IDWF STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 2023

There is #NoExcuse

Seventy five million domestic workers worldwide provide essential services that keep households working. Yet, many domestic workers continue to work in vulnerable situations and are disproportionately affected by violence and harassment in the workplace or face discrimination based on gender, caste or class, ethnicity, skin color, nationality or migratory status. Despite these challenges, the demand for domestic and care services is growing worldwide due to the increase in women working outside the home, the aging of populations, the increasing need for long-term care and the loss of extended family support.

Transformative policies are needed NOW

One in every 12 women workers globally is a domestic worker. Despite their essential role in economies and societies, 8 out of 10 domestic workers are informally employed, without access to social security and fundamental labor rights. Informality leads to precarious working conditions such as meager wages, irregular working hours, insufficient rest, and the absence of occupational health and safety measures, among other rights violations that undermine decent work.

The ILO Convention 189 on decent work for domestic workers was ratified by 36 countries. However, C189 is not enough, even alongside other international standards. Today, and throughout history, domestic workers are among the most vulnerable of all workers to violence and harassment. For decent work to become a reality for domestic workers, more ratifications and effective implementation are needed.

The ILO Convention 190 (C190) recognizes the scope and scale of violence affecting all workers. However, regulations intended to protect workers have typically excluded the private home as a workplace. So, domestic workers too often experience diverse forms of gender-based violence in their employers’ homes due to the power imbalance that characterize their employment relationship, including physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, and economic violence.

The privacy of the workplace is a hindrance to eradicating violence against domestic workers, who perform their tasks in isolation and behind closed doors. This isolation also makes it difficult for workers to organize and create support networks, which is essential for their awareness-raising, support, and empowerment. For migrant workers, limitations on exercising freedom of association further exacerbate their vulnerability. Domestic
workers’ organizations not only assist, accompany, and provide advice to victims of violence but also engage in advocacy, social dialogue, and collective bargaining, improving working conditions for the entire sector.

The historical lack of recognition and valorization of domestic work has become a cultural pattern in which the subordination of domestic workers and the power imbalance with their employers are naturalized. For many, domestic work is not considered work but a service that racialized women in predominantly white societies are obligated to provide by natural mandate and without any rights or compensation.

**We shall be silent no more**

The vulnerability of domestic workers and their dependence on employers make them, in most cases, not report abuses for multiple reasons. Sometimes, domestic workers do not recognize themselves as victims; other times, they are afraid of losing their jobs, being falsely accused, or being deported if they are migrant workers. Migrant workers and those working under live-in arrangements are the most dependent on their employers and, therefore, the most unprotected and affected by violence and harassment at the workplace.

As a sector facing many obstacles to accessing justice, reporting acts of violence is bleak and discouraging. Procedures are cumbersome, expensive, and mostly unsuccessful. More often than not, justice operators are not sensitized to the specific issues of domestic workers: racism and prejudices, as well as corruption, persist in justice systems worldwide. The availability of free and accessible special complaint mechanisms would ensure adequate investigation, appropriate prosecution of perpetrators, and fair redress for victims. In most cases, domestic workers do not have access to such channels or pathways.

If this combination of challenges was not visible enough, the COVID-19 crisis worsened and exposed it like never before. During the pandemic, domestic workers were among the most affected by violence and abuse at the workplace.

The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) demands that solid measures be taken by governments and civil societies alike to ensure the respect and recognition of the human, labor, and women’s rights of domestic workers. The IDWF has been working to ensure that governments around the world adopt regulatory frameworks and public policies to protect domestic workers and ratify ILO Conventions 189 and 190, while providing support to domestic workers worldwide to unionize and address the systemic nature of the gender-based violence and its links to discriminatory laws and policies.
For migrant workers, limitations on exercising rights create support networks, which is essential for their awareness-raising. This isolation also makes it difficult for workers to organize and negotiate with their employers. Domestic workers, who perform their tasks in isolation and behind closed doors, are often employed in environments that lack the presence of occupational health and safety measures, among other rights that workers typically take for granted elsewhere.

The privacy of the workplace is a hindrance to eradicating violence against domestic workers. The ILO Convention 190 (C190) recognizes the scope and scale of violence at the workplace and the need for effective implementation. However, ratifications have been slow among the 36 countries that have signed the convention. More ratifications are needed to ensure that domestic work is recognized as work and that workers have access to the same rights as other workers.

The absence of occupational health and safety measures, along with the power imbalance that characterizes the relationship between domestic workers and their employers, is a significant barrier to eradicating violence against domestic workers. Moreover, domestic workers are often unaware of their rights and the mechanisms available to them.

Domestic workers are informally employed, without access to social security and fundamental rights such as minimum wages, adequate working hours, and the right to sick leave. They are often deported if they are migrant workers. Migrant workers and those working in predominantly white societies are obligated to provide by nature mandated domestic services that keep households working. Yet, many domestic workers continue to work in vulnerable situations and are disproportionately affected by violence and abuse.

We shall be silent no more. The historical lack of recognition and valorization of domestic work has become a cultural pattern in which the subordination of domestic workers is institutionalized. For many domestic workers, their employers’ homes were among the most affected by violence and abuse, even if they were not sensitized to the specific issues of domestic workers: racism and prejudice.

We must continue our struggle to ensure that domestic workers have the same labor rights as other workers. Any form of discrimination, abuse, harassment, and violence against them is a violation of human rights.

There is #NoExcuse for denying domestic workers the right to a safe, fair, equal, and decent work environment.

There is #NoExcuse for violence against domestic workers!

#CareforThoseWhoCareForYou #RatifyC189 #RatifyC190 #NoExcuse