



Domestic Workers Convention Now! Enact *Kasambahay* Bill Now!

23 May 2011

Some three million Asian men and women migrate for work each year and make significant contributions to the economies of both their countries of origin and destination each year. A large proportion of these migrants are women, most of whom are employed as domestic workers in households in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Gulf and Arab Countries of West Asia. These workers are employed in private households—workplaces that fall outside the realm of labour laws and regulation. As temporary migrants, they are already vulnerable to deception and abuse by unscrupulous employers and employment agencies by virtue of their immigration status; as domestic workers, these risks are amplified as their workplaces are largely shielded from scrutiny by the primacy given to the privacy of the home.

MFA supports the *Kasambahay* Bill, designed to protect and promote the rights of domestic workers employed in the Philippines. The passage of this bill is necessary, as it would establish standards within the Philippines that are in line with the protections we would like to see availed to Filipino domestic workers when they are employed abroad.

The labour rights that would be extended to domestic workers with the passage of the *Kasambahay* Bill are also in line with the proposed text of an ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which will be deliberated on from June 1-17 at the ILO's 100th International Labour Conference in Geneva. This Convention would set out international standards for the labour rights and human rights of domestic workers—both migrants and non-migrants. Last year, the Philippines voted in support of a Convention, and it is our sincere hope that this year we will not only adopt and ratify a strong Convention and Recommendation, but that the Philippines will strongly encourage other countries to do the same. The passage of the *Kasambahay* Bill would set an example for other countries in the region for the protection of domestic workers at home and abroad.

So far, the UN and ILO, national governments, CSOs, trade unions, and migrant organizations have been at the forefront of initiatives to bring about protections for migrant domestic workers. To a large extent, Parliaments have remained at the margins of both the discourse and the setting of regulatory frameworks. However, we believe that Parliamentarians play an important role in overseeing their governments' national, regional, and international commitments. They have the capacity to shape political will and to set the tone for debates on issues of importance for the state.

With this in mind, and with the deliberations on the Domestic Workers Convention fast approaching, MFA, with the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, will welcome, tomorrow, guest Parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka in order to forge an alliance of parliamentarians and advocates across the region on this very important issue that is shared by all of our countries. MFA believes that a multilateral cooperation is key to breaking the unhealthy competition that so often compromises the very rights of migrants that governments seek to protect in the first place. A multilateral approach to negotiations will also strengthen the collective voice of origin countries vis-à-vis destination countries. Together with the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, we welcome the creation of an alliance between Asian Parliamentarians and CSO groups to establish strong protections for migrant domestic workers.

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