



# 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



**Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**

# 25 Reflections for GAATW's 25th Anniversary

October 2019



Photo credit: WOFOWON

The opinions expressed in these pieces are personal and do not represent those of the organisations the authors are affiliated with.

---

## Foreword

---

In the late 1990s I wanted to do something about my complete ignorance of the feminist social justice movements in Southeast Asia. A friend of mine in Melbourne suggested that I should live and work in the sub-region for a while and passed on the contact details of a few feminist activists. Siriporn Skrobanek, one of the founding members and the first international coordinator of GAATW, was one of the activists I wrote to.

One thing led to the other and in early 1999 I moved to Bangkok to work in the Research and Publications unit of the GAATW International Secretariat.

GAATW was a feisty five-year-old then. She was strong in her commitment to the rights of all women migrant workers, be they sex workers, domestic workers or factory workers. GAATW insisted that states stay accountable to their human rights commitments towards citizens and migrants regardless of their legal status. And she advocated for human rights protection for trafficked persons.

I got more than what I was looking for. GAATW-IS gave me the opportunity to work not just in Southeast Asia, but with some of the most grounded feminists around the world.

It has not been an easy journey. Perhaps that is the reason why I have stayed on for so long. Organising and participating in a GAATW meeting, and working at the GAATW-IS for that matter, are like engaging with the world. With all its wonders, hopes, joys, frustrations, irritations and misgivings.

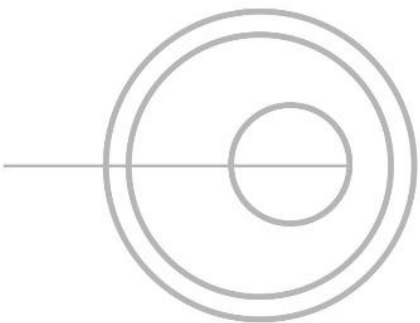
Reading through the 25 reflections collected in this little book filled my heart with joy. It brought back memories of events I had forgotten in the hustle and bustle of daily work. It reaffirmed that it is the commitment of various individuals – GAATW-IS staff, Board, member organisations, donors, and advisors – who give the Alliance its unique

strength. I hope everyone who reads this little book will feel the same way.

As we mark 25 years of GAATW's work, we must note that our vision of a world that is just, fair and free of exploitation is still a distant dream. The political developments around the world do not leave much room for optimism. At moments such as this our only source of hope are the women workers. They never give up. They join hands with each other, resist, protest, speak up and pursue their dream of another world. So must we.

**Bandana Pattanaik**

International Coordinator of GAATW



## From common challenges to advocacy agendas

Foundation for Women is founding member of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women. For the first three years of GAATW, the International Secretariat was housed at FFW. During the first ten years of our membership, Thailand was more a country of origin than a destination country. Networking with other GAATW members was crucial so that we could discuss how to better protect Thai trafficked women who were criminalised, detained and prosecuted in other countries. The rights of these women who were in debt bondage, sexual exploitation and forced labour were ignored by countries of destination. After sharing, discussing and reflecting during GAATW member workshops and meetings, we could turn our common challenges and problems into advocacy agendas.

The recognition of the rights of trafficked persons and their decriminalisation is a significant achievement. However, the number of trafficked persons who can receive access to justice and social protection is still minimal compared to the large number of migrants who face exploitative conditions. The trafficked persons that are recognised may compare only to the tip of the iceberg that we can see clearly above the water. But how can we tackle the problems that are covered under water and also the root cause of this problem?

GAATW has done well in taking a facilitating role in organising consultations with members and likeminded groups. I am glad that at least I could attend the latest workshop on prevention which came up with a clear message: “Strengthening labour rights to prevent human trafficking and unsafe migration”. **I am delighted to see that the paradigm in human trafficking prevention has shifted from a criminal approach to the right to work and rights at work.** And I believe that labour rights should be a core concern in every area of human trafficking work.

This may be a good opportunity to join hand with labour rights group and GAATW member organisations to advocate for good legislation and

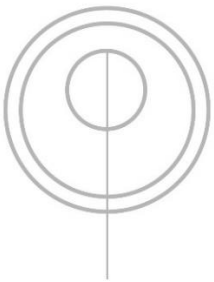
standard practices in identifications that can really protect migrants from forced labour. For example, Thai workers who use agencies to migrate to Korea find themselves in a situation of forced labour as they end up doing work they do not expect, for low wages, with no bargaining power with employers and under the threat of being reported to immigration officers.

Inserting labour rights into human trafficking work including prevention, identification, redress and recovery should be the next action step in our work. **In recognition of labour rights, there is no need for authorities to repatriate trafficked persons back home as the priority is to encourage them to exercise their rights to work in destination countries.** And if the authorities want to stop forced labour, they may need to decriminalise all migrant workers to prevent them from being threatened by employers with deportation.

It is commendable that GAATW has taken the role in developing resources for members and other stakeholders. I have found that the *Anti-Trafficking Review* is very useful for knowledge generation in human trafficking work. It has brought practical concerns from organisations working on the ground into discussion papers.

In the future, I would like to see the role of GAATW in changing those written papers into lively debate and advocacy. There is a limitation of government agencies and policymakers as we cannot expect them to read this informative publication. Even when they read these documents, they may not translate these concerns into practice. Let's hope that GAATW will find strategic ways to work together with members to advocate for labour rights of women workers in the coming years.

**Usa Lerdsrisuntad**, Foundation for Women, Thailand. GAATW member.



## Understanding human trafficking through grounded, evidence-based and feminist participatory action research

Over the last 25 years, GAATW has been at the forefront of research and advocacy in the areas of transnational labour migration and human trafficking with a particular focus on women from and in the global South. When I describe GAATW in conference presentations, public talks, or to my university students, I emphasise the ways in which I believe the Alliance is unique in the global arena.

First, beginning in the mid-1990s, GAATW stood out because of its commitment to the development of a clear understanding of human trafficking grounded in evidence-based and feminist participatory action research. What this research revealed was that trafficking needed to be contextualised within transnational processes, including the forces of globalisation, the growth of informal economies, existing intersectional inequalities along the lines of gender, race, and class, escalating rates of migration and especially women's labour migration into various labour sectors, and national border securitisation. Given that GAATW's early work further uncovered that human rights violations were both the cause and consequences of trafficking, it worked to develop a comprehensive human rights framework in which the rights of trafficked persons were centred. A number of publications, including *Human Rights Standards for the Treatment of Trafficked Persons* (1999) and *Human Rights and Trafficking in Persons: A Handbook* (2000), were pivotal in that they put the human rights approach to addressing trafficking in persons on the global agenda.

Second, GAATW has been a leader in documenting some of the harmful effects of anti-trafficking measures and in emphasising the importance of state and NGO accountability in the development of anti-trafficking policies, strategies, and campaigns in all labour sectors, including sex work. In critiquing the anti-trafficking framework from within, GAATW's collaborative research and advocacy has focused on centring human rights and social justice, delinking trafficking from sex work and



supporting the decriminalisation of sex work, and lobbying for organised sex workers and migrant workers to be consulted in the development of all anti-trafficking legislation. Some key publications that addressed these issues included *Collateral Damage: The Impact of Anti-Trafficking Measures on Human Rights Around the World* (2007), *What's the Cost of A Rumour? A Guide to Sorting Out the Myths and Facts About Sporting Events and Trafficking* (2011), *Sex Workers Organising for Change: Self-Representation, Community Mobilisation, and Working Conditions* (2018), and themed issues of *Anti-Trafficking Review*.

Third, GAATW collaborative research with member and partner organisations has also foregrounded women migrant workers' lived experiences and their stories of struggle, courage, and resilience as they navigate the structural inequalities embedded in migration regimes and the unjust, exploitative, and abusive working conditions in such labour sectors as domestic and garment factory work. Grounded in the belief that people are experts of their own lives and in the principles of migrant justice, GAATW promotes and defends the rights of women migrant workers and calls for safety standards in the process of migration and in formal and informal labour sectors. GAATW has also long stressed the importance of (self)-organising and collective action against injustices as foundational to working towards meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable social change.

A special thank you to the teams at GAATW's International Secretariat – both past and present - for all your hard work and for coordinating and producing such important, influential, and evidence-based collaborative research over the last 25 years. It has been a real honour to be able to participate in some of the projects and to be part of the Alliance for the last 20 years.

**Annalee Lepp**, GAATW Canada. GAATW Board Member.





## **GAATW and the diversity of its members**

I have been working on the issue of human trafficking for almost 20 years, and the most important change that I observe is the development that trafficking does not only exist for the purpose of forced prostitution, but also for labour exploitation and criminal exploitation.

FairWork has been working on this issue for several years, and slowly but surely this view is becoming mainstream. This is an important development, because it shows that exploitation takes many forms. Another gradual development is that the anti-trafficking movement is linking up with other movements in the field of workers' rights and women's rights. GAATW played an important role in that: always looking for relationships and linkages with other movements and linking trafficking to its broader context. It has done this through its global scope and the diversity of its members. GAATW does not only have anti-trafficking NGOs as members, but also self-organised groups and organisations that work on broader issues such as workers' rights and women's rights. This facilitates broader discussions and a more open mind towards possible solutions on different issues.

