

## **An Open Letter to the Minister for Home Affairs and Law**

Tuesday 14 December 2010

Mr K Shanmugam

Minister for Home Affairs and Law

New Phoenix Park

28 Irrawaddy Road

Singapore 329560

Dear Mr Shanmugam,

### **Permit Application Nos PP/20101125/003 and PP/20101128/001 Pursuant to Section 6 of the Public Order Act 2009 - An Appeal under Section 11 of the Public Order Act 2009**

We write to express our regret that the above applications for permits to conduct a vehicle procession and to distribute flyers on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December have been rejected. These activities are to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families which falls on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

Migrant workers who are transported in the open decks of lorries are vulnerable to traffic accidents which may lead to injury and even death. Such tragedies have been widely reported in the media and discussed in Parliament. To raise awareness of the danger of workers being transported in this way, we had proposed to drive a lorry around selected areas in Singapore with the banners 'Migrant Workers are Humans, not Cargo' and 'Ratify the Migrant Workers Convention.'

To raise awareness of the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, we had also planned a separate activity to distribute flyers to members of the public. Samples of the flyers can be found in the email attachment. 20 volunteers who will be dressed in construction work outfits such as helmets and boots, or wearing domestic work outfits such as kitchen aprons with the slogan 'Respect

the Rights of Migrant Workers' emblazoned on them, will be grouped in pairs to distribute the materials and will not be holding any banners or placards.

t We would like to appeal against the decision for the following reasons:

- 1) Our activities are public education initiatives, which are in line with the stated objectives of our Registry of Societies-approved constitutions, which is to raise awareness of the need to protect migrant workers under Singapore's existing laws. We have included in the appendix the content which will be printed on our flyers. These messages are focused on promoting a humanitarian cause and contain no political, racial, or religious content.
- 2) There is no risk of disorder in our flyer distribution activity since there are only 20 volunteers involved and they will be grouped in pairs and spread out over different areas in Singapore. The volunteers will not be initiating or taking part in a march. Details of our locations where our volunteers will be based when distributing flyers and the approximate time they will be there were indicated in our application and in a subsequent email correspondence with a police officer.
- 3) Our procession consisting of one lorry which is on the move will not lead to a gathering crowd or cause public disorder. We had also indicated the route which our lorry will be travelling in our initial application and in a subsequent email correspondence with a police officer.
- 4) The cause we are supporting and raising awareness of is in line with government policy to increase the number of migrant workers in Singapore and also to improve their conditions and safety.
- 5) The Prime Minister, in his National Day Rally Speech this year, supported the view that Singapore must be made more attractive to migrant workers and that public policy should address barriers to their security and integration.

s In 2009, a similar worker's rights gathering (May Day Solidarity Walk) by the tripartite partners, on a much larger scale involving thousands of people, was allowed by the police. We therefore fail to understand why our modest activity has been prohibited. Similarly, in March 2008, the Consumer Association of Singapore (CASE) held a nationwide event entitled 'Walk with CASE' to commemorate World Consumer Rights Day. The Minister of Health, Mr Khaw Boon Wan was the guest-of-honour at that event. It was also not prohibited.

It is also important to note that there are many not-for-profit organisations and religious groups who gather to canvass support for their cause or their beliefs. These may be large scale events or small scale activities involving only a few people distributing flyers, such as ours. Furthermore, flyers are distributed daily up and down the island by property agents and other commercial entities. We believe that the police have not disallowed those events from taking place and know of no incident where these have been proscribed.

Our activities are in line with national interests and do not pose a threat to public order. Migrant workers play a significant role in Singapore's economic development and our proposed activities are meant to acknowledge, recognise and raise awareness of their contributions, and the problems they face when they are in Singapore.

We hope that the Police will reconsider its decision.

Yours sincerely,

Bridget Tan B John Gee

President P President

Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics H Transient Workers Count Too

