EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Trade Union Confederation – Asia-Pacific (ITUC-AP), together with the International Domestic Workers’ Federation (IDWF), gathered over a hundred domestic workers and union leaders from across the region, on 16 June 2022, to mark the International Domestic Workers’ Day. The first in a series of learning and sharing sessions to soft-launch the ITUC-AP’s new campaign “Counting Everybody In,” the event served as a jumping-off point for future discussions on deepening and broadening collaboration with traditionally excluded or marginalised workers’ groups, such as domestic workers.

Several domestic workers and their union leaders reflected on and recounted their experiences in the past 11 years since the adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers. They engaged in conversations about what it means to bring about change in their lives and others’, what else must be done to build an inclusive trade union movement, and why equality matters in the world of work and beyond.

Much of the discussion dwelled on how the pandemic, as a critical juncture, aggravated domestic workers’ harsh working conditions or, in some cases, resulted in job losses. Their struggle during this period attested to their passion and resilience. At the same time, it reignited their drive to consolidate unities, learn more about their rights, and fight for representation and strengthened social protection. Through continuous organising and various creative forms of resistance, they vowed to raise awareness, empower themselves even more, and carry on aspiring to more wins and social gains, such as the ratification of C189 and ILO Convention 190, which aims to eliminate harassment and violence in the workplace.

Finally, the event stressed the urgency of strengthening the care economy, which domestic workers have long supported despite decades of underinvestment and under-valuing. The ITUC-AP’s #InvestInCare campaign is set to explore the gaps between decent work and the current policies and practices in domestic work, as a fundamental component of the care economy, and promote inclusivity, union solidarity, and all necessary conditions for the respect of workers’ rights.

1 Opening and Event Overview

Over a hundred leaders of domestic workers’ groups and trade unionists from affiliates of the International Trade Union Confederation – Asia-Pacific (ITUC-AP) and the International Domestic Workers’ Federation (IDWF) celebrated International Domestic Workers’ Day on 16 June 2022. It marked the 11th anniversary of the passage of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 (C189), the first global treaty establishing minimum labour standards for domestic workers, in 2011.
ITUC-AP General Secretary Shoya Yoshida welcomed the participants and reminded them of the challenges confronting the trade union movement: How can unions help build an inclusive and equal future? How are they counting domestic workers in? And why should they care?

“The truth is that there is so much more that each of us can and should do right in our movement and communities. This is precisely what we in the ITUC-AP are working on so far — putting all people at the centre of our priorities and securing them a space to lead and demonstrate their indisputable capacity to transform their lives and others’,” Yoshida said, “particularly those who have been bearing the heaviest burden of patriarchy and inequalities, those who haven’t been counted in yet to the trade movement, those who remain invisible, excluded, and marginalised.”

He promised more activities to come from the ITUC-AP in line with its new campaign, “Counting Everybody In,” which aims to expand its affiliates’ engagement in addressing concerns about inclusivity, amplify the calls of equity-seeking groups, and broaden collaboration between various workers’ sectors within the trade union movement and elsewhere.

IDWF President Myrtle Witbooi spoke of the solidarity domestic workers had demonstrated across the region during the pandemic. Although job losses and the lack of social and labour protections left them vulnerable, they persisted and decided to express their concerns and demands themselves, especially through digital means and platforms.

“We’ve shown how strong we are as domestic workers. We’ve decided to stand up when it's time to raise our voices because the one thing they cannot take away from us is our voices,” said IDWF President Myrtle Witbooi, lamenting policymakers’ inadequate response to domestic workers’ concerns, especially during the pandemic. “We will make sure that they don’t make any more decisions without hearing the voice of domestic workers, the vulnerable workers, the workers that have been exploited all these years.”

Although dozens of countries have laid down minimum labour standards for domestic work and legally recognised it as on par with other labour categories, the poor implementation or the slow ratification and adoption of C189 in country-level legislation for most of the world still leaves many domestic workers wholly excluded from the scope of labour regulations and social protection laws. In particular, women who predominantly work in the sector stand to lose the most if they continue to be afforded no dignity of decent work.