It is an alliance of equal partners from different continents, and this is reflected in its board, the different working groups and the staff at the Secretariat.

GAATW's focus is on participatory strategies and equal partnerships with other organisations: all initiatives of GAATW are meant to involve workers, trafficked persons and others in order to make sure that possible solutions really benefit them and take into account their opinion. This participatory and rights-based approach makes the alliance different from many other networks.

This is something I am still implementing in my work nowadays - the only way we can achieve change at the global level is to work together as equal partners.

Meeting workers' rights groups gave me a broader picture of the human trafficking issue, allowing me to see trafficked persons as workers more than mere victims. Different solutions are only possible if we start involving workers themselves.

At one of the international meetings of GAATW I shared a room with Eni Lestari from ATKI Hong Kong and we had a really great time. We talked until late and we shared about our work and our personal life. Although our lives were so different, there was a feeling of trust and friendship. We learnt from each other. It was really inspiring for me, both at a personal and organisational level, to meet a person like Eni. Being herself a domestic worker in Hong Kong, she took holidays from her work to come to GAATW meetings. She inspired me with her intelligence, her passion and her commitment to social change. It became clear to me that **as NGOs we can only achieve impact if we really involve the people we say we work for**. We are accountable to them and their participation is essential if we want to improve their lives.

As there are so many different organisations that participate in the alliance, all as equal partners of a global movement, there is so much to learn from each other.

I really hope that the Alliance will maintain its broad, diverse and global membership. It is so interesting to learn from each other, work together on joint programmes and advocate together for change. I really liked the International Members Congresses, which took place every three years, to share, to learn, to inspire and get inspired. I have so many good memories of GAATW! Keep up the good work!

**Sandra Claassen**, Director at Arisa Foundation. Former GAATW Board Member and director of FairWork, The Netherlands.

## Working side by side

I warmly congratulate GAATW and the International Secretariat on our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary! Working side by side, we have learnt a lot from each other. What has always been clear is **the determination behind GAATW's vision to embed human trafficking in a broader understanding of violence against women, restrictive migration policies and migrant worker's rights**. GAATW has never simplified the issues and has never stopped pointing out the complexity of human trafficking, thus doing justice to trafficked person's realities.

GAATW provides evidence-based knowledge, which is accessible for all. In 2013 LEFÖ participated in research on the accountability and impact of anti-trafficking initiatives. GAATW set the frame for feminist participatory action research. The process of this study and the findings have had a lasting impact on our work. This study is a good reminder in our everyday work about our responsibility and accountability as a feminist political migrant rights organisation.

In times of uncertainty, GAATW makes us understand that we are not alone. Together as a network, combining our knowledge and experience, we have seen that we can be a critical voice with an important influence.

I wish GAATW patience and perseverance for the next 25 year to never back down and keep providing the anti-trafficking community with high quality evidence.

**Evelyn Probst**, Coordinator of LEFÖ – Intervention Centre for Trafficked Women, Austria. GAATW Board Member.



**Labour relations have been changing significantly yet efforts to prevent trafficking haven't changed much and remain unrealistic and wishful.**

The nature of working conditions has been changing over the last thirty years across world. For most, work is increasingly characterised by lower job stability, shorter contracts, greater mobility and more migrant workers, stagnating real wages, the need for multiple jobs to make a living, and greater restrictions on collective action.

And yet, in spite of the changing world of work, the much-lauded initiatives to prevent trafficking or modern slavery have not changed much. Standard practice of counter-trafficking interventions is to focus on the “four Ps”: prevention, prosecution, protection and partnerships. “Prevention” interventions are usually about giving information to migrant workers even though information alone does very little to change the world of work. “Prosecution” interventions are usually about disciplining small employers or prosecuting informal labour intermediaries, even though informal employment and labour intermediation is often the result of deliberate policies to promote labour flexibility. “Protection” interventions are usually about providing shelter for victims of human trafficking even though people don't want to be treated as victims and simply want decent work options. “Partnership” interventions usually refer to collaboration between NGOs, private sector and government in addressing the issues mentioned above and improving anti-trafficking laws, even though anti-trafficking laws are usually deliberately delinked from labour realities.

Although few of these so-called “interventions” really tackle the world of work, many do tend to mediatise shocking stories of abuse in efforts to rally support and, indirectly, funding. Unfortunately, media attention on “modern slavery” tends to focus on extreme cases resulting from socially marginal and deviant behaviours calling for police responses rather than the more common daily reality of work that instead calls for a change in labour and economic policies for the common woman and



man. The overall result can often be a rather Orwellian split between the discourse on modern slavery and the reality of work.

### **GAATW as an exception**

**GAATW is one of the few global organisations that offers critical perspectives of the mainstream anti-trafficking and modern slavery discourse.** It is also one of the few organisations that is developing space among working class women and academics to question common policy narratives around the world of work and advocate for more inclusive alternatives. The value of this cannot be overstated. There are few organisations that globally strive to uphold the rights of women workers across occupational sectors ranging from sex work to domestic work to nurses and others.

Continue the great work!

**Igor Bosc**, Chief Technical Advisor, Work in Freedom Programme, ILO.  
GAATW Partner.

## **GAATW, the sum of many parts**

Joining GAATW-IS in 2008 and arriving in the Bangkok office felt like I had arrived at a sanctuary. It was tranquil and lush in a city that seemed on first encounter so noisy and concrete. I remember sitting with Bandana and talking about expectations for the short-term. I felt full of enthusiasm about the teachings from my Master's degree I'd just completed at the Institute of Development Studies and shared musings on participation and power. She listened patiently and then talked to me about the self-organised groups of women workers she had been working with and the broader work of GAATW that embodied much of what we had talked about back in IDS in the UK. She spoke not of theories but of real work, real people and social change that to me seemed inspiring and terrifying in equal measure and far from the safety of the theory at IDS. I remember feeling overwhelmed by the depth of knowledge and history to GAATW of which I knew nothing.

I had many sleepless nights after that conversation, my way of taking the time I felt I required to understand this new place, the history of GAATW and the anti-trafficking field. I also spent many nights getting to know Bangkok, a city, which I soon realised I loved especially in the cool and wild nights. I read everything I could to prepare myself for a meeting in Nepal where I would represent GAATW. Then, when I arrived in Nepal, I met Dr Renu Rajbhandari, founder of the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) an intimidating force for good, who endlessly mocked me for my ancestry and eventually nicknamed me the 'logframe lady' suggesting a colonial tendency towards bureaucracy over real life. Renu showed us to one of WOREC's offices in eastern Nepal and I had my first exposure to GAATW as the sum of many parts. I saw how members like WOREC are working with women in communities to understand the drivers of exploitation whilst also critiquing the anti-trafficking framework. I also learnt from Renu that I was there to learn.

I think everyone who works at GAATW, and is a member of GAATW, feels like part of a family, is exposed to experiences that shape and define us. There are no 'experts', Bandana used to tell me; this philosophy runs deep in the work of GAATW. For me the most important lesson from working at GAATW was the humble nature of GAATW's engagement; Bandana and the International Secretariat know **the strength of GAATW lies in its incredible, often hugely intimidating and challenging, members.** I have taken that on to my work at Focus on Labour Exploitation in the UK, now a GAATW member - the need to learn from others and draw on the widest possible range of voices on our issue, actively seeking out those who will probe and challenge our work. As GAATW celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I think back over its years of serving as an incubator for brilliant ideas and teachings and its influence as the sum of those ideas. Happy anniversary, GAATW, and thank you for all that you have taught me and for the experiences you share.

**Caroline Robinson**, Co-founder of Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), UK. Former staff member, GAATW-IS.



## **Together we are stronger**

When CHS Alternativo joined GAATW twelve years ago, human trafficking was an issue scarcely discussed in Peru and Latin America more broadly. The fight against trafficking was still in its infancy. Countries barely recognised international trafficking, but were starting to show an increase in cases of internal trafficking and exploitation of minors.

In 2008, the Government of Peru enacted a law in response to the Palermo Protocol. Peru also had an official registry system for trafficking cases and a small but active specialised police unit, though it concentrated exclusively on internal trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation. Trafficking for labour exploitation was still invisible. Reaching vulnerable populations was a major challenge, and more consistent data and clear evidence was needed.

### **GAATW – more than a sum of its parts**

At that time, NGOs, self-organised groups, domestic workers' unions, and sex workers' collectives joined GAATW. By 2007, we were already 17 country representatives participating in the Latin American and Caribbean Network (REDLAC). GAATW-REDLAC has insisted on working for the rights of victims of trafficking. We work to address a persistent conceptual confusion regarding the definition of trafficking, victims who do not recognise themselves as such, corruption, impunity, data, intervention and above all, reintegration and restitution of rights, as well as access to justice. Because human trafficking was not exactly a priority on the international political agenda in Latin America, GAATW became and still is an important space for the exchange of experience and the generation of knowledge, coordination of activities, and the formation of synergies from an international perspective.

