



Grace de Jesus-Sievert

# Filipino Women's Council - A Migrant Women's Shelter in Rome

by Charito Basa

Recently, Italy has become the new entry point for those who seek greener pastures, due to the country's lack of border control, its lax authorities, and its economic boom in the 1980s. As a result, migrants from many developing countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia flocked in. Filipinos now comprise one of the largest migrant communities in Italy. Their only available source of income, domestic work!

Filipino migrant workers began to organize and set up Filipino centers, organizations, and groups providing social, cultural, labor and other activities for migrant workers. But until now, no organization focused on women's issues.

In May 1991, a group of 10 concerned Filipinas organized themselves in order to address the increasing problems of Filipino migrant workers living and working in Rome. Thus, the Filipino Women's Council (FWC) was born.

In January 1993, FWC officially opened its services to Filipinas in Rome. Now known as the Filipino Women's House, the center provides services to Filipina migrant women. Its most important function is that of an emergency shelter for stranded Filipinas in Rome.

In its first six months of operation, FWC has helped victims of sexual exploitation, domestic violence and termination due to pregnancy. These women, many of them undocumented workers, had no place to stay. These women and their children (mostly born out of wedlock) were accommodated at the center.

Aside from providing shelter, the staff offer counselling services. Filipino nuns in Rome also provide voluntary services to FWC for training and pastoral aid.

The FWC has established a local network of institutions who give free legal advice, medical, and hospitalization services. It has also established linkages with local women's groups and organizations, NGOs, and migrant women's groups who provide practical support to the activities of the Council. These include: AIDoS (Italian Association for Women in Development), WIDE (Women in Development Europe), the International Documentation Center, and the US based Foundation for a Compassionate Society. The FWC staff has also been given educational and leadership training in raising women's awareness on issues such as health and violence.

The Filipino Women's House is the first project in Italy organized by and for migrant women. It requests material and moral support from groups and organizations interested in migrant women's issues. Please contact: FWC, Via Tertulliano, 7, Int. 9, 00136 Rome, Italy Tel. no.: (39-6) 347098.