“As we make C189 work, together we'll try to make C190 also work, and we’re going to say, ‘No more gender-based violence, no more abuse behind closed doors!’” Witbooi said, referring to the ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment, a legal instrument that has so far come into force in only seven countries. “And we are going to make sure that governments take note of us.”
**Who Cares?**

“This is precisely what we in the ITUC-AP are working on so far — putting all people at the centre of our priorities and securing them a space to lead and demonstrate their indisputable capacity to transform their lives and others’.”

Shoya Yoshida
General Secretary, ITUC-AP

The participants watched “WHO CARES,” a short documentary that the ITUC-AP had prepared for the Global Day of Action for Care in 2021. It highlighted the indispensable role of care workers in Pakistan and the Philippines during the pandemic.

To expound on domestic workers’ daily struggles and hopes, Anna Tuvera, Director of Gender Equality Activities at ITUC-AP, moderated a conversation between three leaders of domestic workers’ groups in the Asia-Pacific: Samina Farooq, Deputy General Secretary of the Domestic Workers Union (DWU) in Pakistan; Gyanu Maya Kshatri, exco member of the IDWF and General Secretary of the Homeworkers Trade Union of Nepal (HUN); and Novelita Palisoc, former President and now Chairperson of the United Domestic Workers of the Philippines (UNITED). They answered rapid-fire questions about what it meant to organise to bring about change.

- **Name one or two stereotypes, biases, and misconceptions about domestic workers that should really go away because they are unrealistic and outdated.**
  - Farooq said that some people still think of domestic workers as slaves, but, with developments such as C189 and continued organising within their ranks, their realities and struggles are now changing for the better.
Kshatri said that, while many employers believe they cannot run their houses without domestic workers, most of them refuse to accord the latter with the rights and prospects for personal development that any decent work guarantees.

Palisoc agreed with Farooq and said most people don’t think of domestic work as work and instead describe it as just a “low profession.”

More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, name one or two bright spots fueling your optimism for an inclusive and equal future for domestic workers.

Before the pandemic, many domestic workers did not know their rights, and their employers did not know their value, Farooq said. Perhaps only during the lockdown, when most people were sheltering in place and domestic workers started organising, did the latter realise their rights and the benefits they were due.

Kshatri noted that, during the lockdown, domestic workers began to brush up on their IT skills. They learned they could find jobs online or connect with friends and other domestic workers through online meetings.

Palisoc said that the pandemic had allowed domestic workers to realise their right to healthcare, for example, as frontliners on whom the burden of household chores largely fell. They had to go out and buy groceries, despite the risks of COVID-19 transmission and their lack of health insurance.

How would you describe the domestic workers’ movement now?

“It’s not just a movement. We’re a force to be reckoned with,” Farooq said, adding that, in Pakistan, they are organising more domestic workers, introducing them to sustainable livelihoods, educating them about their rights, and expanding their reach to other provinces, starting with Punjab.

Do you feel that your mindsets have changed positively throughout your work, and do you think you are excelling in life financially and emotionally?

Certainly, despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, there has been a lot of improvement, Farooq said. In some cases, their salaries have increased such that they can now at least cover their health care expenses and send more money home for their children.

Palisoc found that even tougher circumstances outweighed any positive change she had experienced during the pandemic. For example, it had been harder to find new jobs, especially if women were older, as private employment agencies tended to discriminate against them. She said the health crisis had also caused a tremendous emotional toll, especially on domestic workers who knew of or had relatives fall ill with the coronavirus.

“Whatever benefits domestic workers are enjoying now is because of the people in this room – because they fought for it.”

Anna Tuvera
Director, Gender Equality Activities, ITUC-AP
Although most domestic workers found themselves in even direr straits, they had to cope, manage, and continue fighting for their rights, Kshatri said. They must clinch more unities and keep momentum with the various developments during the pandemic.