cc.c CP Ng Joo Hee

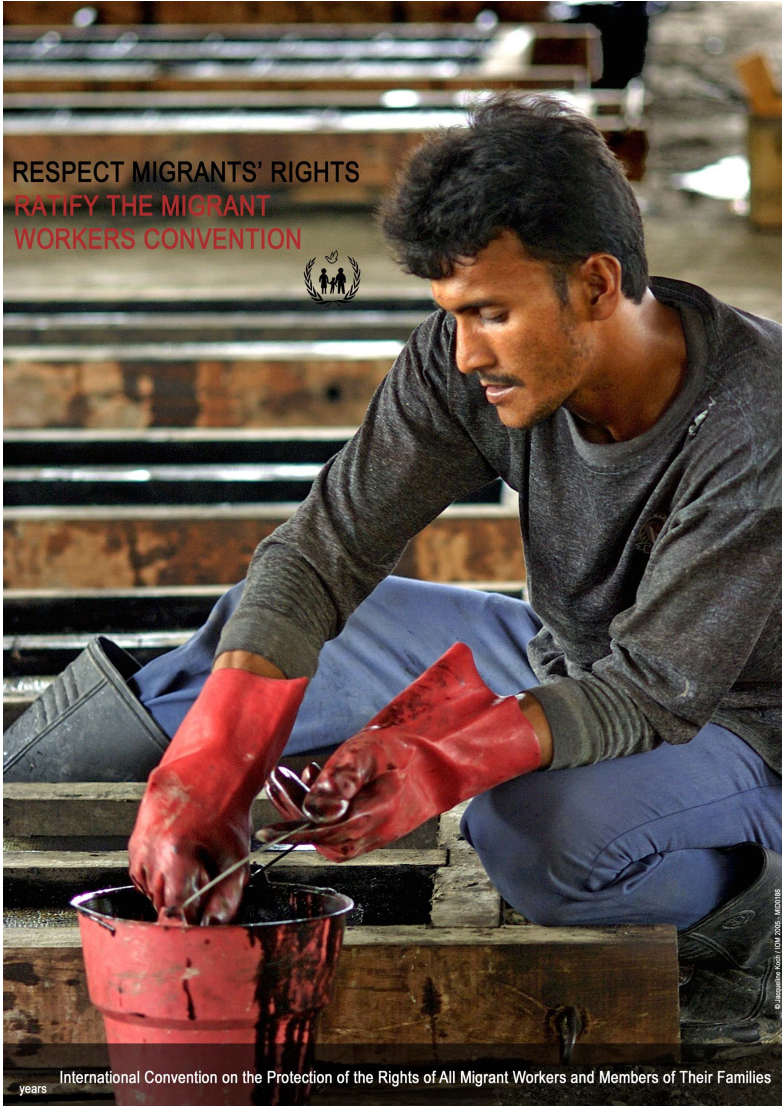
C Commissioner of Police

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RESPECT MIGRANTS' RIGHTS  
RATIFY THE MIGRANT  
WORKERS CONVENTION



International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

years

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## THE CONVENTION

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was adopted on 18 December 1990 by the UN General Assembly. It entered into force on 1 July 2003. To date, the Convention has been ratified by 44 States, and another 15 have taken the first step toward ratification by signing the Convention.

The Convention constitutes a core international human rights instrument, whose importance lies on its establishment of an international consensus concerning the need for greater protection of the rights of migrants. It sets out legal standards and provides guidance for national laws and policies that recognise the specific vulnerabilities of migrant workers and their families and promote humane and lawful working and living conditions.

## THE CAMPAIGN

The International Steering Committee, a unique network of UN agencies, international organizations and global civil society organizations, launched the Global Ratification Campaign.

The Campaign calls for governments to act immediately to end the widespread human rights violations suffered daily by migrants around the world, by ratifying the Convention.

Events in Brussels, Geneva and Yerevan have kicked off activities to mark the 20th anniversary year of the Convention, and more events will follow worldwide.

The Campaign raises awareness about the Convention with government officials, diplomats, politicians, NGOs and the public-at-large, nationally and internationally.

The Campaign has an online petition ([www.migrantsrights.org](http://www.migrantsrights.org)). Each month signatures will be collected for one or two countries and will be delivered to the relevant authorities in order to urge the governments to ratify the Convention.

## 12 REASONS TO RATIFY

- 1 To put in place the legal foundation essential for national migration policy to regulate labour migration and ensure social cohesion.
- 2 To uphold and strengthen the rule of law by ensuring that legal norms define the basis of labour migration policy, its implementation, and its supervision.
- 3 To contribute to ensuring that legal parameters define treatment of all persons on the territory of a country by setting the extent and limits of human rights of migrant workers and members of their families.
- 4 To signal that origin countries demand respect for the human rights of their nationals abroad and are accountable for the same standards as destination countries.
- 5 To reinforce the sovereign exercise of a State's prerogative to determine labour migration policy by affirming conformity with universal legal and ethical norms.
- 6 To obtain public support for and compliance with labour migration policy and practice by demonstrating legal soundness and conformity with internationally accepted principles of social justice and human rights.
- 7 To strengthen social cohesion by establishing that all persons must be treated with respect by virtue of legal recognition and protection of their rights.
- 8 To explicitly discourage the 'commodification' and consequent abuse of migrant workers by legally asserting their human rights.
- 9 To reduce irregular migration by eliminating incentives for labour exploitation, work in abusive conditions and unauthorised employment that fuel trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.
- 10 To facilitate the establishment of effective national policy by calling on advisory services as well as good practice examples provided by the relevant standards-based international organisations.
- 11 To obtain clear guidance for bilateral and multilateral cooperation for lawful, humane, and equitable labour migration.
- 12 To obtain international guidance on implementation of legal norms through the reporting obligations and periodic review by independent expert bodies.