

**The Founding Congress of the Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions  
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Leaders from trade unions in Asia  
Distinguished delegates

It is my great pleasure to be present at the Founding Congress of the Federation of Asian Domestic Workers' Unions (FADWU) and to observe this historical moment. On behalf of the ILO, especially Mr Dan Cunniah, Director of Bureau for Workers' Activities, Geneva and Mr Bill Salter, Director of ILO DWT, Bangkok, as well as on my behalf, I would like to convey warm greetings to all of you.

Today, there are tens of millions of domestic workers throughout the world. They are an important element of economic development in both labour sending and labour receiving countries. On the contrary, their economic contribution is undervalued and their rights are not fully respected. Migrant workers, especially women domestic workers are vulnerable to the risk of discrimination, harassment and inequality.

**Dear delegates,**

In realising the decent work deficits for migrant domestic workers, the ILO has made great efforts to protect them through standard setting, technical cooperation and increasing voice and representation.

**Standard-setting**

Domestic work has been a longstanding concern of the ILO since 1948 when the ILO adopted a resolution concerning the employment conditions of domestic work. This year at the International Labour Conference, the ILO put forward a discussion of a new convention on domestic work and produced a draft convention (brawn report) and a recommendation. A draft convention and a recommendation have been circulated to social partners for their comments. A second tripartite discussion will be held at the ILC in 2011 and the delegates of 183 member states will decide its adaptation.

The trade union movement has been a major driving force for the setting of a new ILO convention to protect the rights of domestic workers and regulate their employment relationship. This standard setting exercise is not only to bring human dignity from exclusion and exploitation, but also to recognise the economic role of domestic workers. The ILO still needs to get strong support from trade unions, in order to adopt the draft convention and the draft

recommendation at the 2011 ILC and to ratify the convention later by their respective governments.

I wish to also draw the attention of trade unions to promote and ratify the existing protective international instruments, which include:

- ILO convention No.97 (1949) on Migration for Employment
- ILO convention No.143 (1975) on Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions)
- UN International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of all the Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990)

### **Safe migration in the ASEAN integration**

As many of domestic migrant workers in Hong Kong come from the ASEAN countries, I would like to highlight a policy trend of migration within ASEAN.

As you are aware, the ASEAN economic block will be materialised by 2015. In the process of the ASEAN integration, the safe, protective migration becomes one of key political agendas between the ASEAN countries.

Currently ASEAN member states are negotiating on a draft “ASEAN Framework Instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers”. If the ASEAN Framework Instrument can be agreed and adopted, the whole migration process from departure to destination would be regulated and the law in both labour sending and labour receiving countries must be abided by its member states. The ILO has been working with the ASEAN Secretariat to build a protective regime for migrant workers in the regional integration process.

### **Organising campaign**

Domestic workers’ associations are established in Europe, Latin America, and Asia and women domestic workers begin to form their own unions for better voice and representation. In early this year, the Israeli authority allowed migrant workers to form their union and practice freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Migrant workers in Singapore, Malaysia and Korea have tried to form their own union, though their efforts are not always fruitful. Compared with these countries, the organising initiative has been quite successful in Hong Kong. Many migrant workers domestic workers’ unions have been established and they have already provided effective services to their members, launched advocacy campaigns on labour rights and networked with trade unions abroad to strengthen solidarity.

The ILO supports the trade unions’ organising campaigns because ‘organising’ is recognised as an entry point to achieve decent work for domestic workers. Supporting the activities of the FAWDU would be a part

of the ILO policy intervention to promote the voice and representation of domestic workers.

### **The minimum wage**

In Hong Kong, the statutory minimum wage was passed by the legislative council. It is understood that the domestic workers will be excluded from decent employment providing adequate income. It is reported that many domestic workers earn their income below the poverty line. The coverage of the statutory minimum wage is one of the four pillars of decent work, i.e. rights at work, decent and productive employment, social protection for all, and social dialogue.

The Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia earn an average of US\$89 to 133 a month over a two year contract. The country considers workers with less than the earning of US\$222 to fall below the national poverty line. The payment of the minimum wage to migrant domestic workers must be a priority to ensure their decent living conditions and support their families.

### **Concluding**

Finally, I would like to express my congratulations to the leaders and delegate of the FADWU for federating domestic workers to enhance their capacity and better protect their rights. I also look forward to seeing its outstanding development in a near future as a core affiliate of the HKCTU. I wish you all a success in your mission and campaign for the betterment of domestic workers and the protection of their rights. The ILO would be pleased to extend its collaboration with the HKCTU on the specific occasion of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in further promoting international labour standards in Hong Kong.

Thank you very much