and Cooperation in Caceres, Spain. A resolution was also passed by the conference in support of the IAMR and in the struggle for the human rights of migrants all over the world.

5. Support from other networks were also clinched, ranging from actual mobilization of migrants and members, co-sponsorship of workshops, and mobilization of networks. These include the following: Asia Pacific Forum of Women in Law and Development (APWLD) Task Force on Labor and Migration, Caram-Asia, Asian Students Association (ASA), World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)-Asia Pacific, Reality of Aid Network (ROA), Asia Rural Women Human Rights Council, etc.

6. An initial primer and powerpoint presentation were made as educational materials in the awareness-building process on the GFMD. Migrant organizations in different countries used these in their discussions and educational fora.

7. In cooperation with IMA and MI, a campaign plan was drafted on how to engage the GFMD nationally and internationally. This took a process of consultations with member organizations of IMA and MI, holding skype conferences in July. Agreements were reached in August. Dubbed as “Ten Days to Shake the GFMD”, the campaign will hold series of engagements and actions raising current migrant issues to governments and the GFMD, starting with IAMR’s launch on August 17<sup>th</sup>. The culmination of the plan featured series of daily actions from different countries for ten (10) consecutive days from October 19 till October 29<sup>th</sup>. In early October, consultations resulted in an agreement to stage a “Zero Remittance Day” on October 29<sup>th</sup>.



## II. The International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR)

1. The IAMR which opened on October 28th gathered 214 official participants from 152 organizations in 35 countries. There were more than 100 guests coming church leaders, people from the labor movement, women's movement, teachers, health workers, families of migrants, students, government employees, lawyers, and others.



2. The conference was graced by Prof. Jorge Bustamante, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, a representative of Mayor Alfredo Lim, Manila City Mayor, and progressive parliamentarians in the Philippines.



*UNSR meets IBON International Director Tony Tujan Jr.*



*Tony Tujan Jr. having a little chat with Rep. Satur Ocampo, Mayor Lim's representative, and Ramon Bultron (APMM)*

What UNSR Bustamante said in the IAMR opening became the news of the day. He said:



“... Economic development is not the responsibility of migrants. Economic development is the responsibility of the governments of the member states of the United Nations that are behind the organization of this global conference.

... Remittances are owned by the migrant workers and nobody else. States and governments don't have any right in modifying the will of migrants in the destinations of their own monies, remittances being for the migrants, not to the politicians. These notions are very important, because if we don't abide by them, then it becomes a means for the government to suggest that the responsibility for economic development is not theirs but the migrant workers.”



*Forum with Latin American Ambassadors  
with UNSR Jorge Bustamante*



*Senate President Manny Villar*



*Sen. Villar speaking*

3. UNSR Bustamante had several schedules prior to the opening of IAMR's conference, such as:

- a. A forum/meeting with parliamentarians, migrants and Latin American ambassadors and consuls on Oct. 27. This was hosted by then Philippine Senate President Manny Villar.
- b. A forum with migrant victims of abuses and violations, together with their families on Oct. 25.
- c. A dinner forum with health workers in the Philippines on Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>.



4. There were eleven (11) workshops organized, which include the following:

**a. Workshop 1: Fighting for the Rights of Migrants**



*Speakers: Eni Lestari (IMA, HongKong), Salimah Valiani (Canada), Jose Gonzales (FIOB, USA)*

“Our organizations and alliances are our shield and weapons against attacks on our rights and general wellbeing. It is our mass movement that delivers us from exploitation and oppression.” - IMA Chairperson Eni Lestari

“If labor is in demand, all rights (is) due to anyone filling the job. The right to work, right to transfer employment, right to settle should be recognized. The right to free association is an underpinning in the defense to migrants rights. The “right to settle” includes the “right to settle”: 1) Right to family reunification; 2) Right to all formal legal protections in country of destination; and 3) Full mobility rights.” - Prof. Salimah Valiani, Canada

“Communication rights include the right to participate in one's own culture and language, the right to enjoy the benefits of science, the right to information, the right to education, the right to participation in governance, the right to privacy, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to the protection of one's reputation, and more.” – Jazminda Lumang-Buncan, IBON Foundation



