



## **Summary Report on the Online discussion on Stopping Violence against Domestic Workers**

**November 23 – December 5, 2014**

### **Introduction:**

November 25 is the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against women. To acknowledge the event, the IDWF asked its community to discuss the prevalence of violence in domestic work and how IDWF can work to solve it. The IDWF asked members to focus on the following questions:

1. What are the most common forms of violence against women from your experience? Verbal? Physical? Sexual? Others?
2. Are domestic workers more vulnerable to violence than others? Why?
3. What can be done? What do you think the IDWF should do to address violence on domestic workers?



## **Discussion points:**

### **What are common forms violence?**

Community members noted that violence is a problem of women everywhere, in both developed and developing countries and abusers can be both men and women. Many members of the community noted that violence against domestic workers is more common than in other lines of work.

Violence is both physical and psychological. Forcing domestic workers to work long working hours, not paying wages, or asking them to take up dangerous tasks can all be forms of violence.

Police complacency is an important aspect of violence, especially in developing countries. In many societies around the world, police can be 'bought off' by the wealthy not to pursue cases against violence. This encourages more violent activity in the future.

Community members noted that domestic workers are more vulnerable to sexual forms of violence including harassment and rape.

### **Why domestic workers?**

The majority of domestic workers are female, and because they work in homes they are secluded from society and more prone to violence. Factors such as poverty, insufficient legal protection, social exclusion, low education levels, and poor balance of power between employer and employee make domestic workers more vulnerable to abuse.

**Poverty** is a common reason that people take up domestic work and many migrate to find work. Workers are more likely to put up with violence if they need the money and fear they will not receive payment if they quit.

In many countries, **insufficient legal protection** for domestic workers can also mean that they have little access to justice if violence is used against them. Abuse cases are difficult to prove, especially for a migrant worker who may not speak the local language, doesn't know local laws, or may be illiterate.

Many communities also **lack support structures** for domestic workers, especially migrants. Social exclusion and classism can mean that not enough resources are available to a woman even if she has evidence that violence has been used against her.

**Patriarchal societies** that value men more than women tend to see more violence against women. Racism can also be a factor, especially in situations where domestic workers migrate between countries for work.

The women also noted that a **poor balance of power** between employer and employee is one of the major reasons for violence against domestic workers. Employers can yield power over women by not giving them the legally required vacation days or severance pay. Because these transactions are not usually regulated, the power is disproportionately in the hands of employers.

### **How can we as an IDWF community help?**

IDWF community members had varied and abundant ideas for ending violence against women.

One of the most commonly mentioned was the use of **education and training**. Community members agree that training is a great way to prevent violence before it happens and training can be given to both domestic workers and their employers. It is also important that workers are trained on the appropriate response if violence is used against them.

It is extremely important that domestic workers are **informed** who to call in the case of an emergency. They can be given phone number or a 'smart card' that would contain important information like police contact phone numbers and emergency phone numbers in their native language.

Unions and NGOs can help end violence against women by providing support and assessing whether other members are comfortable with their working conditions. They can also distribute information on rights and access to justice in the native language of domestic workers.

Domestic worker recruitment companies also play an important role in helping to prevent violence. They are often the first point of contact for domestic workers in trouble and they can be trained to recognize and act on case where they believe violence has occurred.

Finally, **ratification of C189** is an important step in ending violence against women and domestic workers. Community members noted that IDWF should work to encourage more governments to adopt the initiative.

Community members expressed hope that all domestic workers, employers, unions, and organizations recognize the problem of violence against domestic workers and work to help end it.

