



International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN)

c/o

International Union of Food, Agricultural, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)
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November 19, 2012

Mark Harper MP
Minister of State (Immigration)
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Mr. Harper,

The International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) watches with interest and worries about the effects of the UK Home Office changes of the visa system for migrant domestic workers, which no longer allow newly arriving migrant domestic workers to change employers.

Far too many cases in the past, when this rule was previously in force in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, have proven that this regulation leads to worst cases of abuses of domestic workers by scrupulous employers. It creates slavery like conditions of personal dependency and leaves migrant domestic workers in the UK de facto without any human and labour rights.

The UK government argues that the new visa rule will contribute to cutting net immigration. We argue that only protection for migrant workers, including the application of a sound immigration policy would lead to the desired outcome in terms of regulating immigration flow and the labour market segment of domestic services. There is no evidence that the visa regulation which binds the worker to one employer had any impact on bringing immigration numbers of domestic workers down.

We are convinced that ratifying the ILO Domestic Workers' Convention, C189 and implementing its provision into national laws, is the far better approach to resolving various issues of domestic workers.

We urge the UK government not just to consult, but to enter into negotiations with the domestic workers representatives from Justice 4 domestic workers, their trade union UNITE and their supporters (as for example Kalayaan), to address the many problems of the lack of rights, protection and regulation of domestic workers. There are other European countries, like for example Belgium and France, which have found innovative solutions to regulating the sector and to ensure protection to the workers at the same time. This should be possible in Britain too.

Domestic workers are workers and not visitors. They must have the same rights as any other workers in the UK. Any rights in theory are illusory if they do not have the right to change the employer and take action against the poor employment practices of an old employer. Domestic workers cannot be expected to take action against employers they still work for, since they live in their employers' households.

Yours sincerely,

Myrtle Witbooi
Chair, IDWN