

**Foreign Domestic Workers - Unrecognised, Unprotected and Under paid!**

***STATEMENT ISSUED BY UNITED FOR FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS  
(UFDWR)***

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Recognising the need for a regional response to the lack of labour and health protection for foreign domestic workers in Asia, six regional networks - Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM-Asia), Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development ( APWLD), Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant (APMM), Asian Migrant Centre (AMC), and Mekong Migration Network (MMN) – have formed a coalition to campaign for the advancement of the human rights of foreign domestic workers. Under the banner, 'UNITED FOR FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS, the first campaign will be for all FDWs to receive 'A Day Off'.

This campaign is critical. Without a day off, foreign domestic workers (FDWs) cannot organise, and without organising they cannot seek to collectively better their working conditions, and are denied opportunities to improve their knowledge, skills and confidence. A day off also means a free day each week for FDWs to access public health services and to pursue activities that will enhance and meet their psycho-social needs.

A day off has been called for by domestic workers in countries across Asia and most of the have been making this call for some time. Combining our efforts will make our demands more powerful.

**WE DEMAND: Foreign Domestic Workers be given**

One day off per week, days off on public holidays and annual leave. These entitlements must be part of the work contract

We encourage regional networks working in the area of FDW rights to join us to make this campaign a success!

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## **The Context**

Asia has 50 million foreign migrant workers, of which women now constitute more than 50 percent. The feminization of migration has been driven largely by unskilled and semi-skilled women moving into growth economies to carry out domestic work and other informal labour. As more women are joining the skilled workforce in booming economies and more families are entering the middle class, the reproductive sector (cleaning, child-care, caring for the sick and elderly) is being contracted out to migrant domestic workers.

Migration for work can be a positive and enriching experience for the individual, and can have economic benefit for both countries of origin and destination. However, increasingly migrant workers are being seen as commodities and as foreign exchange earners for their governments, rather than as individuals with rights, hopes and dreams of improving their lives. Both men and women are subject to the unreasonable restrictions of temporary migration – in particular no opportunity to have a family life or to job security. However for women, these vulnerabilities are enhanced by their work in sectors that are not recognized as 'work' by governments, and their image as more submissive and accepting of poor conditions.

Female migrant domestic workers frequently work in inhumane circumstances: very long work hours, an unreasonable number of tasks, poor nutrition, isolation and confinement to the employer's house, deprivation of their passport and papers, and no days off. Such conditions can have a severe negative impact on the health of FDWs leading to both physical and mental health problems as evidenced by the high incidence of FDWs committing suicide in Singapore.

Given their isolation and restrictions on their movement, most FDWs rely on their employers for their health care, but this often results in inadequate access to health information and in delayed diagnosis and treatment. Further, FDWs in their role as labour commodities, are frequently subjected to medical tests without their consent and deported for treatable conditions such as STIs, TB and HIV. In many countries women migrant workers are also deported if they are pregnant, denying them of their right to work and the benefit of the labour contracts that they signed.

Since domestic work is not recognised as work under the national labour laws of both receiving and sending countries, FDWs cannot avail of the labour and health protections and the benefits enjoyed by workers in other sectors. Most receiving countries in the region do not require employers to negotiate terms of reference or work contracts with domestic workers; the default assumption of employers is that female domestic workers are available at all times.

The denial of basic human rights to female domestic workers, and to entitlements that would be assumed in other sectors is blatant exploitation of vulnerable people. Female domestic workers play a valuable role in our societies and should be treated with respect. For this reason, we demand that a day off per work is included in all standard contracts between employers and migrant domestic workers.

Dependence on their employers for meeting their health needs often results in poor access to health information and in delayed diagnosis and treatment. Most FDWs are in the prime of their reproductive age (18-45 years) and as such share governments and employers need to recognize the psychosocial and sexual needs of migrant women and their right to bring their spouses, children and access to medical benefits that include maternity leave.

**We, United for Foreign Domestic Workers' Right calls for:** One day off per week, days off on public holidays and annual leave. These entitlements must be part of the work contract.

