



**For Immediate Release**

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

## **A Large Civil Society and Global Trade Unions Coalition Launch a Call for an Urgent Justice Mechanism for Repatriated Migrant Workers**

On June the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, a large coalition of civil society organizations and global trade unions launched a call for an urgent justice mechanism for repatriated migrant workers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Globally, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates 195 million jobs will be wiped out as a result of the pandemic. In the Middle East region alone, an estimated 5 million jobs will be lost, many of those jobs are held by migrant workers. Since the start of the pandemic, more than 200,000 migrant workers have been repatriated to Asia from different parts of the world. This number is expected to rise exponentially over the next few months. Countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines, anticipate the eventual return of a large number of their migrant workers population abroad.

Without proper controls, employers might take advantage of mass repatriation programs to terminate and return workers who have not been paid their due compensation, wages and benefits. Millions will be repatriated to situations of debt bondage as they will be forced to pay off recruitment fees and costs, despite returning empty handed.

Without ensuring that companies and employers are doing their due diligence to protect and fulfill the human rights and labour rights of repatriated migrant workers, states across the migration corridor become complicit in overseeing procedures where millions of workers will be returning without their earned wages or workplace grievances being heard, nor seeing justice in their situation.

“Extraordinary times, call for extraordinary measures” said William Gois, Regional Coordinator of Migrant Forum in Asia, “millions will suffer if this crime goes unnoticed. We cannot see this as collateral damage brought by the pandemic”.

It should be a priority to guarantee that all repatriated workers with legitimate claims are able to access justice and some kind of compensation. The appeal which, civil organizations and trade unions have launched together, calls on governments to urgently establish a transitional justice mechanism to address grievances, claims and labor disputes of repatriated workers who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic.



Many migrant workers have reconciled to the situation of wage theft in the form of unfair or unpaid wages for months and years before the COVID 19 pandemic. They have accepted it as their fate and refrained from complaining lest they lose their jobs, or, worst still, live under the fear of their status being made undocumented.

“The pandemic must not stifle our will, our spirit and commitment for justice” Gois said. If we are to ‘Build Back Better’, we cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the issue of wage theft that has been persistent across migration corridors for years, and will be unprecedented in the case of repatriated migrant workers in the COVID 19 pandemic.

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