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Representative

**Privileged Speech**  
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**Asian Parliamentarians Unity for Domestic Workers' Rights Now!**

Today, we are joined by parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, set to forge an alliance of labor-sending countries to protect the rights of domestic workers.

There is a common denominator that binds our countries together: underdevelopment and poverty have pushed a good number of citizens to take on work in households in wealthier countries across Asia and the Middle East, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan.

2010 saw the deployment of 1.36 million Filipino migrants across the globe, more than 80,000 of that were domestic workers. In the latest available statistics, 52% of Cambodian women migrants were employed as domestic workers in 2007. Over 900,000 Indonesians were deployed in 2006 as domestic workers. Sri Lanka deploys around 125,000 domestic workers annually. Bangladesh deployed 475,000 migrant workers in 2009, 6% of which are women whose destinations are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, presumably for domestic work.

These are but official numbers, a more worrying scenario emerges should we factor in undocumented migrant workers that are trafficked from and across Asia to inhumane working conditions.

While a number of domestic workers are fortunate to find employment that does not compromise their dignity, it is common for our migrant kababayan to experience various forms of abuse and maltreatment in the hands of their employers.

In extreme cases, the picture that emerges is one of modern-day slavery: domestic workers are deceived by recruiters and sold to employers whose practice is to confiscate important documents and withhold compensation, deprive them of food, medical care and other basic needs, and periodically subject them to sexual abuse and other forms of violence.

Domestic workers are voiceless against these abuses, and in many instances, this has resulted in their death.

This sordid reality has been documented by the United Nations, International Labor Organization, civil society organizations, migrant organizations, and even the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs when a team of us went to Saudi Arabia to determine the living conditions of our kababayan in the Kingdom.

To protect migrant domestic workers, Akbayan proposes a two-track strategy that the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress and our friends from foreign parliaments must take: engage processes that create an international framework for decent work for domestic workers, and develop policies on national migration or ensure the effective implementation of existing ones.

A strong alliance among parliamentarians is crucial to this process.

It has been a dog-eat-dog world. Abuses persist because labor-receiving countries and recruiters exploit the fact that the pool of unemployed in developing world is wide and deep. Especially in the case of domestic work, they set bare minimum standards of employment – ridiculously low wages,

long working hours, and other such factors that contribute to the inhumane working conditions that domestic workers experience. And if a labor-sending country even so much as raises an issue regarding the terms of employment, the receiving country threatens to employ domestics from other countries instead.

Developing countries are consistently on the losing end of the bargain, unable to protect domestic workers from abuse despite all the efforts to engage receiving countries simply because this perverted system has treated the employment of domestics as a competition, a race to the bottom, among labor-sending countries.

And we must expect labor sending countries, organized recruiters, and employers to maintain this front in the upcoming negotiations of the decent work for domestic workers at the International Labor Conference in Geneva, in June.

It is through the creation of a strong alliance that we from Asia can call labor receiving countries and recruiters to account for their bad practices.

After all, we parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines share the same humanitarian responsibility: to ensure that the right of our citizens are protected wherever they are in the world, and whatever their work would be.

Not only will the alliance destroy the notion of competition among labor-sending countries, this will provide us greater leverage against receiving countries, employers and recruiters and help in setting fairer, more decent living conditions and compensation packages for our migrant domestic workers.

The partnership that will be created today and tomorrow may also facilitate cooperation and the easier exchange of information among the countries involved, especially crucial to the success of crackdowns on trafficking and illegal movement of peoples across borders and the effective enforcement of national policies on migration.

This alliance also sets the tone for the discussions of the prospects of an South-East Asian framework for the protection of migrant workers' rights that will be on the agenda of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in September.

Today is an historic moment for us members of the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, our friends from the Parliaments of Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and the migrant domestic workers from and their families in each of our countries. Today, we lend our collective voice to Asian domestic workers across the globe and declare our commitment to defend their rights and their welfare.

Thank you.