

December 9, 2010

DPI/NGO Briefing  
Issue of the Moment:  
“Crossing Boundaries: Protecting the Rights of  
Migrant Women Domestic Workers”

Thursday December 2, 2010, 10:15 - 12:15 PM  
North Lawn Building, United Nations

1. Background Information:

The United Nations International Labor Organization (ILO) defines Migration as primarily a labor issue which involves the movement of workers who cross borders to find employment, as well as the necessity for equal treatment, good working conditions and rights. Migrant workers can make a positive contribution to development both through their labor in their host societies as well as through the remittances which they send home. Yet these workers lack labor protection at the national and international level and are thus vulnerable to both exploitation and human trafficking.

In 2010, the ILO estimates the number of international migrant workers to be 214 million. Nearly half of these are women. Though many migrant women may have worked in recognized professions in their countries of origin, they often have to accept lower skilled jobs in foreign countries for higher pay. In many cases, the only opportunities available to them are in household or domestic service. Consequently, women migrant domestic workers are usually employed in private households and subject to physical and sexual abuse.

The situation of migrant women has been exacerbated by the global financial and economic crisis. This has brought with it significant employment and social challenges particularly for migrant workers from developing countries.

The ILO, as the only United Nations agency with a constitutional mandate to protect migrant workers, is therefore very concerned about managing labor migration so that it contributes positively to the growth and development of both home and host societies, as well as to the well being of the migrants themselves.

It is therefore not surprising that in the last two decades international migration has risen to the top of the global policy agenda. In response to this, the General Assembly on December 4, 2000 proclaimed December 18 as International Migrants Day. The resolution (A/RES/55/93) by the United Nations has invited Member States, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations to observe International Migrants Day through the dissemination of information on human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants, the sharing of experiences and the design of actions to ensure their protection.

2. Moderator:

Ms. Marie Luisa Chavez, Chief, NGO Relations,  
Department of Public Information (DPI)

3. Speakers:

Mr. Patrick Taran, Senior Migration Specialist,  
International Migration Program, United Nations  
International Labor Organization

Ms. Diane Savino, Senator, 23<sup>rd</sup> NYS Senatorial District

Ms. Nisha Veria, Senior Researcher, Women's Rights Division,  
Human Rights Watch

### 3. Speakers (Cont'd)

Ms. Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, Organizational Coordinator,  
Domestic Workers United

4. The moderator, Ms. Maria-Luisa Chavez, welcomed everyone and introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds. She summarized the problems facing migrant women workers throughout the world.

5. The first speaker, Mr. Patrick Taran, has served as a Senior Migration Specialist with the International Labor Office (ILO) in Geneva since 1990. He is a leading international specialist on migration and migrants' human rights. He has 33 years of professional experience in migration, refugee, anti-discrimination and integration work at the local, national and international levels.

He is responsible for advisory and technical cooperation projects in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States in support of ILO work to combat discrimination against migrant workers. Mr. Taran is also responsible for activities for the protection of rights and dignity of migrants.

His previous positions include that of Program officer for the joint United Nations inter-agency International Migration Policy Program and Secretary for Migration at the World Council of Churches. He also co-founded and formerly directed Migrants Rights International immigration policy, refugee resettlement and immigrant integration issues with local and national organizations in the United States. He made his presentation by video from Geneva.

Mr. Taran indicated that ten percent of the world's work force are migrant workers. Sixty percent of these migrant workers are women and are being exploited. He stated that this is just the cutting edge on international migration. He stated that we need firm rules for decent treatment and protection of these workers. There has to be a collaboration of governments on this important issue. It is essential.

He stated that the problem is now 120 years since the migrant worker started facing this problem. Stakeholders and government leaders have taken the lead on addressing this important issue. International labor organizations have also joined with governments in addressing this issue. They are calling for an international convention to address the issue of migrant workers.

Most domestic workers are migrants. Mr. Taran described procedures that should be established in a framework and laws to protect migrants. This issue is being driven by NGOs from around the world. A Bill of Rights for them are important. Many initiatives have already been taken especially in New York. An adoption at a convention will depend on all countries around the world. Civil society must join in and take a hand.

6. The second speaker, Ms. Diane Savino, began her career in public service as a caseworker for New York City's Child Welfare Administration providing direct assistance to abused and neglected children. An active member of her local labor union, the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU) Local 371, she quickly rose through the ranks to become the Vice President for Political Action & Legislative Affairs, where she became one of the most respected labor leaders in New York State.

As a labor activist, she actively and successfully campaigned for an increase in the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.15. This was the first raise for New Yorkers in over a decade. In addition, Ms. Savino has championed legislation protecting hard-working New Yorkers including Paid Family Leave, which establishes up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for a sick family member or newborn, and the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which expands basic worker protection rights to domestic workers.

She not only battled for domestic worker's rights in New York City but was involved in the majority of the cases presented by the labor movement. Many people were ignorant of the plight of domestic workers.

They are an integral part of our work force. Other states have now enacted a bill of rights for domestic workers but there has not been a lot of support for domestic workers. Ms. Savino indicated that the United Auto Workers and the International Labor Union in New York State have been very helpful on this issue. On June 1, 2010 the New York State Assembly passed a labor bill on this issue. The governor signed the bill into law on August 1, 2010.