*Workshop 1 participants*

*Workshop 1 participants listening to presentations*

## **b. Workshop 2: State Exaction and Government Accountability**

As the Philippines is seen as a model of labor export, the pro-people confederation of government employees criticized the government's LEP. COURAGE President Ferdinand Gaité has this to say: "Overseas employment is the single highest employment generator for the country. ...The national coffer is raking billions of pesos from various fees paid by OFWs in relation to their overseas employment. This means that services for OFWs are revenue centers of the government.... Exploitation and countless corruption issues by state officials in the embassies, labor offices and other government offices including private sector profiteers have been raised by migrants who have labored under extreme conditions."

John Monterona, Migrante Middle east Coordinator, lambasted the Philippine government's extortion on migrant workers: "State exaction is the legalized form of extortion extracting huge amounts out of migrant workers' sweat and blood."



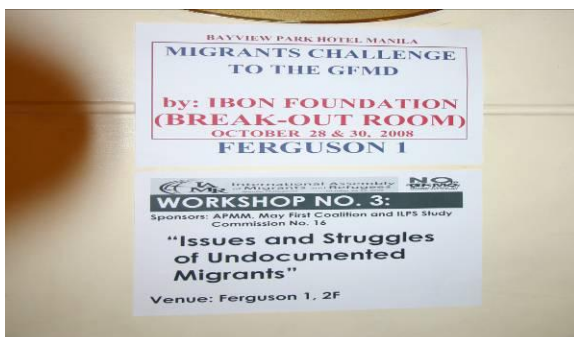
*Speaker Ferdinand Gaité of COURAGE*



*Workshop 2 participant*

## **c. Workshop 3: Issues and Struggles of Undocumented Workers**

The panel of speakers for this workshop recounted the different issues and struggle of undocumented workers in their areas. Carlos Canales of the May 1<sup>st</sup> Coalition in USA revealed that "Undocumented migrants in the US are called Wetbacks because most of them swim across borders and arrive in the US with their backs wet.... House Resolution 4437 authored by Sen. Sesebrenner is aimed at deportation of undocumented migrants. The bill, though says that being an undocument migrant is not a crime. It is considered a civil violation."





*Workshop 3 Speaker Jose Gonzales*

Workshop participants resolved to campaign on the issues of undocumented workers. But since they could be put in danger, advocates can initiate the campaign. They also see the need to be creative as advocacy work should be grounded on the undocumented themselves.



**d. Workshop 4: LEP and Remittances**



Workshop keynote Tony Tujan Jr., Director of IBON International, analyzed remittances like this: “Macroeconomic remittance dependency is not sustainable and subject to exogenous factors in labor deployment. It is illusory investment being wage income for consumption and household sustenance. Its consumer character, does not provide sufficient financial base for industrial investment production unstable and unbalanced economic development

*Workshop 4 Speaker Tony Tujan Jr. discussing how financial dependency on remittance is not sustainable*



*Workshop 4 ongoing documentation*



*Workshop 4 participants*

**e. Workshop 5: Legal Mechanism of Terror and the Struggle of Migrants and Refugees**



*Guney (L) translating for Ufuk Berdan (R)*



*Participants of Workshop 5*

**f. Workshop 6: Labor and Migration: Issues and Challenges to the Labor Movement**

Trade Unions in various countries have raised concerns on these policy dialogues. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and global unions for instance maintained that the trade union movement should be an integral part of these high level dialogues and that discussion on migration and development should be fundamentally anchored on humanrights.

At the shopfloor level, local and national unions in receiving countries have long began looking at migrant workers not as competitors but as integral part of the local workforce, except that there are many hurdles in bringing the local and migrant workers together.

Some global unions also posit that key to protecting migrant workers is to organize them within the existing unions, and that migrant workers should not be encouraged to set up their own union outside of the existing established unions particularly in receiving countries. They think it is going to weaken rather than strengthen the trade union movement.

What is apparent in the whole discourse is that trade unions, labour organizations, workers' support organizations or institutions and/or individual labour rights advocates have responsibilities not only in addressing the gross abuses and exploitation of migrant workers, but also in addressing the fundamental factors that continue to force workers to migrate.