**If there's one thing you want attendees of this event to remember as a result of this conversation, what would it be?**

- Farooq reminded everyone of the importance of international solidarity. At the same time, trade unions must be given adequate support financially because any contributions to funding are also investments in the collective growth of domestic workers' groups.
- Kshatri urged young unionists to join trade unions and organise other workers. In doing so, they can better understand the intersections of issues in domestic work across gender and cultural lines. They can build platforms and maximise opportunities for personal development and leadership.
- Palisoc echoed the calls of Farooq and Kshatri: Continue organising and fighting hand-in-hand for the rights of all domestic workers worldwide.

“T’m so glad that we are live-streaming this event because a lot of people get to see that domestic workers, our dear sisters in the room, are more than talented, passionate, and hardworking people, and not so many people know that,” Tuvera said. “Whatever benefits domestic workers are enjoying now is because of the people in this room – because they fought for it.”

### 3 Domestic Workers’ Resilience in the Pandemic Era

Domestic workers found creative avenues to call attention to their plight during the pandemic. Through a virtual gallery, the participants were shown select artworks by domestic workers in the Asia-Pacific.

Some of the works featured were by Binda Shova Rai, a Nepali domestic worker in Hong Kong. Her paintings of landscapes not only used symbols from Nepali history and iconography but also told a more personal story about homesickness, displacement, adaptation, and diaspora. She had no formal training in painting, which did not stop her from creating art and sharing it with others.

Similarly, Marry Renee Rose Cayabyab and her friends from the Domestic Caretakers’ Union (DCU) Taiwan hesitated to call themselves “artists.” Still, their collection of woodcut-printed T-shirts called “Dine with the Boss” did what any good art does — provoke, stimulate a conversation, and hint at otherwise unheard-of stories.
Creative production empowers them to raise awareness about their vulnerabilities, Cayabyab said, and articulate their hopes, such as for social safety net benefits, higher wages, fairer employee-employer relationships, a guaranteed weekly day of rest, and other labour rights that many of them are still denied.

For members of Asosasyon ng mga Makabayanang Manggagawang Pilipino Overseas (AMMPO) in Malaysia, performance is more than just a way to cope with their stress during the pandemic. In a video clip, they danced to a tune and conveyed their messages. Their talent help bring domestic workers closer together to their families and other sisters.

4  We Care

In a dialogue highlighting several best practices and success stories in organising during the pandemic, Tuvera joined three domestic workers’ leaders in the Asia-Pacific: Nasriakah Sarah Paidin, a coordinator for the Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Association (Persatuan Pekerja Rumah Tangga Indonesia Migran, PERTIMIG) in Malaysia; Lita Anggraini, the national coordinator of the Indonesian National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy (Jaringan Nasional Advokasi Pekerja Rumah Tangga, Jala PRT); and Arooma Shahzad, the General Secretary of the DWU Pakistan.

They started their conversation by reflecting on a question earlier posed to the participants: What does “counting domestic workers in” mean to you? A word cloud was generated based on their answers and shown onscreen.

- Choose a word from the word cloud and tell one related success story in your country that you made happen.

  - Paidin picked out “domestic work.” She shared that, in Malaysia, the Employment Act was just recently amended to use “domestic employees” instead of “domestic servants.” In June 2021, policymakers included domestic workers in the country’s social security schemes. And even though the Malaysian government does not yet recognise PERTIMIG as a registered organisation, it has begun to involve Paidin and other domestic workers’ representatives in discussions about policy changes related to domestic work.
  - Shahzad chose “domestic workers’ unions,” to which she attributed their continued efforts to negotiate with government representatives and employers in national tripartite social dialogues. For example, her union is active in consultations regarding the campaign for a harassment-free workplace for domestic workers in Pakistan.
  - Anggraini lauded all domestic workers across the region who are expanding their networks and continuing to struggle for welfare, justice, and decent work.

“As I listen to the sisters today, so many identities came onto the fore. They were workers, activists, leaders, sisters, friends. And when we look at so many of these identities, we realise that there are so many elements that come together to make who a domestic worker is.”

Raina Bhattacharya
Program Officer for Asia, IDWF
"To join the movement, to join a union and get information, makes us powerful. And so we need to put much more people, like domestic workers, into the union and give them the right information, and that will make our movement stronger."