However, there is still work to do. Currently, most available information about human trafficking in Latin America still relates to trafficking for sexual exploitation. Very few trafficked persons are identified outside



the sex industry. Hence, we still have a blind spot and a gaping need because the victims of labour exploitation continue to be invisible. While Latin American countries have a broad regulatory framework that includes laws, procedures, protocols and guidelines, very few cases are prosecuted and the gap between the reality and the concrete results is still enormous.

### **Old problems in modern times**

Today Latin America faces a range of challenges. Rampant corruption has marked many countries. In Peru, the last four presidents have been prosecuted for corruption leading to a serious erosion of trust in state decision making. Serious crises, with migrants from Venezuela heading south and from Central America northward, generate high vulnerability for those on the move. **Every time new walls or fences are erected to prevent the passage of people, there is a turn towards barbarism.** This can clearly be seen in the inhumane conditions in which migrants are detained at the US border, many of them children separated from their parents and without the minimum conditions of care.

Migration in such conditions results in exploitation and abuse. Many migrants live in despair, pushed to survive in any way and to make decisions without necessarily measuring the risks involved. The current situation of these refugees, sometimes misnamed 'economic migrants', will pass. In the future, the causes of migration will be water, land and the devastation of the environment and climate change. In any circumstance, it is our duty to protect human rights, promote equality and non-discrimination. It is our duty to ensure access to dignified living conditions and the protection of victims of all forms of human exploitation. All this must be present in the work we do, today and always.

As an Alliance, we must not lose the ability to be flexible. We must always remain broad-minded, open to differences, tolerant and willing to listen. That is what will differentiate us from so many other networks or from so many other movements which are closed to ideas or

positions, leaving others out. We must remain an organisation that reflects, thinks and exchanges. We must go beyond our place of comfort. We must seek to question, to challenge and change the status quo.

**Andrea Querol**, Founder and Executive Director of CHS Alternativo, Peru. GAATW Board Member.



## Looking at everything with a questioning eye

GAATW means a lot to me and I am so happy to see it reach the 25-year mark! I worked at the GAATW-IS for only three years but I have been fortunate to stay in contact over the years, it was such a formative experience. My work with GAATW led to me studying in the United States, and to later work as a consultant and researcher. I also made lifelong friends and had many adventures on the sidelines of the work. Perhaps the greatest impact GAATW has had on my life, though, is its values and approach to the work. The value of building a diverse network, taking time to listen and discuss complex topics (usually over delicious food), leaning into nuance, looking at all dominant narratives with a questioning eye, and always centring the work back to the individual women travelling, working and striving to build their lives around the world. These were not easy things for me to learn as more of an A-type personality, and I know I stumbled a lot in many of my interactions. But luckily, another lesson I took from GAATW is not giving up on people, even when they (like me) struggle to grow and learn!

**I wish for the IS staff and the membership to stand up with confidence, be present, and speak up more loudly than ever.** In my current home, the US, I have seen changes in the way trafficking is discussed over the last ten years - more awareness of the complexities and of all forms of trafficking, for example. The sex worker rights movement is also making inroads in parts of the country. Yet, the larger forces that make women vulnerable to exploitation seem stronger - economic inequality, climate change, restrictive migration practices, insecure work - and angry, xenophobic voices only louder.

GAATW's voice is rare and refreshing and its approach empowering at a time when so many of us feel overwhelmed and disempowered. I hope to see the network grow even more over the next 25 years :)

**Eleanor Taylor-Nicholson**, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at Dexis Consulting Group. GAATW former staff member.



## **Building knowledge together**

On GAATW's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I want to heartily thank and congratulate everyone who started and sustained the network and its important work. I was four years old when GAATW was established and it was around this time that I migrated for the first time in my life. This migration was temporary, but I have memories of feeling an identity crisis after I returned to the place of my birth.

Based on my own experience and after hearing the migration experiences of many sisters, I realised that women have diverse experiences of migration. It is up to each individual woman to say whether her migration was forced, coerced or by choice and whether the outcomes of her migration were fair or not, and whether she wants to go back to her place of origin or not.

As humans, as women, the realities of our lives have been made complex by structures, cultures, traditions, economies, religions, laws (or lack thereof). I recently had the opportunity to be a researcher in a Feminist Participatory Action Research on women's safe and fair migration with women working in the entertainment sector in Kathmandu. This experience showed me that although we can't choose where or who we are born as, we have to have the right to make decision about our path in life.

I learnt a lot about GAATW from this project. I learnt that GAATW emerged from the women's movement in the Global South. But I was also happy to learn that GAATW's work is not limited to the Global South, but that it is connecting activists and community-led organisations between and within countries and at the regional as well as the global level.

In today's world, people are exploiting people for profit, which is highly visible in the world of labour migration. The exploited must raise their voice and protest. The powerless must protest with those who have accumulated power historically or recently. Through our joint FPAR

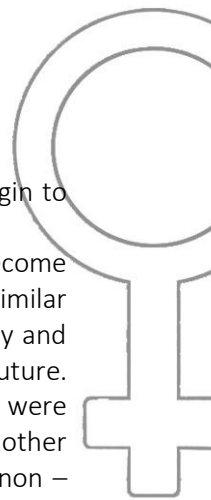
project, GAATW supported communities made-powerless to begin to deepen their understanding and to raise their voice.

I also learnt that solidarity is powerful, but it is easy to become frustrated and feel hopeless. For me, knowing that people with similar struggles from diverse backgrounds are fighting in their own way and can reach out to each other, helps me keep my hope for a better future. The FPAR re-kindled this learning for me. For example, as FPARs were carried out in different countries at the same time, by reading other research partners' reports, I came to know that people in Lebanon – Lebanese nationals, migrant women, also migrant women from Nepal – are organising and forming feminist groups. Back in 2013, I was involved in another FPAR, with APWLD, on the situation of women working in the entertainment sector, in the context of the right to decent work and a living wage. As I was documenting a sister's experience as a domestic worker, and how she returned to Nepal because it became difficult for her to survive, we (or I) did not imagine that one day we could reach out to activists in Lebanon.

Social progress takes very long time, and it is challenging to be optimistic. I got frustrated as well as excited during this FPAR and now I feel that we must keep going, regardless of the setbacks and however small the progress. And I feel that as a network with a big vision, GAATW is connecting these small steps; I guess this is how widespread webs are formed.

Engaging with GAATW helped me understand **human trafficking not only as a crime, but as a social, political and economic issue**. It also helped me realise that most project-based work that CSOs are implementing is actually de-politicalising migration; and the programmes that identify 'lack of awareness in migrants' as the main reason behind unsafe migration and unsafe working conditions may lead to overlooking and withdrawal of governments' accountability towards people's safety.

GAATW is connected with activists, comrades, psychosocial therapists, and people with many skills, and long experience in women's



movements in different countries, working on diverse topics. With this, I want to thank you again for this valuable work and I will always treasure the personal relationships of sisterhood formed along the way, your support and guidance has truly meant a lot for me. I am very thankful for the opportunity to engage with GAATW. Thank you so much and congratulations.

**Anisha Luintel**, Researcher at WOFOWON, Nepal. GAATW Member.

## Bridging social movements for coherent political demands

In January 2019, IWRAP Asia Pacific partnered with GAATW to organise a Global Convening on Trafficking in Women in the context of global migration. The convening was organised in relation to the ongoing drafting of a general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration by the UN CEDAW Committee. At the meeting, Rebecca Napier-Moore, an independent researcher focusing on migration, gender equality and labour, started her presentation by saying that in 2008, she had attended a meeting organised by IWRAP Asia Pacific and GAATW regarding the drafting of a CEDAW general recommendation on women migrant workers. It was interesting, she noted, to be having the same discussion with almost the same set of people ten years down the line.

A few months later, in July 2019, Austria was reviewed by the CEDAW Committee. The Concluding Observations included the following recommendation to Austria:

*“Revise immigration policies to ensure that laws and policies on the deportation of foreign women are not applied in a discriminatory manner, do not deter migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from reporting crimes of trafficking and do not undermine efforts to prevent human trafficking, identify or protect victims or prosecute perpetrators.”*

Registering that I had seen such a recommendation from the CEDAW Committee only once before I excitedly emailed Bobby at GAATW. *“This is a good recommendation, right?”*, I asked. Bobby’s reply was *“Yes. It is what we and other NGOs have been saying for years.”*

Both these exchanges are emblematic of GAATW’s crucial position in the women’s rights movement. They also raise some larger questions about our expectations from international law and policy frameworks and mechanisms concerning the protection of the rights of trafficked

persons, particularly in terms of their responsiveness to the lived realities of trafficked persons. It goes without saying that **GAATW has played an extremely important bridging role over the last 25 years, between the migrant rights, labour rights and women's rights movements.** The liminal space GAATW occupies between the different social justice movements not only enables them to effectively bring together and be present to the demands of all these constituencies, but also to nimbly navigate international policy spaces.

