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பெண்கள் தொடர்பு ஊடகங்களுக்கான கூட்டமைப்பு
Women & Media Collective

WMC and ACTFORM condemn the execution of Sri Lankan migrant worker Rizana Nafeek

The Women and Media Collective (WMC) and the Action Network for Migrant Workers (ACTFORM) strongly condemn the execution of Sri Lankan migrant worker Rizana Nafeek by the Government of Saudi Arabia. She was on death row having convicted of killing an infant while working at the household of a Saudi Arabian National in 2005. Despite appeals from national and international organizations for the protection of the rights of migrant workers and, from the Sri Lankan Government as recently as the 5th of January 2013 to defer the execution, it was carried out on the 9th of January 2013.

She was arrested on the 25th of May 2005, the same day of the incident. According to Saudi Authorities, she confessed to the killing of the child but she later retracted her statement, which she said was made under duress. She remained incarcerated until the time of her execution. From the time she was accused of killing the infant to the conviction, she had little or no access to legal counsel and no access to a lawyer who spoke her language to initiate a strong appeal against criminal negligence on her part.

Efforts were made by WMC and ACTFORM and other organizations to pressurize the Sri Lankan government as well as the Saudi Authorities to act on behalf of Rizana. In 2010 WMC and ACTFORM launched an Island wide signature campaign appealing to the Saudi Arabian Government for a pardon for Rizana Nafeek. Over 5000 signatures were collected and the appeal was handed over to the Saudi Embassy in Colombo on November 08, 2010. The appeal was sent to the King of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom's Interior Minister through the Saudi Embassy in Colombo. The appeal was also sent to the Sri Lankan President.



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The tragic death of Rizana is a clear indication of the Sri Lankan government's lack of commitment to ensure proper engagement with national as well as diplomatic processes for the safe migration and return of migrant workers from this country. The fact that recruitment agencies are able to send under-age girls with falsified documents exposes the impunity with which national administrative processes are violated. The length of time it took for the Sri Lankan government to begin to focus on Rizana's unjust incarceration is symptomatic of its disregard for prioritizing State responsibility and accountability towards Sri Lankan workers who are the mainstay of the country's economy. Given the reluctance of the Sri Lankan government to protest or respond after the death sentence had been passed in Saudi Arabia, it was the Asian Human Rights Commission that stepped in to file an appeal on her behalf. The Sri Lankan government at that stage maintained that it would abide by its policy of non-intervention for Sri Lankan workers charged with criminal activity outside the country. This stance was taken despite facts that indicated that Rizana was in fact innocent of criminal negligence. This decision of the Sri Lankan government is in stark contrast to the immediate interventions by other Asian governments that send thousands of its nationals to work as migrant workers in West Asian countries. In 2001, the President of the Philippines strongly appealed to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to release two Filipino maids accused of murder and these two women were able to return to the Philippines albeit after spending almost 9 years in jail. In 2009, in a case where an Indonesian maid was accused of murder, the Indonesian Government reportedly negotiated the payment of the compensation stipulated to secure its national's release, and the Indonesian housemaid returned safely to her home country. It is a disgrace to all Sri Lankans that the Sri Lankan government instead of admitting its callous failure to explore all possible means to save the life of Rizana is now attempting to accuse non governmental organizations of trying to undermine it.

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WMC and ACTFORM demand accountability and transparency in the implementation of measures for the protection of the lives and the rights of all migrant workers. WMC reiterates that this tragedy should not be used to deny women the right to employment overseas. Rather, this should be a turning point in the government's policy regarding migrant workers and should serve to make it clear in no uncertain manner that the Sri Lankan government bears full responsibility to ensure that all possible international and diplomatic measures are taken to ensure there will be no such tragedies in the future.

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