Yoshiko Norimatsu
Chair, Women’s Committee, ITUC-AP

Phobsuk Gasing, the chairperson and founding member of the Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU), thanked Anggraini and related a story of how, with the help of other trade unions, she and her co-workers learned a great deal about their rights according to the Labour Law and the changes necessary to secure domestic workers’ equal opportunities and protections from discrimination, violence, and harassment in the workplace.

Shahzad thanked the ILO, the ITUC, and the Pakistan Workers’ Federation (PWF), the DWU’s parent organisation, for their support when she and her colleagues were just starting to organise and clinch broader support for the #RatifyC190 campaign. Without their help, DWU members would not have been able to undergo capacity-building initiatives, such as young leaders’ training and paralegal training. Now, the union is working towards sustainability and strengthening their relationships with the communities they are organising, through meetings and consultations, all thanks to the trade union leaders and partners who have helped them recognise their roles as social change makers.

Anggraini said that Jala PRT would not have grown its membership without the domestic workers in Jakarta who were among the first they organised. During the pandemic, Anggraini and her colleagues decided to adjust their methods of organising and thus employed the
so-called RAP method, by which they distributed online application forms and brochures about why it is vital to fight for employment support, regulations, and labour standards. In addition to door-to-door consultations, they shifted online to hold Zoom meetings, form WhatsApp groups, and gather insights from prospective members about their workplace issues and experiences.

- On behalf of PERTIMIG, Paidin was grateful to the IDWF for its continuous support and to the local unions in Malaysia for their willingness to collaborate with and learn from migrant domestic workers. Like Anggraini, she found opportunities through social media to encourage more people to learn about domestic workers’ issues and become allies in asserting a decent work agenda.

- **How important is it that domestic workers themselves are the ones pushing for these changes?**
  - As domestic workers, these union leaders know the issues and struggles first-hand, Shahzad said. They can push for policies and laws and launch domestic workers-led initiatives. With their voice, they can authentically represent the sector in dialogues with policymakers, other partners, and stakeholders.

Before Tuvera closed the session, she asked the women what parting message the participants should remember after this event. “Keep on the struggle. Organise!” Shahzad said. “Be proud that we are domestic workers. We are workers,” Nasrikah said. Continue organising to assert their rights and fight together for “recognition, representation, redistribution, justice, welfare, and decent work,” Anggraini said.

### 5 Yes, I Did It

Four domestic workers shared their journey on how they brought forth change in their lives and others’: Liezl Caldo, a coordinator for AMMPO Malaysia; Novia Arluma of the Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Group (IPPMI) in Singapore; Munazza Ishaq, the Deputy General Secretary of the DWU Pakistan; and Achal Gurung of the National Domestic Workers Federation (NDWF) in India, who unfortunately could not make the event but whose story was read and shared by one of her friends from the NDWF.

Having struggled back home looking for better prospects, some had to work overseas as domestic workers. They hoped they could find a compassionate household to work for and would not end up harassed, abused or exploited like those they had heard about on the news.

But “many employers treat their domestic workers like slaves, as if giving us little wages makes them our masters,” Galdo said. For over two years, for example, her employers did not let her out of their house on her days off.
It was easy to grow resigned to these working conditions, to think they at least had it better than others.

“My mentality was just like a servant’s, who did not have the right to ask, as long as I was being fed and not faced with sexual harassment. I felt I was so lucky,” Arluma said. “When I received my salary every month, I did not know how much money I should receive because I did not hold the contract in my hand.”

Fish Ip, the IDWF Asia Coordinator, observed that many people, not just domestic workers, think they could come by decent work with just luck. And yet “this should not be the way,” she said. “We should not rely on luck and destiny to see whether we can have a better workplace. We need concrete and solid labour protections and policies to ensure that none of us will be left behind, that none of us will be hurt.”

In a way, the pandemic proved pivotal for some domestic workers in making them realise there is more to work than just getting through each day to earn a paycheck. Meanwhile, for Arluma, who had joined a union, the past couple of years motivated her to share what she had learned about domestic workers’ rights to help others who were just like her several years ago. “Because I think this spirit has to be [spread] to others so that more domestic workers can voice out their [troubles] and also to build the mindset that to fight for themselves is to fight for their welfare,” she added.