A question, however, remains regarding the receptivity of us in the women's rights movement to the research evidence and advocacy messages of GAATW. I believe a lot more needs to be done by all of us to ensure that the evidence generated by GAATW and their members to advocate for rights affirming outcomes for trafficked persons is proliferated and amplified much more widely and loudly, within our movements and in international law and policy spaces. We at IWRAW Asia Pacific commit ourselves to supporting GAATW's journey on this front moving forward. Hopefully another conversation on the same issues, with the same set of people will not be necessary by 2029. :)

**Ishita Dutta**, International Women's Right Actions Watch Asia Pacific – IWRAW. GAATW ally.





## **A life free of violence and trafficking for women**

In 2000, our dreams of establishing and creating a space with and for the women of Medellín led us, Corporación Espacios de Mujer (CEM), to meet GAATW. CEM decided to work together with GAATW for the rights of all women, irrespective of their profession, against human trafficking.

GAATW's 25-year anniversary is an opportune moment to reflect on our shared dream and stories.

Colombia is a country of contrasts. People survive a state of constant conflict. While the main protagonists change, what remains the same are the atrocities and abuse against the integrity of individuals. In 2016, following half a century of conflict, we made peace with the FARC-EP (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army) with the belief that everything was going to change.

However, we had not considered the presence of the other armed groups, on the left and the right, who have been targeting community leaders, human rights defenders, children, adolescents, women and the civilian population in general, creating situations of greater violence and human rights violations.

When CEM was established in 2003, we did not have much knowledge of human trafficking and the State did not recognise it as a priority. Then GAATW came along, fostered a partnership with us, educated and accompanied us, and gave us hope that one day all women will be able to fully exercise their rights.

These dreams have seen some realisation.

Following years of mutual exchange of ideas, debates and common yet different experiences, in 2007, with the support of GAATW, we decided to form the Latin American and Caribbean Network against Human Trafficking (REDLAC) alongside other organisations from Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Bolivia and Ecuador. Our aim was to build critical thinking, innovative



proposals and transformative political action, in order to make the attainment of a life full of rights for women a reality.

At Espacios de Mujer we are proud to belong to GAATW: we celebrate 19 years of joint work for a life for women free of violence and trafficking.

The first time I met with the GAATW team in Bangkok, it filled me with much joy and satisfaction to meet women who inspired us so much to TAKE ACTION without fear or prejudice. Supporting women in prostitution, knowing their stories and their lives, drew us even closer to GAATW; it was clear to us that **women's decision to be in prostitution did not exclude them from enjoying their rights.**

Our story has never been told in isolation: GAATW is part of the diversity and the joint forces that have inspired the transformations for women; we have faced challenges, undergone transformation but also gained knowledge and, above all, close friends.

Because of this and many more reasons we thank you, GAATW, and invite you to celebrate, so that together we can continue to think about how to take action and strengthen our ALLIANCE, with sisterhood that will enable our work to become stronger.

There are 25 years of history, connections, alliances, learnings, indignation and reaction, transformation... our footprints outline a shared ambition of a world free from patriarchy and discrimination, whose vision inspires us to keep moving forward.

A LIFE FREE OF VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING FOR WOMEN! OUR PATH AND OUR STORY CONTINUES!

**Betty Pedraza Lozano**, Founder and Director of Espacios de Mujer, Colombia. GAATW Member.

## Questioning our assumptions

When I arrived at Sivalai Condo, where the GAATW Secretariat office is located, to meet Bandana, in what I assumed was a preliminary job interview, I stepped into one of the scariest elevators I had ever seen. As the machine and I were making our way, slowly and shakily, towards the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, I remember an increasing feeling of unease. Where was I heading? I knocked at the door and Alfie's smiling face appeared on the other side, welcoming me. The uneasy feeling immediately disappeared. Bandana and started talking, and a few minutes later I had forgotten I was being interviewed for a job at all; it felt more like a conversation with a new friend about important, interesting topics around the intersections between women's rights and migration for labour, topics I knew very little about at that time. The sun set in one of those glorious Bangkok dusks, and by the time I left a few hours later I was pretty sure I had better get used to that elevator because I was surely going to return to the building.

I worked at the GAATW-IS from 2006 to 2011. When I joined, GAATW already had a long history as an Alliance instrumental in conceptualising trafficking in women as both a cause and consequence of human rights violations. **GAATW had changed the way trafficking in women was being looked at, and therefore, addressed.** It had done this by applying a feminist discourse, by bringing new voices and experiences into the discussion and by making sure an evidence-based approach to trafficking was applied when developing anti-trafficking policies.

GAATW revealed itself to me as a complex, multigenerational, multilingual, culturally diverse space where committed individuals and organisations connect, learn, analyse, plan, research, advocate, disagree and confront, compromise and move forward, all in a spirit of collaboration and sisterhood. And in doing so, we laugh, cry, dance, sing, and support each other through hard times and good times.

In my view, the GAATW-International Secretariat always mirrored the Alliance itself. We worked really hard. Looking back at that time, what I



remember above all is the commitment of every single person in that office. It was a really exciting time and I always felt very privileged to be doing the work I was doing with the people I was doing it with.

GAATW taught me the importance of always questioning my assumptions, taught me to see beyond my own circumstances, to sit with someone else to listen to her or his story without judgment. It taught me about resilience and adaptation, about the importance of relationships, about how none of us is an island but linked together, about how what happens in the corner of the world where I live has consequences that ripple far beyond it, determining other people's lives, and, therefore, about how we need to weave a wider web of connections, responses and actions.

The current political and social context in Europe, and in Spain (where I live now) is the perfect example of why international networks like GAATW are needed. Xenophobic and anti-migration discourses and policies are finding increasing support. Parties upholding these views are gaining political representation, even making it to local, regional and national governments. One of their scariest achievements is their capacity to contaminate the discourse of traditional parties and the general public debate. At times like this, where facts are increasingly losing their relevance, we need to find new ways of engaging with policy-makers and citizens. How can we transform the existing narratives (in this case around migration and what 'being European' means) in ways that move away from an excluding and monochromatic discourse? How do we change the language we use, the tools we use, the way we engage, to respond to these realities?

GAATW is a living body, adaptable and wise, and my wish for her is to apply the knowledge she has gained during the last 25 years to respond to these new challenges and to continue nurturing, supporting and encouraging in a celebratory, joyful and grounded way.

**Nerea Bilbatua**, Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, Spain. GAATW former staff member.

## A shared journey and enriched partnership

In 2003 Aaina, with the support of GAATW, undertook a small pilot programme to survey domestic workers in the slums of Bhubaneswar, followed by skills development. This was the first programme that gave an insight into the struggle and status of women workers. In the same year we attended a workshop organised by NAWO and facilitated by Ms Bandana Pattanaik. This was an eye opener to internal and cross-border trafficking. Before the workshop, Aaina was dealing with trafficking as a local issue. This was enriched with the knowledge of the international scenario, the treaties that India has ratified and the struggle to get an international Trafficking Protocol.

GAATW's understanding of safe migration, labour and trafficking contribute to the work of its partners like Aaina. The way we have been looking at trafficking changed when we started focusing on labour and the nuances of promoting safe migration. We were fortunate to attend two International Members Congresses of GAATW. Both were unique and educational. I wish these sharing events could happen more often! We as an organisation have grown along with the Alliance in learning, debating and redesigning strategies to deal with the issues of women on the move!

I deeply appreciate the effort of all the staff members of GAATW, be it June, Alfie, Bobby or Leah and others in not only supporting the partners but providing the space for growth and participation through shared learning. I deeply acknowledge the support extended by Leah and GAATW during CSW62 in 2018 where I got an opportunity to speak about the migrant women workers and the #MeToo movement! And I consider all these are the reflection of the dynamic leadership of Ms Bandana Pattanaik who has contributed so much to the growth of the Alliance! I wish GAATW to grow to its pinnacle of glory and continue being a torchbearer in the region in the service to humanity!

**Sneha Mishra**, Secretary, AAINA, India. GAATW Member.

## Knowledge sharing to raise our power

Evolving as a platform of returned migrant workers in 2004, OKUP's initial focus was to unite the returnees and raise their collective voice. In the beginning, it was a small group of returnee male migrants. Around two years later, UNIFEM, now UN Women, came to us and offered their support to organise returnee women. Once we registered as an organisation in 2008, we started working with foreign partners. We first started a participatory action research on migrants' health and HIV with CARAM Asia. It was then that we met Bandana Pattanaik, who made a great contribution to improving OKUP's institutional capacity. We barely had any knowledge of human trafficking and how it links to labour migration. GAATW contributed greatly to our conceptual clarity on human trafficking and its nexus with labour migration. Not only that, but also GAATW's capacity building training on dance movement therapy and women's sexual and reproductive health, among others. GAATW supports us to be present at different regional and international events.

