

PRESS RELEASE | MFA Releases First Case Analysis Report, “Crying Out for Justice: Wage Theft Against Migrant Workers during COVID-19”

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Last 07 April 2021, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) launched the analysis report, “**Crying Out for Justice: Wage Theft Against Migrant Workers during COVID-19**” as part of the Justice for Wage Theft campaign, that document cases of wage theft from the period of **November 2019 to January 2021**. The Justice for Wage Theft campaign was launched by a large coalition of trade unions and civil society organizations in 01 June 2020, calling for an urgent justice mechanism for migrant workers repatriated due to COVID-19 without being paid their due wages, salaries, and end-of-service benefits.

Dasharathi Barik, an Indian migrant worker who experienced wage theft after being terminated from his job in Saudi Arabia in early 2020, spoke during the launch to call on stakeholders to help him and hundreds of his colleagues in the same situation address the wage theft that they have experienced. He stated, *“We have been trying to file our case for the past 6-7 months but there has been no response from the Indian Embassy. We will not be able to file a case after one year in Saudi court. We request all of you to support us file a case to get the money we worked hard for.”*

Barik further shared that finding a new job has been extremely difficult amid the worsening COVID-19 situation, after he failed to pursue two job opportunities in the UAE. *“We are all poor, we have to send our children to school and find a means to feed our family.”*

Following Barik’s appeal, William Gois, Regional Coordinator of MFA, emphasizes, *“It is people like Barik who are suffering the most during this pandemic. The study we have done highlights how universal the issue of wage theft is ... how systemic this problem is.”*

This is echoed as well by one of the reactors, Neill Wilkins, Head of Migrant Workers Programme of the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB). Wilkins emphasized that the issue is globally systemic including among companies and employers. *“These practices have become deeply embedded in global supply chains, so much that it has become a normal part of doing business. Employers are able to get away with this because workers from impoverished backgrounds are unable to say no.”*

MFA presented the various forms of scenarios in which wage theft occurs apart from non-payment of wages such as through failure to pay on time, unpaid overtime, and reduced wages. Anna Engblom, Chief Technical Advisor of the International Labour Organization (ILO) TRIANGLE, Bangkok, pointed out as indicated in ILO’s studies that, *“migrants have to regularly accept wages that are below minimum wage and systemically being paid less than what local workers are being paid for in the same job.”* Engblom reiterates that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the issue of wage theft which has existed prior to the pandemic, asserting that not only does the study of MFA confirm this fact, but so does the work that the ILO is doing in assessing the impact of the pandemic on migrant workers.

The report also revealed the intrinsic lack of access to justice among migrant workers around this issue. Nenette Motus, Regional Director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Asia-Pacific underscores this reality saying, *“This report is very timely and is a reality check for us. It highlights that there is a continued lack of access to justice mechanisms further revealed in this time of crisis. Undeniably, there is a need for increased, proactive, bilateral multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration to address such situations [of wage theft] underlined by the data we all collect, which we have the responsibility to collect.”*

David Schilling, Senior Program Director of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). Schilling shared the same insight, pointing out the balance between data and the human cost of wage theft found in the report. *“We got to have that data to bring to governments, companies, international organizations, to change policies so that access to justice ... is embedded in the systems internationally and at the national level.”* In referring to the story of Dasharathi Barik, Schilling stresses the urgency of the situation; *“This is urgent, this is not something we can put on an agenda for tomorrow, it is today.”*

William Gois called upon the international community to take action on the systemic issue: *“It is time for us to look at how we want to take this forward. We need to make this a tipping point in our own struggle for looking for justice for migrant workers; we must see what more needs to be done and what more we can do.”*

The pandemic has devastated the lives of many migrant workers across the globe, leaving many of them hopeless and with no options before them as they are left jobless and empty-handed. A year after the breakout of the pandemic, they continue to face barriers in accessing justice, specifically getting their wages in an expedited manner.

“Crying Out for Justice” is the first in a series of reports to be published by MFA based on their on-going documentation of wage theft cases filed through their online documentation system available on the Justice for Wage Theft website. The report will be published on a bi-annual basis.

As migrants’ rights advocates, we strongly urge you to share this report widely, particularly to concerned stakeholders who are interested in supporting the campaign, in forming concrete, short-term and long-term solutions that will help migrant workers retrieve their wages and achieve justice.

You may access the report via this link: <http://mfasia.org/crying-out-for-justice-wage-theft-against-migrant-workers-during-covid-19/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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