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“Dirty, degrading and dangerous”

Take action on International Migrants Day (18 December) to prevent the exploitation of all migrant workers.

An estimated 90 million migrants live and work outside their country of birth, many of them having left in search of security and a sustainable livelihood. Many economies have come to rely on migrants who are prepared to work in what are often referred to as “3-D jobs” – dirty, degrading and dangerous with little security and low wages.

Migrant workers are often subjected to a variety of human rights abuses by unscrupulous employers as well as host states. These include: non-payment of salaries; confiscation of passports and other documents; verbal and physical abuse; lack of proper housing and health provision; and arbitrary arrest and detention in abusive conditions.

Women, who constitute around fifty per cent of migrant workers, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, including sexual violence.

Migrant workers are often too afraid to complain about their situation. If they do, they are likely to be sacked by their employer and, if they turn to the authorities, they may be deported from the country.

The Migrant Workers Convention came into force in 2003 and reaffirms the obligation of states to respect the human rights and freedoms of migrants residing in their country. “It is a vital part of efforts to combat exploitation of migrant workers and their families” in the words of Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, 2003. Only 34 states have ratified this Convention to date. However, ratifying a Convention does not always result in complying with the provisions set out in it, and some of the ratifying states to the Migrant Workers Convention have not lived up to their international obligations.

Case study

“I had been working in Qatar for a Lebanese family for two years and two months, but had not been paid a penny. When I told my employer I would complain to the police, she immediately took me to the police. I was detained for three days before they brought me to prison. I have been to court six times. I have no lawyer and I don’t know what is happening.”

– 30 year old female domestic worker from Indonesia.

Take action!

Call on your government to ratify and/or implement the Migrant Workers Convention.

Sample letter

Dear President / Prime Minister

I am writing to urge you to take all necessary measures to respect and protect the human rights of all migrants in your country, in accordance with international human rights standards and principles.

In particular, I urge you to [ratify and] ***delete as appropriate*** fully implement The International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (The Migrant Workers Convention).

Migrant workers, many of whom work in difficult and degrading jobs with little security and low wages, are often exploited by unscrupulous employers and too afraid to complain about their situation. Whether migrant workers are in a regular or irregular situation in your country, their human rights must be respected.

Ratification and full implementation of the Migrant Workers Convention is an important affirmation of a state's commitment to respect, protect and promote the human rights of everyone on their territory.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours Sincerely,

(Photo)

Migrant workers from Myanmar return home after being expelled from Thailand

(AP GraphicsBank)