I remember the early days when GAATW asked us to share our pre-departure training manual when they came to know about OKUP and our work in 2012. We became suspicious – what are their interests in this? Do they want to steal our things? We planned we would not share anything until we knew them better. This is because we had developed the first country-specific pre-departure training manual in Bangladesh, and introduced residential training for Lebanon-bound women domestic workers. However, I was convinced after I had a first-time face-to-face meeting with Bandana, and we planned future collaboration.

In 2014, GAATW proposed providing a capacity building training to our staffs on women's empowerment and women's sexual and reproductive rights. Our colleagues still remember the fun we had during late-night sessions. These trainings are still a good base of our knowledge and capacity. One of my colleagues said, "I never thought

about my own strengths. It never came to my mind since I grew up as girl in our society. **I was so encouraged when I, from a GAATW training, understood what women’s power meant and how a woman’s power could make positive changes in the family and society.**” Another one expressed, “I have found in myself a new person when I got the training of trainers in 2014. I discovered my inner power more strongly.”

OKUP became a member of GAATW in 2015. It’s been an exciting journey of building knowledge, networking, representation and implementation. The most recent was the Feminist Participatory Action Research we did together in 2018-2019. I think such an action-oriented research keeping the perspective of feminism in the centre can contribute a lot to building the agency and ability among women and the community to grow a social movement for a real change, rather than the typical development projects.

**Shakirul Islam**, Founding Chairman, OKUP, Bangladesh. GAATW Member.



## **The importance of international cooperation**

In the last two decades the anti-trafficking field has changed enormously. Focusses, players and interests have definitely changed. There are many new actors in the field. Although this helped to raise attention for the issue, it also requires much more efforts and staff capacity to follow all new initiatives and measures and to ensure coordination, exchange and smooth cooperation between all the different stakeholders.

At the same time, the impact of all this action is not clear. Yes, there is much more and better legislation in place, and on paper the rights of trafficked persons are better acknowledged. However, the number of registered and assisted trafficked persons stands in stark contrast with the high estimations. Still we continue to call for action - often in vain - to ensure that the reflection period is adequately implemented and that trafficked persons receive proper assistance and support. While the need for identification seems broadly acknowledged, in practice it remains quite difficult to convince state authorities that people who have been trafficked or severely exploited need to be helped. The same for access to justice; if the prosecution was not successful and no assets were recovered, it proves very difficult for trafficked persons to receive the compensation they are entitled to. Much action currently undertaken relates to the development of new actions plans or policies and measures; while this is important, it often seems like an excuse for the non-implementation of the actions and measures already in place.

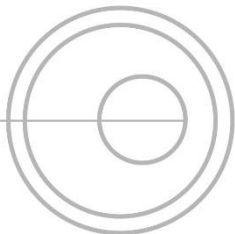
**With the globalisation and flexibilisation of the labour market and subcontracting of services and workers, labour standards have dropped and work has become much more precarious, affecting millions of workers globally. Instead of more guidelines, tools and desk research, we urgently need binding measures to hold the private sector and governments more accountable and to ensure that labour laws are effectively implemented.**



What is positive is that over the last years, many more linkages have been created and cooperation has taken place between different fields of actions. Anti-trafficking NGOs and other anti-trafficking actors – who used to operate within their own narrow field - have slowly started to extend their work and scopes engaging with sectors and actors that address related issues, like human rights abuses by the private sector, or promotion of migrants' or workers' rights.

When I started working in the field 17 years ago, the focus was still mainly put on trafficking for sexual exploitation and on women exploited within the prostitution sector. Now there is much more attention for all forms of human trafficking and for the linkages between trafficking and migration and other related issues. It is much more acknowledged that regulated sectors are vulnerable to exploitation of workers too and that human trafficking and labour exploitation are happening all over Europe and not only in countries facing conflict or difficult social and economic circumstances.

What unfortunately has not changed is the moral debate about prostitution and the continuous conflation of human trafficking with prostitution. While legislation calls for addressing all forms of human trafficking, in many European countries, actions still focus primarily on trafficking for sexual exploitation. The Nordic Model has been promoted and copied without any evidence of its effectiveness to address human trafficking or attention to the harm done to those working in the sex industry. Moreover, more than before we see (moral) political debates influence the anti-trafficking field; where people stand political – on migration and/or on prostitution – or which country they come from, seems to have become much more important than expertise in the nominations for high-level positions in the anti-trafficking field. The current anti-migration and anti-prostitution climate does harm and negatively impacts anti-trafficking policies and strategies.



Given the political and social context in Europe and globally, cooperation at the international level has become even more essential than before. What is happening in Europe is very closely connected with situations and policies in other regions. Although EU nationals are also trafficked within Europe, many of the trafficked and exploited persons in Europe originate from Asia or Africa. For actions to prevent human trafficking or assist trafficked persons, close cooperation with actors outside Europe is needed. For La Strada International, membership of GAATW has always been important, as it offers opportunities for cross- continent cooperation and to be part of a larger NGO community with a louder voice. GAATW membership helps NGOs in Europe to learn more about root causes and practices elsewhere and can help to ensure better exchange among NGOs and common action, including when those assisted have to return and seek assistance elsewhere.

GAATW has helped to place debates and issues of concern in a global perspective. At GAATW meetings, it has always been interesting to notice that situations and practices in other world regions do not differ so much from what is happening in Europe. From exchange we learn that that NGOs elsewhere struggle with the same challenges and dilemmas as we do in Europe. For sure national contexts differ, but it is worth to see whether best practices identified elsewhere can be copied here.

The cooperation with GAATW has positively impacted the work of La Strada International; working together has enabled us to better monitor and react to global actions and developments. For example, GAATW-IS informed and undertook joint advocacy around the Global Compact on Migration and the UNTOC review mechanism; actions in which separate members could easily participate. GAATW-IS was also taking the lead in critically monitoring the US anti-prostitution pledge and in debates and research on collateral damage, on demand, on the need for access to justice and compensation and on 'modern slavery' terminology.

What has impressed and surprised me personally from GAATW meetings were the GAATW work ethics and the long working sessions including preparation and evaluation sessions sometimes until midnight, which I have not noticed at 'European' meetings. Further, cultural differences became clearly visible at meetings; Dutch and other Europeans are in general much more direct in their statements and questions, and could be critical and confronting towards others; I have seen several cultural clashes and miscommunications, but also great connections and intercultural exchange. I remember interesting talks with organisations supporting domestic workers in Lebanon. This exchange continued at nights; at GAATW meetings, I have shared hotel rooms with different people and still remember talking at length at night with a Suriname participant, who told me her life story over several nights. When I left, I knew all about her and her life.

I congratulate GAATW on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wish GAATW to remain successful and active and hope that in the near future, we can closely work together on a common project or action for change. I would like to see more direct cooperation between GAATW members in Europe with members or other regions on topics of common concern. The staff exchanges GAATW initiated in the past are a good example of what could be done to promote such exchange between members.

**Suzanne Hoff**, International Coordinator, La Strada International.  
GAATW Member.

## Linking trafficking in persons with migrant rights and broader issues

The last decade in Africa has seen a surge in adoption of more anti-trafficking legislations in various countries (with 40 out of 54 African countries adopting legislation since 2006) and more new laws and policies promoting women's rights in general and addressing gender-based violence specifically. There has also been an increase in the creation of government departments or agencies to combat trafficking in persons. However, due to lack of credible data to track trends with precision, it is difficult to say whether these efforts have led to reduction in trafficking flows within Africa or from Africa to the rest of the world.

The UNODC in 2016 reported that Africa remained a significant destination for intraregional trafficking and a major origin for trans-regional trafficking, with the most prevalent forms being trafficking of children and trafficking for forced labour. This prevalence may be borne out by the economic, social and political context in Africa within the past decade. The Arab Spring and the attendant conflicts and political instability in countries of North Africa earlier in the decade, the rise of terrorist groups and acts of terrorism, environmental degradation, and the economic strains of the fall in oil prices on many countries, and widening income inequalities in the region have all led to a surge of migrants within the continent and across the Mediterranean towards Europe and onwards. This surge of migrants is met by increasingly restrictive migration regimes, which limit regular mobility pathways within and beyond the region for potential migrants. **Whilst anti-trafficking efforts have increased in the past decade, they have proceeded in isolation from broader social, economic and political issues which continue to create the pressures to migrate and thereby a demand and supply of migrants who are vulnerable to exploitation through trafficking.**

Within this context, GAATW can continue to support its members to build knowledge through research on the links between trafficking in

persons and migrant rights and broader social, economic, environmental and political issues. Such knowledge will equip policy makers, service providers and human rights activists to develop and implement actions that are more comprehensive in addressing these issues as opposed to an isolated subject matter, which trafficking in persons is still being treated as today. The nature of current developments in Africa, like terrorism, smuggling and national insecurity means irregular migration is increasingly being viewed through the prism of national security, with the risk that all refugees and migrants are viewed as potential security threats.

