

MIGRANT FORUM



in A S I A

Migrant Forum in Asia Statement to the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference

June 2011, Geneva

Thank you, Chair, for this opportunity to address the committee.

My name is Ristanti. I have been a migrant domestic worker for 9 years, and I am here today as a member of the delegation of Migrant Forum in Asia, a regional network of NGOs, associations and trade unions of migrant workers, and individual advocates in Asia that are committed to the protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of migrant workers.

I thank my employer for giving me permission for a two-week leave so that I could be here to address you today. It is an honour to be a part of this historic moment. But as I stand here, I know that there are millions of other domestic workers who do not share that privilege.

It is fitting that the milestone 100th Session of the ILC be marked with a return to its social justice roots – a landmark Convention supplemented by a Recommendation setting international standards to protect the rights and welfare of one of the most vulnerable groups of workers. This 100th Session will be remembered for remedying one of the most pressing injustices in the modern world of work.

We echo the words of the Director General in his address to us only last evening, when he invited us all to realize the significance of this moment. This Convention marks the movement of the ILO system into the realm of protections for workers of the informal economy. With this Convention and Recommendation, domestic workers will become part of the ILO's history; the lives and working conditions of millions of domestic workers will be greatly improved.

As Migrant Forum in Asia, we bring forward concerns that we strongly hold should be addressed in the text of this Convention, and reflected in the Recommendation.

First, there is a clear need for the regulation of a recruitment system that charges exorbitant fees, puts migrant domestic workers in situations of debt bondage, and deploys workers abroad without providing them with adequate information.

Second, as migrant domestic workers it is imperative that there be an ILO Convention that recognizes our need for freedom of association and the right to form trade unions.

Third, even as I have been granted the time off to be here, one of the constant struggles of domestic workers is the basic need for rest and the right to a day off.

MFA reiterates the call of different members of this committee for a flexible yet robust Convention, at the heart of which is the key binding recognition that domestic work is work, like every other work.

We also acknowledge the need for an instrument that will be universally ratifiable, but that is the commitment that we members, participants and observers of this historic Committee will bring back to the constituents we represent. It took us 56 years to get here. Let us hope universal ratification will come about in a fraction of that time.

Chair, members of the Committee: As the Director General reminded us yesterday, it is not often that we have the feeling that history is being made. I am proud to be a part of that history, for domestic work is not slavery; domestic work is work; domestic workers are workers.

Thank you.