New York State is the first state to take the lead on workers' rights. The New York State bill provides the following rights to domestic workers;

- A week of rest
- After one year three days of paid rest days
- The workers are covered under the Human Rights Law
- They are also protected against sexual advances

The Department of Labor are busy notifying employees how to move forward on this issue. This is the beginning for domestic workers.

7. The third speaker, Ms. Nisha Varia, recent research has focused on human rights abuses against migrant domestic workers from South and Southeast Asia employed in the Middle East, Malaysia and Singapore. She has authored several reports including;

- Help Wanted: Abuses against Female Migrant Domestic Workers In Indonesia and Malaysia (July 2004)
- As if I am not Human: Abuses against Asian Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia (July 2008)
- Slow Reform: Protection of Migrant Domestic Workers in Asia and the Middle East (April 2010)

Ms. Varia regularly engages with labor, immigration and justice officials to advocate for stronger protections. She is a frequent commentator on these issues to the media and has been closely involved with the process of creating an ILO convention on domestic work,

She originally worked in over eighty countries to protect the rights of workers. She gave many examples of how their organizations' Human Rights workers were abused coming back from Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. In Lebanon a migrant worker dies every week.. Many domestic workers have been sexually abused and not being paid. Even those that were paid, their wages were very low. There must be guarantees for all domestic workers.

Kuwait with sixty-one thousand people have 600 migrant workers. We must create work at home to give migrant workers a choice. Recruitment is a major problem. Recruitment fees are very high. Migrant workers are not protected on hours worked and paid. In many countries migrant workers visa are tied to their employer. Migrant domestic workers have no rights. Jordan has modified their domestic labor lives to protect migrant workers. This the first country to do so. Singapore has also amended their labor laws to protect migrant workers. Workers are organizing to protect migrant workers rights.

8. The fourth speaker, Ms. Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, has been a member of DWU since 2002 and is a former nanny. She advocates against the exploitation and abuse that women face in the domestic industry. She is currently working relentlessly in the Campaign for the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

Ms. Gill-Campbell is a strong advocate for women's rights and has spoken across the country on human rights and workers rights issues. A graduate of the Social Justice Leadership Foundations of Organizing Training Program and a current student at Cornell University, Ms. Gill-Campbell also serves on the Coordinating Committee of Grassroots Global Justice. This is a national alliance of grassroots organizations dedicated to building a transformative social justice movement beyond borders.

Her organization is organized to help and support domestic workers. They use releases and publicity to help the migrant workers. Their first target was in 2000 to address agencies that were exploiting the migrant workers. They formed a Domestic Workers Rights organization. Over 2000 domestic workers in New York State had been exploited.

People in New York State did not realize that this was a major issue for domestic workers in New York State. Senator Sovino was the first to support her organization in Albany on this issue and the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. Her organization have won over two million dollars in abuse cases for domestic workers. The bill passed give workers more rights. The employer must give the worker their rights as a worker. The employer must give the worker their full rights in writing.

Ms. Gill-Campbell believes that human rights are also worker's rights. She and her organization are fighting to have a national labor law to protect domestic workers.

9. Questions/Answers:

9.1 Mr. Patrick Taran, The intent of the legal convention was to have a minimum legal age for the worker of 15, 16 or 17 years.

9.2 Ms. Nisha Varia, The law to be adopted will apply to all workers not just domestic workers.

9.3 Ms. Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, All workers have been told about the domestic workers bill of rights and have workshops for their employers and the domestic workers to educate them about their rights.

9.4 Ms Diane Savino, There are a significant number of undocumented workers (more then 50%). The burden is on the employer to treat their workers properly.

9.5 Ms. Joyceln Gill-Campbell, The main issue are the rights of the workers.

9.6 Ms. Joyceln Gill-Campbell, They started fighting for domestic workers rights in 2006 in Atlanta, Georgia. She indicated that there are approximately 2.5 million domestic workers nationally. Her organization has many programs to educate their members on this important issue. Their members have also traveled to Geneva on this issue.

9.7 Mr. Patrick Taran, Internal Labor standards apply to all workers on their rights. The domestic worker statement is important nationally and internationally. His organization have never underestimated the backgrounds of domestic workers and many have become political leaders.

9.8 Ms. Diane Savino, Unfortunately women's movements never got involved in the preparation of the Bill of Rights. Part of the problem are women's focus on this issue.

9.9 Ms. Nisha Varia, Many employees have contributed to sexual violence of domestic workers.

9.10 Ms. Diane Savino, We have finally brought matrimonial laws in New York State up to date.

9.11 Ms. Diane Savino, The 24/7 case is a big problem but not part of this issue.

Questions/Answers (Cont'd):

9.12 Ms. Nisha Varia, The ILO Convention and the resulting initiatives have become an excellent way for different Domestic Worker and Human Rights organizations to learn to work together.

9.13 Ms. Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, Her organization does a lot exchanges of information on this important issue with other organizations.

9.14 Mr. Patrick Taran, A coalition of organizations have joined together on this issue in many countries. The leadership in many counties in New York State have now come on-board to get this bill passed. as a Bill of Rights. It must be passed in all states of the United States of the United States and taken to Washington.

9.15 Ms. Nisha Varia, We have seen progress because of the efforts of many domestic groups. It is important that we all work to support this important domestic worker issue.

9.16 Ms. Joycelyn Gill-Campbell, She thanked everyone for their support. Both Washington and California have moved forward to pass this law in 2011.

PDC George Weinstein  
National UN Chairman