It is important that GAATW continues to sustain its focus on a feminist perspective to migrants' rights discourse as women's rights in Africa remain challenged by enduring patriarchal structures in public institutions, in legal and policy environments as well as in practice. This creates a paradox of asserting special focus on the vulnerabilities of women and girls in anti-trafficking interventions, whilst treating them as passive beneficiaries of care and support and not as active agents in diverse forms of migration. At the same time, the glaring exclusion of men's experiences and needs in anti-trafficking interventions is relevant for Africa and can be an area for attention.

My encounter with GAATW in 2002 started one of the most enriching professional relationships of my career and ignited my passion for legislative and policy advocacy. Through advocating a revision to the 2003 Anti-TIP Act in Nigeria, to international advocacy for a review mechanism for the Palermo Protocol, to development of human rights tools for anti-trafficking officials in Nigeria and globally, that encounter set me on the path to contributing to helping shape human rights in Africa in my own small way. Since those early days, I have been a part of the evolving discourse from human trafficking as a unique phenomenon to its re-linkages with the wider issues of migration and labour rights and within them, the specific questions of women and children's rights as well as the rights of minorities and other identities of diversity within the migration process. Through the *Anti-Trafficking*

*Review*, to which I contributed in 2014, I have gained much knowledge about anti-trafficking policy and interventions globally.

My immediate wish for the future of GAATW is that it continues to do the invaluable work that many of the member organisations around the world benefit from, which is promoting new research into evolving trends in migrant women's rights, building capacity of member organisations to drive local discourse on trafficking across countries and regions, and helping develop tools for advocacy and policy reforms.

**Victoria Nwogu**, Gender Advisor, United Nations. GAATW former Board Member.



## Wings of Life

My husband whispers  
My employer says  
State regulates  
Neo Lib creates the norm:

It is normal  
When women are beaten and raped  
When women do everything and get low wage  
Moreover, if the woman is  
a wife  
a labourer  
a domestic worker  
a sex worker  
Moreover, if the woman is  
a migrant  
which even, ignored by her family and origin country

How dare you?!  
Thinking we would like to internalize the slave norm  
Thinking we will obey and submit to the normalization and regulation  
that you make

Will human dignity wither and decay because of economic hardship?  
Maybe yes, but not for us

We're a group of wings  
Self-organizing, protected or criminalized by state law  
The harder you oppress  
The stronger we develop wings  
Build formations from continent to continent  
Building confidence from heart to heart

We're a group of wings  
Who goes on, with or without state support  
Heading and creating better continents for each and every nation

We're a group of researchers wings  
Who hears silenced voices  
Which records how much the country and the strength of the global  
economy  
Respect or demean the mother of life

We're a group of lobbyists wings  
Who whispered at the negotiating tables between the state and neo-  
lib  
(which often does not give seats to the workers who are being sucked  
up)

We're a group of artist wings  
Who shows the evidence of oppression with paintings  
Who heals the workers who are raped by dancing  
Who gives a sign of ongoing injustice with the statue  
Who confirms resistance with poetry

We are a group of female wings  
the wife  
the labourer  
the domestic worker  
the sex worker  
the migrant

Those who believe today are yesterday and tomorrow  
Today is a life blessing, to fight the previous and future oppressions  
Those who believe in oppression are closer to Satan, fighting closer to  
God



Who believes in caring for life, as a sign of authenticity as a human being

We're a group of wings  
from the heart of Africa to Asia  
from the heart of America to Europe  
from the heart of places you ignore and forget

We're a group of living wings  
Keep moving  
With or without

**Dewi Nova**, GAATW former staff member.  
*Pamulang, Indonesia, 25 June 2019*



## **Remembering very inspiring years with GAATW**

Ban Ying has always had a strong connection to GAATW. The first time I met GAATW was in 1999 on two very different occasions: the first was doing lobby work to shape the UN Trafficking Protocol in Vienna; and the second was a workshop on Feminist Participatory Action Research in Bangkok. It was the start a very inspiring and deeply political and personal relationship. Until 2013 (when I left Ban Ying) I regularly met colleagues at workshops, doing lobby work at the UN in Geneva, annual meetings in Bangkok and regional meetings in Europe. Apart from these physical meetings we were regularly in touch. In all these years the GAATW Secretariat and network have always been reliable and helpful in many challenging situations. Retrospectively I must say that the issues I worked on with GAATW have significantly influenced my academic work as I teach many of these issues now to students of Social Work.

### **Feminist Participatory Action Research: a method I learnt from GAATW**

Having studied in Germany, I had learnt a lot about research methods, but never anything about Participatory Action Research. I was feeling very uncomfortable with the conventional research methods which seemed convenient to retrieve information, but left me with many unanswered ethical questions: why should the people I interview want to talk to me?; What do they gain from the interview/research?; Who guarantees that the research does not negatively affect them?; How can research ever be “neutral”?

The workshop on Feminist Participatory Action Research did not only provide space to discuss these uncomfortable questions but offered an opportunity to learn a new method that seemed ethically justifiable – one I had never heard of at university during my studies. Even today this method is very seldom taught in academia in Europe! I occasionally give classes on this method and students are delighted to get this input and some of them actually apply the method in their research projects

for example, with unaccompanied minor refugees in Germany. The material that GAATW has produced on FPAR (for example, the Feminist Participatory Action Research series of 2009/2010) is unique and shows how a human rights approach can also be guaranteed in doing research.

### **Lobbying for the Palermo Protocol**

The Palermo Protocol was adopted in December 2000. It was in January 1999 that the GAATW Secretariat informed the NGO community that this piece of legislation was being discussed and also mentioned its consequences. GAATW then formed the Human Rights Caucus, consisting of many NGOs and activists from anti-trafficking, sex worker rights and human rights groups and organised resources for us to be in Vienna and try to direct the focus of the document towards the human rights of trafficked people, rather than controlling migration. Often, international lobby work is done by (white) western Europeans who have studied law; **the strength of this Alliance lies in its geographical, professional and personal diversity**. GAATW made sure that especially the perspectives of those who were often unheard were taken into account.

In the following years it was very interesting to see how the Protocol provoked legislative changes in all regions of the world. At the same time, it remains problematic to see how some states have instrumentalised it for their political agendas. These experiences are excellently reflected in *Collateral Damage*, which came out in 2007 and illustrated the problematic sides of anti-trafficking interventions. We celebrated that the definition of trafficking in the Protocol finally included all sorts of work that trafficked people can be performing, but in many countries there remains a clear gap between the prosecution of trafficking for sexual exploitation and trafficking for labour exploitation, leaving the impression that state authorities still seem to believe that exploitation in the sex industry is bad enough to be called

trafficking, whereas other exploitations are “just” exploitation with corresponding consequences for the trafficked person.

### **GAATW: collective publications**

I find the quality, quantity and path of GAATW publications unique. GAATW always asks member organisations what their urging global issues are and supports them, and then builds a group of very interested members in order to collectively publish on an issue, while hoping to support others. One such occasion was the FIFA World Cup in Germany in 2006, repeating all the rumours that such sport events have regularly induced. GAATW gathered all our experiences and that of colleagues in similar situations, which led to the excellent publication *What’s the Cost of a Rumour?* in 2011.

Since 2012 GAATW has published the open access peer reviewed journal *Anti-Trafficking Review*, which explores trafficking in its broader context including gender analyses and intersections with labour and migration.

### **GAATW: conferences**

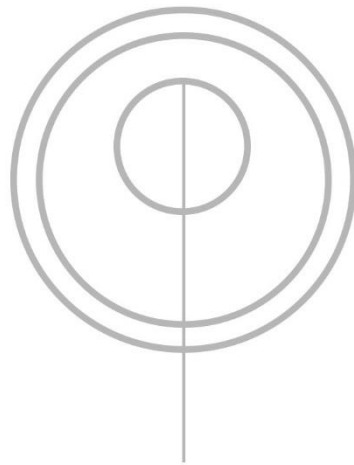
I consider myself very lucky, as I had the opportunity to attend many events that were hosted by the GAATW Secretariat. I have never again visited conferences that were so challenging; provided so much food for thought; were so well organised; reflected so much diversity; made sure that people directly affected by trafficking and/or anti-trafficking interventions were also considered experts on the issues we debated.

### **The Future**

Observing changes in the field of violence against women and migration I am very worried. In Europe there is an increase in right wing populism that is slowly expanding its boundaries. These parties have a clear anti-feminist (and anti-migration) agenda and are very successful in discussing issues of gender and migration in a misogynist and racist manner within mainstream society. In Germany for example they tried

to block the signing of the Global Compact on Migration in 2018, even though it is not legally binding and not very challenging for states. Currently one party is again trying to campaign for the prohibition of sex work! In such times, we need international feminist anti-racist alliances such as GAATW, that keep the standards up in order to ensure that these developments do not swallow up all the achievements of the last 25 years. And last but not least the GAATW Secretariat needs financial resources in order to continue all this challenging and demanding work.

