

HOME's Response to 'More Help and Treats for Foreign Workers'

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Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to last Sunday's article 'More Help and Treats for Foreign Workers'.

We urge The Ministry of Manpower to re-consider its view that it is unable to accede to the United Nations Convention for the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families because Singapore's 'specific circumstances' does not make it possible to give equal rights to migrants. While we acknowledge that there are certain benefits which only citizens should enjoy, such as the right to vote or hold political office, a person's nationality should not determine whether they are treated fairly at the workplace or whether they have affordable access to health services. Given the enormous economic contributions that migrant workers make to the economy, the lack of resources should not be a reason in denying them such basic rights.

The provisions contained in the Convention for Migrant Workers are in no way different to Singapore's other human rights obligations. For example, the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC) both of which Singapore has ratified, contain provisions which apply to migrant women and children too. Singapore has signed on to the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which contains provisions addressing discrimination based on nationality. Therefore, signing on to the migrant workers convention would be a logical next step. We note the government's reluctance to support the Convention by citing the fact that the majority of states have not ratified it. But Singapore can certainly be a leader by setting an example in the region by signing on to the Convention, even though many countries have not.

It is important to realise that granting equal rights to migrants does not disadvantage locals in any way. Research has shown that a work culture which upholds human rights and does not discriminate based on social status leads to higher productivity and encourages staff retention. Indeed MNCs in particular recognize this fact and have established diversity committees to create inclusive work environments.

Governments can and should retain the right to decide on the number of immigrants to let in based on its size, infrastructure and impact on the population at large. However, to allow the systematic discrimination of migrant workers who are resident in Singapore runs counter to the kind of society which Singapore prides itself for: one which is multi-racial, diverse and meritocratic.

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