Thus, the trade union movement has and must play a crucial role not only in the defense and promotion of migrant workers rights, but also in addressing the factors that force workers to migrate despite many risks.

It is in this context that the workshop was organized. Workshop resolutions include the following: a) Strengthen the linkages of trade unions and labor organizaions with migrant organizations in the host countries and sending countries; and to b) campaign to consider



domestic work as work, for it to be accorded protection of labor rights, specifically one day day-off with pay per week.



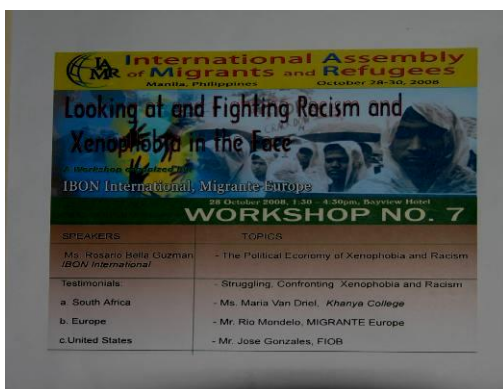
*Daisy Arago (CTUHR) doing the introductions*



*Workshop 6 participants*

### **g. Workshop 7: Looking at and Fighting Racism and Xenophobia in the Face**

Xenophobia or the fear or intense dislike of the stranger or foreigner, has been described as irrational (phobia being the operative word rather than hatred). It is however, more than this. It is a social phenomenon that has emerged from the crisis of imperialism and affected not only people of diverse cultures and underdeveloped countries but also the migrants, specially in these times of global financial and economic crisis.



*Speakers Jose Gonzales (FIOB, USA) and Maria van Driel (Khanya College, S. Africa)*

“Xenophobia and racism have become noticeable in countries that have received large numbers of migrants, whether as permanent or temporary residents and workers or as asylum-seekers. In those countries, the migrants have become the targets in internal disputes about national identity.... The ongoing Global Forum on Migration and Development hosted by the Philippine government only reflects this predicament, and so far sending governments have only made the appeal for the receiving governments to respect basic human rights and workers’ protection and remains unquestioning on the unjust global economic system. Challenges are great, especially for migrant organizations and advocates to expose the abuses of monopoly capital, the ferocity of its crisis and the role of migrant work. Through education, action and organization, this paper tiger called imperialism, can be defeated. Only then shall xenophobia, racism and other forms of human rights abuses be truly eradicated.” – Rosbee Guzman, IBON Foundation

Workshop participants recommended the following:

- Need to identify the root causes of why racism & xenophobia exists in our communities, because racism is not an inherent characteristic within people. It arrives as a consequence of the prevailing economic systems (i.e. capitalism) we have which cannot provide for people – and uses and feeds from these differences (color, gender, caste, religion, etc.) to divide the people.
- Need to strategize for solidarity work given that X & R are being used as divide and rule instruments.
- Have an honest internal discussion, criticism and self-criticism, and train/educate within our own movements on anti-racism.
- Need to widely project issues/cases of victims of racism (racial crimes) – such as in the hate crime killing of Jose Luis Ramirez in Shanendoah, PA. Need to project these in different media, establish information database, etc.
- Assert the rights and principles that have already been won by working peoples through the centuries such as the Universal Declaration of HR and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, and which are now under attack from ruling classes /neoliberal globalization and the ‘war on terror’.
- Campaign for the ratification by the sending and receiving countries of the International Convention of Migrants’ Rights.
- Strengthen the global movement to protect migrant workers’ rights.
- Come up with studies to look into more restrictive, discriminatory and racist immigration policies of receiving governments and come up with plans of action



*Workshop 7 Speakers Rosario Bella Guzman (IBON Foundation) and Rio Mondelo (Migrante-Europe, Holland)*



*Workshop participants listening to inputs*

#### **h. Workshop 8: Global Migration and Education: Dissecting the Links and Impact of Globalization on Education, the Youth and the Family**

One of the common issues raised in this workshop is this: The fundamental value and objective of education which is liberative and emancipative for all has been changed to fulfill the needs of the capitalist imperialist. This is due to an education policy introduced by colonialist and practiced until now. This has caused the privatization and commercialization of education where only the elite class in society can afford education.