**Nivedita Prasad**, Professor at Alice Solomon University, Berlin. Former Director of Ban Ying, a GAATW Member.



## **An ally of sex workers**

GAATW has long been valued as a key partner within the sex worker rights movement. In supporting the call for the decriminalisation of sex work, GAATW have been a leading ally in calling for a clear distinction between trafficking and exploitative labour practices within sex work. Anti-trafficking discussions on 'demand' have historically been stymied by anti-sex work efforts to eradicate the sex work sector by criminalising clients, despite protests from sex worker rights organisations and the growing evidence that such approaches do not work.

GAATW also joined NSWP and other international organisations as a partner in the Sex Worker-Inclusive Feminist Alliance. GAATW have added their voice to that of sex worker organisations in calling for greater inclusion, acceptance and respect of sex workers in discussions and fora within the women's movement, and promoting an evidence-based approach to highlighting the enormous harms caused to sex workers and to women's rights when sex workers are not recognised as rights bearers.

For many years GAATW's evidence-based, independent and detailed publications have been a vital resource for sex workers advocating for their rights. GAATW's publication 'What's the Cost of a Rumour' in 2011 exposed the supposed link between sporting events and trafficking. It corrected the hugely prevalent misinformation about trafficking and showed why this unsubstantiated idea still captures the imagination of politicians and some media, and offered a more constructive approach to address trafficking beyond short-term events. 2012's 'Beyond "Supply and Demand" Catchphrases' highlighted the folly of 'demand'-based approaches, such as the idea that eliminating sex workers' clients (or the 'demand' for commercial sex) through incarceration or stigmatisation will reduce trafficking. In 2018's 'Sex Workers Organising for Change', GAATW details the ways in which sex worker rights organisations are responding to violence, exploitation and other abuses

within the sex industry, including human trafficking. The report demonstrated that sex worker rights organisations are human rights organisations whose primary mandate is to ensure that the human, economic, social, political, and labour rights of the people they work with are recognised and respected by state and non-state actors.

GAATW's *Anti-Trafficking Review* has always ensured that sex workers' voices were included in debates around the anti-trafficking narrative. This culminated in 2019's Special Issue on Sex Work which enabled sex workers to tell their own stories, highlighting how they claim their human, social, and labour rights, resist stigma and punitive laws and policies, and provide mutual and peer-based support.

NSWP congratulates GAATW on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and looks forward to continuing to strengthen our partnership in the coming years.

**Ruth Morgan Thomas**, Global Coordinator, Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). GAATW ally.



## **An Alliance pushing for placing human rights at the centre of any anti-trafficking strategy**

In 2005 I had just graduated and started working at PROJETO TRAMA – a consortium of civil society organisations working on human trafficking in Rio de Janeiro. My colleagues and I came across GAATW while searching for anti-trafficking organisations in Europe that provided assistance to Brazilian women. There were only a few of us in the region and GAATW turned out to be an important network to help us gather organisations from different parts of Brazil and inspire us to set up a Latin American anti-trafficking network.

I remember with great joy the long discussions with partners from Brazil, Dominican Republic and Colombia on the differences and similarities of human trafficking in the region and the importance of having a regional chapter of the Global Alliance: The Red de América Latina y el Caribe de la GAATW or, as we called it, GAATW-REDLAC. Together with other GAATW members in the region and the International Secretariat, PROJETO TRAMA decided to hold four workshops at the World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela. It was an odyssey to organise those meetings as the dynamic of that WSF was a bit different and activities were spread throughout the city, which forced us to travel in large groups to different parts of Caracas. We made the most of the experience, getting to know the city and strengthening ties with members of several anti-trafficking organisations, survivors, sex workers, academics and politicians who came to the workshops to discuss important aspects of trafficking.

Government and civil society were becoming aware of the realities faced by trafficked persons and the Brazilian government, in particular, realised there was a need for further understanding and investment in this field. A lot was accomplished in the following years. Brazil approved a National Policy to Combat Human Trafficking and National Action Plans on Combating Trafficking in Persons organising federal governmental initiatives around this issue. The Brazilian legislation was



also changed and researches on trafficking by academia and non-government organisations within the region expanded. At the same time, anti-trafficking organisations pushed the government to adopt a human rights-based approach, placing human rights at the centre of any anti-trafficking strategy.

During this period, I had the fantastic opportunity of researching and writing – together with Frans Nederstigt – the Brazil Chapter of *Collateral Damage*, coordinated and published by GAATW with brilliant guidance from Mike Dottridge. This report was an opportunity to revisit the accomplishments in the fight against human trafficking but also the challenges and side effects of anti-trafficking measures. This report reinforced the need to study the efforts to combat trafficking and their impact on trafficked persons. That's why I was very happy when GAATW launched in 2012 the *Anti-trafficking Review*, offering a space for dialogue among advocates around the world.

We still have a long way to go in the pursuit of a socially just society and GAATW plays an important role here. **Human trafficking is not only intrinsically embedded in the context of migration and labour, but it is also linked to gender inequalities and social exclusion.** The current situation in Brazil, with a far-right president openly opposed to human rights and minority groups, undermining the rule of law and democracy, together with previous attempts to dismantle policies to combat forced labour and other violations happening in the country, reinforces the need for a strong civil society and a united global alliance to fight these setbacks. In fact, it is the global character of GAATW and its ability to comprehend how different types of oppression work to hinder people's access to resources and rights that allows us to work on the issue of human trafficking with a more critical perspective. In this sense, Alliance building through GAATW is a great instrument to devise plans so as to change the realities of those who are trapped in the web of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

**Luciana Campello**, Programme Manager at C&A Foundation, Brazil.  
GAATW ally.



## **Focusing our work on the people**

TWC2 (Transient Workers Count Too) came into contact with GAATW at the very end of 2007. Our work was nearly all with low-pay documented migrant workers, but from time to time, we would encounter individuals who we thought might have been trafficked. We joined GAATW to learn as much as to contribute to a broader network. We were impressed by the range of people and groups that came together in GAATW, and we appreciated something that seemed fundamental to the alliance's whole attitude to trafficking, which was to be focussed around the people that anti-trafficking work is supposed to be supporting, rather than taking a top-down, legal and administrative approach.

In Singapore in the past 15 years, we have seen a certain amount of progress. Public awareness of trafficking has grown, and Singapore has passed the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, as well as signed up to the Palermo Protocol. However, there is still a tendency to stress prosecution of those complicit in trafficking more than protection for possible victims, and the criteria for establishing that a person has been trafficked appear overly restrictive.

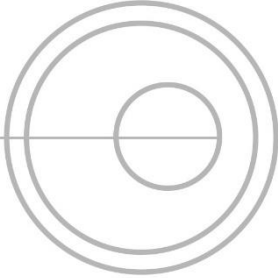
The right of domestic workers to a weekly day off has been recognised in law, though a "get out" clause providing for supposedly voluntary agreements between workers and employers that enable days off to be given up in return for payment does not take into account the power disparity between the two and leaves around a third or more of domestic workers without any days off. This is still a significant improvement over their position when we started.

Measures have been introduced to make resolving pay disputes easier: workers are legally meant to be informed of their due pay before leaving their countries of origin, and most must receive itemised pay slips. However, we encounter many cases of workers being induced to sign papers accepting greatly inferior pay levels on arrival in Singapore, which the authorities regard as voluntary consent on the part of

workers. A new Employment Claims Tribunal is supposed to make settling cases easier, but many migrant workers will have difficulties with the online processes required of them in lodging their claim. Intermediary fees are a considerable burden for most workers and the need to pay back debts is one important factor making them vulnerable to pressure from employers to accept inferior conditions of employment to those they'd expected. While in the recent past, domestic workers' pay has kept pace with or even risen faster than intermediary fees, for many male workers, especially those from Bangladesh, conditions have markedly deteriorated: new workers may pay SGD 15,000-16,000 for a job, compared to SGD 7,000-8,000 in 2011.

It's been valuable to hear the perspectives of other GAATW members on issues that concern us, for example, the experience of organisations working with sex workers and their response to purported anti-trafficking actions such as police raids in red light areas, clarification of things such as the distinction between people smuggling and trafficking and the discussions around the "modern slavery" theme.

In the longer term, I think that approaches that take on trafficking by, in part, countering the conditions in which it can be fairly invisible would be a productive approach to stress. **The distinction between workers who are trafficked and those who are not but face horribly exploitative conditions often seems quite artificial and can serve to make the latter appear tolerable and legitimate.** I'd like GAATW to become unnecessary, which it would be in a world where women have due rights and respect and in which those who labour for a living are empowered.



**John Gee**, Head of the research sub-committee and a former president of Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), Singapore. GAATW member.

