



Press Statement on IMD Day 2011

Migrant Rights are Human Rights! This is not rhetoric but an urgent call on International Migrants' Day 2011 to all countries not to ignore the one billion people on the move world-wide. On this day we pay tribute to migrants and their families for their heroic sacrifices to survive in hostile conditions in countries that continue shamefully to discriminate, abuse and exploit them. We take this opportunity in solidarity with the world to urge the world and Singapore

- to recognize the contributions made by a billion migrants to the development and well-being of so many countries in the world;
- to end all forms of abuse and violence against migrants and their families and promote respect for their basic human rights;
- to sign and ratify the UN Convention on Migrant Workers, the UN Trafficking Protocol and the ILO Domestic Worker Convention;
- To be accountable with regards to the rights of migrants especially migrant domestic workers who suffer discriminatory regulations and practices against the CEDAW principles of gender equality and non-discrimination.

Migrant domestic workers in Singapore suffer mandatory repatriation on grounds of pregnancy ,many could lawfully work years without a day off, many are burdened with a debt of 6 to 10 months' salary deduction as placement agency fees, many have no freedom to worship, to contact with their families and are denied their right to hold on to their passports. These are some of the human rights violations that migrant domestic workers suffer in modern day Singapore and elsewhere because they are excluded from national labour legislation. We therefore urge Singapore not to do the populist thing but to do the right thing and sign and ratify the ILO Domestic Worker Convention to comply with international labour standards and be committed fully to her treaty obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Migrant workers other than domestic workers in Singapore are covered by national labour legislation but even then they do not have access to their legal rights because many of these workers are not unionised, many are heavily burdened with prohibitive agency fees and many are under a work permit sponsorship system that gives the employer the unilateral power to repatriate them to their countries without just cause. These migrant workers continue under a system where employers and recruitment agencies could exploit and manhandle them despite the protection of existing laws. We urge the State to make our laws work effectively for the protection of migrant labour against exploitative practices and unjust working conditions.

Trafficking of Persons is not just a report card by the US Department of State or an UN definition but is crime against humanity. It affects the lives of millions of men, women and children who are victims of heinous abuses and violence in labour and sexual exploitation. Singapore being a destination country in the region for trafficking in persons cannot be tardy in the urgency to combat human

trafficking with the four Ps strategies – prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership. We urge the State to enact a specialised anti-human trafficking law that includes comprehensive victim protection services and bilateral agreements with source countries to end modern day slavery.

We are glad that the State has recently set up an Inter-Agency TIP task force. However for the agency to work effectively we need to train our law enforcers on human trafficking crimes and also to work proactively with civil society organizations with a shared conviction that one human trafficking crime is one too many for Singapore. No victim of crime should be compelled to stay against her will without financial assistance or compensation to be a State witness. The law must work for the person and not the person work for the law. Actions and prosecution against human trafficking have to be based on respect for fundamental human rights principles as enshrined by the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

HOME, a non-governmental organization in Singapore, believes and advocates that ‘Migrant Rights are Human Rights’ and we call upon all peoples to join us today to give tribute to the millions of migrant workers who are indeed the martyrs of the 21st century as they give their entire lives to their countries of birth and countries of adoption.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Tan', with a stylized initial 'B'.

Bridget Tan
Founder & President
18th December 2011