Moreover, governments instead of playing their fundamental role to education their citizens have taken the sides of the capitalist imperialist hence gives minimal concerns and allocation of resources. This is reflected in the continuous reduction in the governments’ budget allocation for education.



It was concluded in this workshop that neo-liberal policies on education are enforcing the agenda of globalization including forced migration. Some of the recommendations that the workshop participants raised included the following:

1. Promote and develop Alternative Education through various channels, structures and framework. Channel these through the existing international organizations of migrants and their families aimed at educating them of their rights and understanding the root causes of forced migration and the problems in their respective countries.
2. Release or publish materials on migrants' rights, thus opening the venue for alternative education.
3. Receiving countries of migrants to acknowledge migrant worker unions and for student organizations to accept foreign students with out discrimination.



*Rey Asis (ASA) giving the workshop introduction*



*Workshop 8 speakers: (R to L) Robyn Rodriguez (USA), Ken Leonard Ramos (Anakbayan, Philippines), Kane Te Manakura (Maori, NZ)*

#### **i. Workshop 9: Health, Globalization, and Migration: Issues and Struggles of Migrant Health Workers (Case Studies)**



*(R) Naida Castro (NAFCON, USA) discussing the Sentosa case*



*Participants of Workshop 9*

Workshop 9 tackled a lot of issues, foremost of which is the dearth of health workers in labor-sending countries and its impact on the health care of the people. Another issue is the realization that the issues confronted by healthcare workers abroad are directly linked to the social problems in the sending countries.

Some of the workshop resolutions include: 1) Educate & organize the people, nurses & health care workers to fight for their rights including the right to health; 2) Promote the rights & welfare of all health workers & professionals, including creation of job opportunities, stop mass lay-off and contractualization of health workers, and work for just wages, benefits, safe working conditions and security of tenure for all health workers; 3) Defend and uphold the rights of migrants including health workers by conducting alternative pre-employment, pre-departure orientation regarding migrants rights, and pushing for the recognition of the credentials of trained professionals by the receiving countries.; 4) Stop commodification of health workers & professionals and scrap Labor Export Policy (LEP), and 5) Expose & oppose unjust & exploitative bilateral & multi-lateral trade agreements affecting health and migrants(i.e. GATS, JPEPA).

Specific Actions were also resolved, such as: 1) Support specific campaigns, such as Canada campaign for access to health coverage for migrants (e.g. abolition of 3 month waiting period for health coverage) & workmen's health & safety, compensation in the case of accidents & illness in work place, and continue support for the Sentosa victims; and 2) Organize an international conference of migrant health workers (2009).

#### **j. Workshop 10: Women Migration: The Empowerment Myth**



(L) TASAT's Hsia Hsiao Chuan speaking about the plight of foreign brides.



(RtoL): Speakers Lina Cahuasqui (Ecuador), Natividad Obeso (Argentina), Rahela Rabani (Bangladesh)



Elvira Olayo (Mexico) speaking while Eni Lestari (IMA), Emmi de Jesus (Gabriela), Prof. Hsia Hsiao Chuan (Taiwan) listen



Workshop 10 participants listening intently



Workshop 10 resolutions include the following:

1. Create international tribunal for refugees specifically on the issue women refugees
2. Come-up with a global campaign on trafficking of women that would challenge the various multilateral and bilateral mechanisms and platforms, like the ASEAN, UN, and others on the issue
3. Make use of US Anti-Trafficking Act to expose issues of trafficking in home country.
4. Campaign for the elimination of all U.S. Military Bases and Agreements
5. Lobby that anti-trafficking laws in the various countries are implemented and used to monitor trafficking case
6. NGOs from host and sending countries should lobby with sending governments to provide help to victims of trafficking even in host countries where they do not have any agreements
7. Come-up with a study on the use of various cultural exchange programs as a way to traffic women
8. Conduct education work for both men and women migrants regarding machismo
9. Come-up with an education program for women migrants on women's issues
10. Lobby for the inclusion of a topic on migration and the situation of refugees on the curriculum of schools
11. Have migrants women join the international campaign for the elimination of violence against women on November 25
12. Come up with an internationally coordinated campaign among migrant women for March 8, international women's day