## **Working to ensure that the voices of those whose rights are violated are heard**

A quarter century ago, the United Nations used an obscure term ('contemporary forms of slavery') to refer to severe forms of exploitation and the phrase 'trafficking in women (and girls)' was interpreted to refer to recruitment into prostitution. Then **'human trafficking' became a major international issue, in part to justify wealthy countries closing their borders to migrants from poorer countries and 'saving' (and deporting) migrants who were exploited.** Despite efforts spearheaded by GAATW to move the focus onto the human rights of people who were trafficked or exploited and women migrants in general, investments in stopping trafficking went mainly into constructing giant STOP signs and channelling resources to criminal justice professionals and immigration services. Finally, over the past five years, we have seen the pendulum move back to the term 'modern slavery' and counting 'modern slaves', in a campaign led by xenophobic governments, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, still dedicated to portraying human trafficking and slavery as crimes that can be stopped by catching criminals, rather than as systemic characteristics of the world's current economy that require systemic changes to put an end to current patterns of exploitation.

When I was director of the London-based NGO Anti-Slavery International (1996-2002) I initially found it difficult to find out what GAATW was or what it was doing. During those six years I never travelled further east than India, but I became gradually more involved in GAATW's work as it spelt out the human rights of trafficked persons in a handbook. It was issued shortly before the UN adopted its Trafficking Protocol (November 2000) which contained a new definition of human trafficking but next-to-nothing about human rights. All that changed when I made the first of many visits to Bangkok which fortunately coincided with a GAATW workshop that I was able to attend. GAATW's work on human rights, compiled by Elaine Pearson,

was put to vital use when the Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights convened two meetings to spell out what was missing from the UN Trafficking Protocol. The result was the UN High Commissioner's *Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking*, issued in 2002, but not submitted to a UN body for approval for fear that they might be rejected.

Over the next few years I lived through some exciting and even life-threatening times with GAATW (mainly Marjan Wijers' torpedo, launched at a conference convened in December 2004 to mark the Alliance's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, after which I was caught up in the tsunami that hit Thailand's southwestern coast). I saw the rise and fall and then rise again of GAATW's Latin American network—although this started with a shock to me and those Spanish-speaking experts who had made the long journey to Bangkok and who then had to listen to my excruciating Spanish, and mispronounce words, addressing the women as 'bitches' (*'perritas'*) rather than 'experts' (*'peritas'*—the difference is in the way the 'R' is pronounced). I think they eventually forgave me!

A key aim for anyone with a human rights background is to ensure that the voices of those whose rights are violated are heard (notably by policy makers) and to encourage them to get organised in their own defence. GAATW has made an important contribution, in the face of unflinching opposition from governments and UN organisations, notably by trying to persuade the countries which ratified the UN Trafficking Protocol to set up an independent body to review the Protocol's implementation (a treaty-monitoring body). At successive meetings at the UN in Vienna they have refused. Further, it is still difficult to refer others to a 'standard' method for ensuring that the views and voices of trafficked people are listened to, let alone heard.

I have been disappointed that GAATW has not established a stronger support base in sub-Saharan Africa, but have no difficulty in recognising that the term 'trafficking' (along with 'modern slavery') makes little sense in light of the realities in most of the continent. I have been disillusioned by our failure, despite the wording of the UN Trafficking



Protocol, to persuade governments, such as the US and Sweden, not to exploit the term 'human trafficking' in their efforts to close down the sex industry in their countries and elsewhere. In recent years I have also been saddened by the way that certain governments (in particular Australia, UK and USA) have established a monopoly of funding on the issue of human trafficking. None of them appears committed to protecting the human rights of people who are trafficked or human rights in general, although each is ready to make lofty rhetorical statements and to denounce 'the heinous crime' of trafficking (or modern slavery).

All this implies that GAATW still has plenty to do, keeping the focus on human rights at a time when governments, whatever they say in public, are moving fast in the opposite direction.

**Mike Dottridge**, Independent human rights expert, Former director of Anti-Slavery International. GAATW ally.

## A window to the world

### Contacts and parallels

It was back in 1996 and I remember that special atmosphere of a GAATW meeting. My first impression? I was overwhelmed with the amount of new information, contacts and interactions. One could feel the spirit of dedication, creativity and solidarity radiating in the air. Dozens of new ideas boiled in my head. How to make any use of it? The reflection came later, while sharing my impressions about the GAATW network with my colleagues at La Strada in Poland. I shared with them what I learnt about the global and different manifestations of human trafficking. It has had an empowering effect on our work in La Strada, as we started to realise more and more that **we are not alone in our fight and there are hundreds of organisations and groups worldwide facing the same situation, overcoming similar obstacles, fighting for the same rights.**

### Unity and diversity

My work with GAATW was a learning process on how to deal with different approaches, points of view and different ways of working that I not always shared and agreed with. It was a great school of dialogue and tolerance for me. How to respect them, how to accept them? Notwithstanding, the differences were overcome with the commonly respected and exercised human rights values and principles that we all followed.

### Backing and affiliation

We used the GAATW network as a “fortifying element” of our advocacy and lobbying work on a national and regional level. It still worked with our governmental officials back in the 1990s, when we showed how international our work is and how strong we and our partners worldwide are together.

### **Advocacy & lobbying**

GAATW was also a gateway for La Strada's international lobbying work. It enabled us to become a member of the Human Rights Caucus, an active part of the NGO work on the Palermo Protocol. For more than one year (1999/2000), a strong team of dedicated human rights experts lobbied for a definition of trafficking and provisions for trafficked persons. For me it was a unique opportunity that built a solid foundation of our advocacy and lobbying work.

### **People - the most important!**

The most rewarding experience and an extra bonus for me were the people I met on my journey with GAATW. Many of them impressive, fascinating, inspiring, intriguing, role-modelling, patterns to follow, partners to argue and agree with, colleagues, friends. The quintessence of my networking.

Happy anniversary, GAATW!!! Many happy returns of the day!

**Stana Buchowska**, Regional coordinator at ECPAT; founder of La Strada Poland. GAATW former Board Member.







## Listening to the voices of migrants and trafficked persons

When I first started working on issues of migration, asylum and displacement some 20 years ago, these topics were mostly confined to specialised places in policy, research and advocacy – although the outcry over the “asylum crisis” in Europe in the mid-late 1990s foreshadowed the ways in which this debate would come to define the public agenda two decades on. Since then, we have witnessed a proliferation of discussions on migration. We had a UN summit on large movements of people, resulting in the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, and the subsequent negotiation of the Global Compacts for Migration and on Refugees. All of this has brought migration and displacement onto the agenda of more people, more governments, different government departments, UN agencies, and different civil society actors. The net result of this is that, now the stakes are higher than they’ve ever been – that means more potential for positive change, but also more potential for failure, for issues to be framed in ways that may be detrimental to our cause. One of these issues continues to be trafficking.

In the arsenal of those arguing for more effective “migration management”, trafficking has always stood out as an exponent of the failure of law and order, as an open affront to state sovereignty. Controlling borders – and, in many cases, preventing movement – thus becomes a means to an end, often with little regard for the rights of those on the move. These rights recede even further from view when – as has been the case in recent years – the public debate on migration becomes injected with xenophobic rhetoric, stoking fears of terrorism and diminishing public resources.

We live in the age of hyperbole and manipulation. It’s hard to know which “experts” to trust. In this age, **GAATW has been a stalwart of nuanced analysis, as well as of trusting, first and foremost, the expertise of those about whom policies are being designed and implemented in the first place.**

This has been evident in two areas in particular. One is the evolution of the discourse on trafficking. Previously often relegated to a special corner of law enforcement in connection with transnational crime, GAATW has been at the forefront of promoting an awareness of the structural causes that give rise to trafficking. It has encouraged practitioners and policymakers in different arenas to move beyond a simplistic focus on the symptoms, which had often led to short-sighted policies based on patriarchal notions of law and order, protection, and migrants' – especially women migrants' – rights to make autonomous choices. Instead, structures of gender-based discrimination, as well as exploitative working conditions and the inaccessibility of justice have been exposed clearly as a result of GAATW's work.

In addition, the alliance has never been satisfied with analysing policy frameworks and engaging in global and regional advocacy spaces, both with civil society and intergovernmental actors. An integral part of GAATW's approach has been to base this analysis on the voices of those who have been the targets of the policies investigated. Documenting their experiences and views in a way that acknowledges their agency and values them as equal participants in the process is what has set apart GAATW's work from that of many others in the sector. Thus, the adverse effects of migration bans on Nepali women, the often limited impact of anti-trafficking legislation on the situation of women migrants, and the widespread deficiencies in basic labour rights that are hindering real-life "safe and fair migration" for many women have been powerfully and effectively documented by GAATW.

If I were to express one wish for GAATW's future, it would be that its work becomes even more elevated, its voices heard by even more people, and its arms interlinked with those of even more allies fighting for change. I look forward to walking this path together.

**Christian Wolff**, Programme Manager for Migration & Displacement at the global ACT Alliance. GAATW ally.



## **Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**

191/41 Sivalai Condominium, 33 Itsaraphap Road, Bangkok 10600, Thailand  
T: +66-2-864-14 27/8, F: +66-2-864-16 37

Website: [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/GAATW\\_IS](https://twitter.com/GAATW_IS)

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/GlobalAllianceAgainstTrafficInWomen/>