

Asian Parliamentarians Forum on Migrant Workers
Manila Statement – 24-26 May 2011

We, Asian Parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka have come together on the eve of the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference. This is a monumental occasion at which the tripartite constituents of the ILO will negotiate the text for an ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, supplemented with a Recommendation. This new international treaty would establish, for the first time, global labour standards for this historically neglected group of workers.

We have collectively deliberated on the vulnerability of Migrant Domestic Workers in a number of host countries, and we recognize the pressing need for strong support of this landmark Convention, setting the minimum framework for national legislation that recognizes the contribution that migrant domestic workers make to the development of both their home and host countries.

The United Nations estimates that a large proportion of the 62 million migrant workers in Asia¹ are women who are mostly employed in domestic work. Migrant domestic workers from labour-sending countries, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, work in households in wealthier countries across Asia and the Middle East. Major destination countries include Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. While some migrant domestic workers have positive experiences, our recent field investigations in a number of destination countries show that many others face the risk of abuse at all stages of the migration process, with serious lack of protection measures and access to justice in destination countries. This is also verified by parliamentarians' reports of inhumane living and working conditions confronting most domestic workers in the Gulf States.²

Acknowledging that most countries do not include domestic workers in their labour laws, it is imperative that as the ILO begins its deliberations on an international convention, parliamentarians from both labour sending and receiving countries, who have largely remained on the periphery of deliberations on migration policy, urgently convene around parliamentary processes for the drafting of national legislation that recognizes the rights of domestic workers, the minimum standards for which will be stipulated in the forthcoming ILO Convention.

To ensure that migrant work is not commodified, and that migrant worker communities are not played off against one another, it is imperative that sending countries unite and agree on a common strategy to urge receiving countries to adopt laws and regulations that promote the interests and welfare of migrant workers.

Recognizing previous attempts at the ASEAN level to promote a greater understanding of migrant worker issues among parliamentarians, and encouraged by the establishment of a committee tasked with crafting instruments to promote the protection of migrant workers within the region, we urge our respective governments to adopt and implement without further delay, a legally-binding instrument of protection for ALL migrant workers within ASEAN.

We call for the formation of an Asia-wide parliamentarians' caucus on migrant workers to cooperate in the enactment of legislation that would promote the rights and welfare of migrant workers and their families, and in overseeing the implementation of these laws and multilateral agreements.

Furthermore, we commit to bringing this strong sense of solidarity and collaboration to the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly that will meet in Cambodia in September, 2011.

Finally, we commit to supporting an ILO Convention setting out international standards on decent work for domestic workers, and to work towards the creation and adoption of national legislation that reflects the same.

Signed at Manila by:

Mr. Md. Israfil Alam

Member of Parliament, Bangladesh

¹ UN DESA 2009

² In January 2011, the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs of the Philippines sent a delegation of 5 parliamentarians to Saudi Arabia. In April 2011, the Indonesian parliament also sent a delegation to Saudi Arabia. Both delegations investigated the living conditions of migrant workers from their respective countries.

Chairman, Standing Committee on Ministry of Labour and Employment
Chairman, Extreme Poverty Cluster of All Party Parliamentary Group

Mr. Shantha Bandara

Member of Parliament, Kurunegala District
Sri Lanka

Representative Walden Bello

Chair, Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs
Philippine House of Representatives

Mr. Mustaque Ahmed Ruhi

Member of Parliament, Bangladesh
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment

His Excellency Son Chhay

Member of the Cambodian National Assembly

Mr. Shehan Semasinghe

Member of Parliament, Anuradhapura District
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Ms. Eva Kusuma Sundari

Member of Parliament, Indonesia
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