



## Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Domestic Workers: an ILO Convention after 63 years

Migrant Forum in Asia Statement  
9 June 2011, Geneva

### The Realities of Migrant Domestic Workers

On June 7<sup>th</sup> at 9:15pm, we celebrated the adoption of the draft provisions of the ILO Convention on Domestic Work by the Committee on Domestic Work. That moment was a milestone in a 63-year long struggle to secure the rights of this highly vulnerable group of workers. Yet alongside this triumph is the harsh reality that exists for many domestic workers throughout the world who suffer grave abuses on a daily basis. As we celebrate this moment, we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a long road ahead to ensure that domestic workers are protected; their rights, now enshrined in Convention form, must be defended and strengthened.

Many migrant domestic workers face harsh realities on a daily basis. Their conditions of work are unregulated, many are abused and mistreated by their employers, and they live in isolation – behind the closed doors of private family homes, beyond the reach of labour inspectors and state authorities. Many are beaten, and many die. They are not covered by the labour laws of the countries in which they work, they are paid low wages, they do not enjoy social protection, and their contributions to both their host and home societies go unrecognized and unappreciated. Until this moment, they have been marginalized and alone.

### The ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011

Perhaps the greatest achievement of this convention is that domestic workers are finally officially recognized by the international community as *workers*, just like any other workers. This venue has brought together domestic workers from across the world, in solidarity with one another, reaffirming that they are not alone. It has raised worldwide consciousness of their plight, and their important place in the world of work.

The Domestic Workers Convention bestows upon domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers, most of whom are women and girls, the same labour rights and standards as are extended to any other workers. The Convention recognizes, among others, that domestic workers have the right to join and form trade unions; to be informed of their terms of employment, including hours of work, compensation, rest days; to retain their travel and identity documents; to work in safe and healthy workplaces subject to labour inspection; to social protection benefits, including maternity benefits; and the right not to be subject to mandatory HIV testing as is the current practice in many countries.

### Steps Forward

While we anticipate the adoption of a strong convention supplemented by a recommendation, the situation of domestic workers, and migrant domestic workers, will not change overnight. The members of Migrant Forum in Asia have much work to do, now that these international standards have been set.

Migrant Forum in Asia will spread the news of this important Convention among our networks, raising awareness among domestic workers and those who advocate for their rights, and what this means for us.

We will assist domestic workers in organizing themselves to demand the rights enshrined in the Convention; to unite, to bargain collectively, and to dialogue with other social partners and labour organizations to claim their rights at the national and international levels.

We will continue to lobby our governments through sustained dialogue to ensure that national legislation reflects the provisions stipulated in the Convention.

This moment is significant: the Convention brings workers of the informal sector into the formal sector for the first time. This represents a ray of hope for others working in the informal sector, that the potential exists for their rights to be protected as well.

### **The Case of Lebanon, By Caritas Lebanon**

As a partner of Migrant Forum in Asia, Caritas Lebanon has been engaging in sustained dialogue with the Lebanese government on this issue. We welcomed the introduction of legislation this year that would protect the rights of domestic workers, however the proposed provisions fall short of international standards. With the Convention, we have a strong basis to demand that these new international standards be upheld. We support the efforts of the other organizations in the MFA network to do the same in their countries.

**Domestic work is work! Domestic workers are workers! Domestic work is not slavery!**

#### Press Conference Panelists, MFA Members

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