Ishaq, who credited the ILO in Pakistan with igniting her “fire to be more educated about my rights and the [situation] of domestic workers,” also wanted to pay it forward. “The knowledge I gained gave me direction. … I started to think about my aspirations,” Ishaq said, looking back on her journey. “I started as a domestic worker, alone in my daily struggle, with no one to listen to my challenges. Now I’m not just a domestic worker – I am not alone in my fight for the rights and dignity of domestic workers. My sisters are with me; together, we are strong and powerful.”

Workers must train, learn, and stick together, Ip said. For, although they can bring about change in their personal lives, the more significant policy-level changes required to improve their lot are possible only through collective action and broader cooperation with other workers’ sectors and stakeholders.

“We should not rely on luck and destiny to see whether we can have a better workplace. We need concrete and solid labour protections and policies to ensure that none of us will be left behind, that none of us will be hurt.”

Fish Ip
Regional Coordinator (Asia), IDWF

6 Everyone Should Care

The participants raised their signs and slogans bearing calls to action and messages of solidarity: “Protect migrant workers,” “Domestic work is work,” and “Ratify C189!”
On the last point, Marieke Koning, a policy advisor for the ITUC, reiterated the need for more countries to ratify C189 and ensure that, upon adoption, it is adequately implemented following the guidelines set out by the ILO. The ratification of this Convention, along with others, such as C190, will lay the groundwork for strengthening the care economy, which remains largely devoid of benefits and protections for its workers who often suffer low wages and often suffer low wages physical, mental or even sexual harm.

“When we’re talking about the care agenda, it is also about decent work for all domestic workers, including those who are working in the informal economy,” said Marieke Koning, ITUC policy advisor on gender equality and domestic work issues. “It’s about the right to quality public care and health services. And that also implies an agenda where we need to ensure support for all domestic workers.”

The care economy will remain a critical pillar of the ITUC agenda, especially in its post-pandemic recovery plans. More to the point, many more women can enter the workforce given increased investments in care, which then relieves them of the responsibility of providing unpaid care and enables them to engage more fully in society. Particularly in Asia and the Pacific, where millions of women migrate every year to take up a job as domestic workers, ITUC-AP’s #InvestInCare campaign will explore the gaps between decent work and the current policies and practices in domestic work in the region.

More and more organisations are indeed willing, as strategic partners of trade unions and women’s organisations, to spotlight this area of work. Koning cited the Global Alliance for Care as an example, a global initiative originally launched in Mexico to call on governments, the private sector, civil society organisations, and philanthropic groups to promote commitments and concrete actions around care.
Such efforts at deepening collaboration are integral to building “bridges and solidarity across all care workers, including domestic workers, to move forward to a solid care agenda at the national level in as many countries as possible,” Koning said.

7 Bringing It All Together

In closing, leaders from the ITUC-AP and the IDWF discussed ways to make the trade union movement more inclusive and equal.

“To join the movement, to join a union and get information, makes us powerful,” said Yoshiko Norimatsu, the Chair of the ITUC-AP Women's Committee. “And so we need to put much more people, like domestic workers, into the union and give them the right information, and that will make our movement stronger.”

Domestic workers bring with them into the movement a plethora of experiences and perspectives that can help enrich people's understanding of their issues and calls for “inclusion and regulatory systems, laws recognising the rights of domestic workers, and access to social security,” said Raina Bhattacharya, Programme Officer for Asia of the IDWF.

“As I listen to the sisters today, so many identities came onto the fore. They were workers, activists, leaders, sisters, friends,” she said. “And when we look at so many of these identities, we realise that there are so many elements that come together to make who a domestic worker is.”

Collectively, the domestic workers' testimonies “translate into the lived experiences of our sisters ... and, in these, we see that the power of domestic workers manifests as resistance, as resilience,” Bhattacharya added. She thanked all the domestic workers who “spoke about their lives, spoke about their experiences, spoke about their fight, and spoke about their emotions.”

