

PHILIPPINE STATEMENT ON DECENT WORK FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS, COMMITTEE ON DOMESTIC WORK

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Madam Chair, the Philippines is elated that domestic work is now at the center of tripartite discussions in this 99th Session of the International Labor Conference. This is a genuine step towards ensuring decent work for domestic workers across the globe. The dignity of their hard work and their contribution to the global and national economies merits respect and recognition. In the Philippines, our 1.7 million local domestic workers enable workingmen and women to effectively balance work and family responsibilities. Our migrant domestic workers, numbering over 70,000 in 2008 alone, are sought by more than 50 countries all over the world to work for their households.



Madam Chair, the plight of millions of domestic workers is in our hands. We can be agents of change as we talk about one of the oldest and most important occupations for many women and men in our respective countries. It is in our hands right now to decide on how to eliminate a long history of abuse and exploitation of domestic workers.

The Philippines believes that an effective way to do this is to adopt an international instrument in the form of a Convention. Madam Chair, our government is for the adoption of an ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. We believe that domestic workers, like any other worker, should be accorded the highest form of protection through international labor standards.

Decent work for domestic workers means that their rights at work is protected, employment opportunities are available, income is ensured, social security is provided, and representation is guaranteed. Decent work for domestic workers means being treated in a humane manner. These elements should all be present in a binding instrument that will serve as framework for member-countries in dealing with their domestic workers.

We are for a Convention because domestic workers are oftentimes exposed to oppressive situations, subjected to long working hours, delay or non-payment of wages, inhumane treatment, and verbal, physical, or sexual abuse. The kind of living and working conditions a domestic worker has solely depends on his or her employer.

Domestic workers are also vulnerable to trafficking for forced labor, putting them in a contemporary form of debt bondage, while traffickers derive considerable profit from such exploitation.

Madam Chair, if we want decent work for this group of workers, a binding instrument is needed for all member-States. The Philippine government position went through a series of consultations with tripartite partners last year. There was agreement that the adoption of an international instrument is necessary to ensure the rights and welfare of domestic workers.

Allow me to share Madam Chair that in the Philippines, there are existing laws that protect our domestic workers from abuse and exploitation. The Labor Code of the Philippines sets minimum labor standards for our domestic workers. An employment contract, which serves as their protection, is required of employers. The Labor Code also provides for a minimum wage to be given only in legal tender. Assignment to non-household work is prohibited. Opportunity for education of domestic workers is provided as well as indemnity for unjust termination. The Labor Code ensures that domestic workers will be treated in a just and humane manner and shall be provided with suitable and sanitary living quarters as well as adequate food and medical assistance there are also laws that ensure access of domestic workers to statutory social security benefits.

For the Filipino migrant domestic worker, the Philippines recently enacted legislation strengthening further the current law protecting migrant workers. The new law elevates the standard of protection and promotion of the welfare of migrant workers. This law allows the deployment of overseas Filipino workers only in countries where the rights of Filipino migrant workers are protected. As such, it will allow the deployment of Filipino migrant domestic workers in countries:

- (a) With existing labor and social laws protecting the rights of workers, including migrant workers;
- (b) That are signatory to and/or a ratifier of multilateral conventions, declarations or resolutions relating to the protection of workers, including migrant workers; and (c) that have concluded a bilateral agreement or arrangement with the Philippine government on the protection of the rights of overseas Filipino workers.

Aside from a legal framework favorable to domestic workers, the Philippines instituted policy and program reforms for our local and overseas domestic workers. For our local domestic workers, the implementation of programs and services were strengthened with technical assistance provided by the ILO. Recognizing the important role of local governments in protecting domestic workers from abuse and exploitation, we developed a model ordinance that is now being actively promoted for adoption by local government officials. Handbooks for domestic workers and training materials have also been produced.

The Philippines believes that upgrading the skills of domestic workers is one of the best forms of protection. Thus, we developed training regulations for overseas domestic workers. The curriculum produced there from defines the core competencies of a domestic worker and what constitutes domestic work.

In 2007, the Government established a new set of labor standards to further protect our migrant domestic workers. This Reform Package includes, among others, the following:

- (a) Applicants for domestic work abroad need to undergo skills assessment and be issued a Certificate of Competency by government;
- (b) The worker also needs to undergo country-specific language and culture training;
- (c) The minimum age requirement was increased to 23 years old to minimize vulnerability to abuse and exploitation;
- (d) Migrant domestic workers are fully exempted from payment of placement fees;
- (e) An upward adjustment in the minimum wage salaries; and
- (f) The conduct of verification of documentary requirements for registration of principals by our labor offices abroad.

Pre-employment and pre-departure orientation seminars for would-be and departing migrant workers are conducted free of charge in conjunction with licensed recruitment agencies, where preparation for worksite integration is made part of said seminars.

Madam Chair, these are just some of the policies and programs that the Philippines has for our local and overseas domestic workers. While there are admittedly still a lot of gaps and challenges to overcome, we continue to envision decent work for all Filipino workers, including domestic workers. It is not just a vision of the Philippine government alone, but also its social partners.

It is in this spirit of shared goals and aspirations in our country that we would like to assure the Committee that the Philippine government is in full support of binding international labor standards for all domestic workers.

Thank you Madam Chair.

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