

# DOMESTIC WORKERS IN MALAYSIA: INHUMANE WORKING CONDITIONS

## **The World Day of Prayer movement in Germany and human rights activists in Malaysia: Fighting together for justice!**

“Let Justice Prevail” – this is the title of the order of worship for World Day of Prayer 2012 written by women from Malaysia. During the service, we listen to words by human rights activist Irene Fernandez. For many years, Irene Fernandez has fought for the rights of migrants and domestic workers in Malaysia and, because of that, spent a long time in prison.



*“Domestic work is work”*  
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### **Abuse and exploitation**

According to the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, more than 300,000 domestic workers work in Malaysia in South East Asia. Most of these women and girls are migrant workers and come from poorer Asian countries e.g. from Indonesia or the Philippines. They come to find work in Malaysia because Malaysia is – compared to their home countries – economically very successful and offers more employment opportunities. Their stay is usually organized by an agency and the employer and leaves the domestic worker voiceless and powerless. In most cases, the women’s passports are confiscated when they arrive. This is often done to put domestic workers under additional pressure because it renders them incapable of applying to extend their visas themselves. So, if there is a conflict, the employer has leverage over them. In addition, the domestic workers often owe enormous fees to recruitment agencies which they have to pay off.

In Malaysia, as in most other countries, domestic work is not included in the country’s labour laws and is not officially recognized as being decent work. For this reason, domestic workers do not have any basic rights. Therefore, they cannot take a stand against inhuman working conditions and cannot protect themselves from sexual and physical abuse and exploitation. According to research conducted by non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch, life of many domestic workers looks like this:

### **No social security**

### **Confiscation of passports**

### **Not even a single paid day off per week**

### **No employment contract**

### **All forms of sexual violence:**

### **harassment, assault, rape**

### **No collective bargaining agreement**

### **Insults, threats and physical violence**

This is not only reality in Malaysia but also in many other countries worldwide. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has started acting against these injustices. Governments, unions and employer representatives, represented in the ILO, adopted the historically unique ‘Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers (No.189)’ on 16 June 2011. It states that



member states 'shall take measures to ensure that domestic workers, like workers generally, enjoy fair terms of employment as well as decent working conditions' (Article 6). Malaysia, a member state of the ILO, abstained from voting in favour of the convention. According to research conducted by Tenaganita, Malaysia has so far not made any efforts to ratify the ILO convention or implement its provisions.

### **The WDP-partner organization Tenaganita helps and supports domestic workers**

Tenaganita means 'women's force' and is a non-governmental organization founded by Irene Fernandez. It is one of the numerous women's organizations which will be supported by the WDP collection 2012 in Germany. In the last seven years, Tenaganita has recorded 3,366 cases of human rights violations concerning 371 domestic workers in Malaysia. That means that all of these women and girls have suffered several human rights violations each (e.g. no employment contract, confiscation of passport and physical violence). In all cases, Tenaganita has pressed charges but only five cases were prosecuted and only in two cases the perpetrators were convicted. At the moment, the women of Tenaganita are planning several campaigns which aim at prompting the Malaysian government to improve the situation of domestic workers, to ratify convention No. 189 and to implement its provisions.

#### **Become active:**

#### **Sign this petition for the rights of domestic workers**

Within the scope of the World Day of Prayer, you can support the women of Tenaganita by signing the petition 'Ratifying ILO Convention No. 189 and implementing its provisions in Malaysia' and by returning the completed signature lists to the German national committee of the World Day of Prayer in Stein near Nuremberg.

There, lists will be collected and then send off to Malaysia where they will be handed over to government officials in charge. **This campaign will be launched on 15 December 2011.** Please, only use original lists of the German national committee of the WDP, do not sign them on the back page and **return all lists by 15 April 2012.**

The women of Tenaganita await our support. In their letter, they write 'Together, let us fight for human dignity and fair working conditions.'

#### **The petition during the World Day of Prayer: Fighting together for justice!**

There are several ways to inform the WDP congregation and raise their awareness:

- Methodical ideas in the work book „Ideen und Informationen“, pp 210 – 213. (tip: Replace 'postcard action' with 'petition')
- short speech during the service (e.g. after song p 9)\*\*

You can also use these ideas for other events and presentations organized in the context of the World Day of Prayer 2012.

*You can download a sample speech here: [www.weltgebetstag.de](http://www.weltgebetstag.de)*



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