Once again, Koning of the ITUC urged domestic workers to continue breaking barriers and building on the gains of their landmark win 11 years ago, the passage of C189, towards influencing labour law reforms and initiating more social and policy dialogues on decent work.

“You are, for me, heroes, who have inspired me for many, many years, and I have learned how you have contributed to building this very big, strong movement across the world of domestic workers, which up until today is inspiring many,” Koning said. “So, you are our teachers, and we will be there standing next to you in solidarity.”

“”When we're talking about the care agenda, it is also about decent work for all domestic workers, imcluding those who are working in the informal economy. ... It's about the right to quality public care and health services. And that also implies an agenda where we need to ensure support for all domestic workers.”

Marieke Koning
Policy Advisor, ITUC
# Annex 1. Count Domestic Workers In (Agenda)

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>14:00 – 14:30</td>
<td><strong>Opening and Event Overview</strong></td>
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<td>• Housekeeping reminders and simultaneous interpretation instructions</td>
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<td>• Overview of participants and the program</td>
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<td>• Messages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Shoya Yoshida, General Secretary, ITUC-AP</td>
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<td>o Myrtle Witbooi, President, IDWF</td>
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<td>14:30 – 15:00</td>
<td><strong>Who Cares?</strong></td>
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<td><em>This short documentary will set the scene and bring the stories, daily struggles and aspirations of care workers (in the Philippines and Pakistan), particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.</em></td>
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<td>• Reflections</td>
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<td>o Samina Farooq, Deputy General Secretary, DWU/Pakistan</td>
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<td>o Gyanu Maya Kshatri, General Secretary, HUN/Nepal</td>
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<td>o Novelta Palisoc, Chairperson, UNITED/Philippines</td>
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<td>Using the format of the rapid-fire questions, the moderator will engage in conversations with the speakers on a set of quick-fire questions (e.g., what does “counting everybody in” mean to you, how you are organising to bring about change). The moderator will also encourage the participants to share their quick-fire questions in the chat.</td>
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<td>15:00 – 15:30</td>
<td><strong>Domestic Workers’ Resilience in the Pandemic Era</strong></td>
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<td><em>This virtual gallery walk will showcase the resilience of domestic workers – finding their strength in the midst of adversity – by featuring their artworks. A speakers will be invited to further reflect on their story.</em></td>
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<td>15:30 – 16:10</td>
<td><strong>We Care</strong></td>
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<td><em>Using a talk-show format, this interactive dialogue will feature DW leaders showcasing different ways of (what works in) “counting in” domestic workers.</em></td>
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<td>• Arooma Shahzad, General Secretary, DWU-PWF/Pakistan</td>
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<td>• Lita Anggraini, National Coordinator, JALAPRT/Indonesia</td>
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<td>• Nasrikah Sarah, Coordinator, PERTIMIG/Indonesia</td>
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<td>16:10 – 16:40</td>
<td><strong>Yes, I Did It</strong></td>
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<td><em>This session will feature domestic workers sharing their journey on how they bring about change (on a personal/individual level and collectively).</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Liezl Galdo, Coordinator, AMMPO/Malaysia</td>
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<td>• Novia Arluma, IPPMI/Singapore</td>
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<td>• Munazza Ishaq, Deputy General Secretary, DWU/Pakistan</td>
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<td>16:40 – 16:50</td>
<td><strong>Everyone Should Care</strong></td>
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<td><em>The event will conclude with select representatives showing their slogans that communicate their demands (call-to-action).</em></td>
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<td>• Reflection from Marieke Koning, Policy Advisor, ITUC</td>
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<td>16:50 – 17:00</td>
<td><strong>Bringing It All Together</strong></td>
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<td><em>The event will pull together a range of final insights from ITUC, ITUC-AP and IDWF and report on the discussions of the event and will end with a quick feedback exercise and an illustrative summary.</em></td>
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<td>• Marieke Koning, ITUC</td>
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<td>• Yoshiko Norimatsu, Chair, ITUC-AP Women’s Committee</td>
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<td>• Raina Bhattacharya, Program Officer for Asia, IDWF</td>
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