

Retrospect

10th Asia ILERA Regional Congress: A Historic Virtual Gathering

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This is an expression of great satisfaction and gratitude to all the convenors, organizers, presenters and participants, approximately a total of 250, who made the 10th Asian Regional International Labor and Employment Relations Association (ILERERA) Virtual Congress held on December 3 and 4, 2020 a huge success and a historic event.

The congress was originally planned in 2017 as an onsite event in UP Diliman, Quezon City, following the 9th Asian Regional Congress in Beijing in 2016. However, the 10th gathering was twice postponed due to the Taal volcanic eruption and COVID-19 global pandemic. Hence, the convenors and organizers had to shift quickly to resuming the preparations online and held the first-ever virtual ILERA congress. This became possible only with the support of a magnificent team, patiently working together from home, from remote places despite wi-fi instability due to weather disruptions and super typhoons.

We acknowledge that working from home through various platforms was our contribution to crush the COVID-19 transmission chain. Remote work, working from home, telework — we could be isolated from our work colleagues, and boundaries need to be established, both

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time and space sovereignty. Remote work even required resources, respect, trust that need to be shared. Crucial elements of communication however were lost in the process, including social interaction, and the value of reading each other's body language as part of that communication and understanding.

The virtual conference on labor and employment relations in Asia assembled a distinguished panel of esteemed scholars that could help navigate the portal of new possibilities in the future of work, and employment relations — experts share what is known so far, and the architecture of emerging employment relations.

History is full of accounts on past pandemics and similar events — bubonic plague, the black death, including the world wars. Disruptions forced human beings to break with the past, and “image their world anew”, to evolve and adjust to the new environment. The COVID-19 pandemic seems no different — it could also be a “portal”, “a gateway to a new world”, to borrow the words of some visionaries, including a more humane, innovative world of work and employment relations.

A key point from the COVID-19 pandemic is that work cannot be reduced to a commodity, as frontliners produce and deliver essential items for life to continue — contract tracing, testing, caring for the sick.

The threat of marginalization and joblessness hangs over vulnerable contract based, “non essential” workers, even overseas workers. For productivity and positive employment relations to be sustained, work should be decommodified, and democratized especially on decisions about job re-assignments, work redesign, to ensure co-ownership with the voice of the workers through dialogue, consultation and empowerment.

Labor and employment relations in the future should ensure the dignity of the workers, and navigate the challenges through the demographic dividend of a productive and skilled workforce, green jobs; and the use of automation and artificial intelligence to ensure work and life balance, as well as time and space sovereignty between work and home.

We are most grateful for the contributions by way of papers and discussions, the plenary and panel session chairs, moderators, emcees, rapporteurs and technical support. Thank you for your kind understanding and patience in overcoming registration, log-in and related technical difficulties — due to wi-fi / internet bandwidth or connectivity problems, quality of video and audio, and stability.

Thank you for helping each other understand the emerging world of labor and employment relations, through exchange and sharing of experiences, and ideas on how we move forward. We need to fill the gaps and weaknesses as we attempt to work and build prosperity together, and sustain employment and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the 10th Asia ILERA , and with new friends and networks shall boost our understanding and create a more innovative world of work and employment relations as a basis of creating mutual sustainable prosperity, and world peace.