**k. Workshop 11: Seafarers: Issues and Challenges in Organizing and Empowerment**



*(R) Atty. Edwin de la Cruz (ISAC) and Bobby Tuazon (middle)*



*Workshop participants, mostly returned seafarers*

Common issues and concerns on seafarers which were raised in the workshop are as follows: 1) blacklisting of seafarers who fight for their rights; 2) prevalence of FOCs (flags of convenience) shortchange seafarers wages and benefits and only benefits the the flagship state, manning agencies, training centers, and the government who receive tax-cuts and non-strict labor laws; 3) state exactions; 4) policies that maneuver and shortchange benefits accrued to seafarers and their families; and more.

Recommendations by workshop participants include: 1) Support for the ratification of the International Maritime Labor Convention; 2) Hold a summit to further discuss, analyze, and form a stand regarding different issues; 3) Have a voice in the Congress and Senate; and 4) Conduct a study to audit the money being contributed to the AMOSUP, OWWA, and other agencies.

5. After keynote and workshop inputs and resolutions, the Migrant Declaration was drafted and concluded. Said Declaration is attached herewith.

6. The Migrants' Speak-out, an outdoor activity was organized, coinciding with the culmination of the “Ten-Day to Shake GFMD” and the call for “Zero Remittance Day”. More than three thousand five hundred (3500) people, including IAMR participants marched to the streets near the site of the GFMD. Photos of said activity are found below.



*Migrants from all over the world gathered in Manila to say “NO to GFMD. No to Labor Export. No to Forced Migration.*



*Health workers say No to Labor Export*







Eni Lestari, IMA Chairperson, in the forefront of the Migrants' Speak Out



A child of a migrant worker, holding a placard in solidarity with IAMR. Placard says "Create jobs back home, no to LEP"









7. Media projection-wise, there were 112 landings on print (8 times on Philippine Daily Inquirer with editorial); 12 landings on wires; 42 TV news coverages with at least 4 live guestings; 12 radio interviews; more than 40 internet landings. Details of this can be found in the attached file: IAMR Projections\_2008\_report.doc.

8. On the whole, the gathering of migrants and the campaign that it launched concerning the GFMD had the following breakthroughs:

- a. It has engaged the GFMD and governments, especially the Philippines. Prior to the gathering, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), aired in a news conference its appeal for the IAMR to forego the “Zero Remittance Day”. It even invited IAMR organizers to attend the GFMD. But as this was followed-up, no response was made, exposing its insincerity for the democratic participation of the most important stakeholder in the issue that they have been discussing – the genuine migrant organizations. This proved once again the undemocratic character of the GFMD process.
- b. The gathering has also exposed the anti-migrant nature of the GFMD, paying lip service to “development” and “protection of rights” when all there is to it is a mechanism to sell its anti-poverty and financing scheme based on the tenets of neoliberal policies.
- c. There is now a broader advocacy network for migrants’ rights from the ranks of grassroot migrants and advocates. This network provides the machinery that will work for tasks in the next GFMD and in the struggle ahead for migrants’ rights and well-being.
  - New contacts from Latin America and South Africa have pledged to work for the next IAMRs in the coming years. Goodwill has been initiated that it invited IMA to their regional conference in November.
- d. Solidarity with other sectors was enhanced as critical issues have been squarely discussed and levels of cooperation and coordination have been crystallized:
  1. The Asian Students Association (ASA) included in its recent Congress 3-year Program the issue of migration as a major concern and to support IAMR.
  2. The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) also passed a resolution to seriously take up migrants’ rights and other issues as major concerns for their global federation.
  3. Trade unions in advanced capitalist countries such as in Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand will bring the issues taken up in IAMR to their respective unions.

The migrants have spoken and drew inspiration from the experiences in the IAMR.