

“A NATION BUILT WITH BROKEN BONES “

Tenaganita and CARAM Asia Media Statement On International Migrants Day 2017 for the Protection of Migrant Workers’ Rights

International Migrants Day celebrated on December 18, 2017 reminds the world of the enormous contribution of migrants to the world economy and to societies and communities - source and destination countries. Despite the enormous contribution of migrant workers to the economies of their host countries, and the remittances they send home which help to boost the economies of their countries of origin, we still see that this important population continues to endure hardship in silence. The situation remains the same with migrants being the silenced lot and feeling intimidated.

The obligation of protecting migrant workers’ rights, therefore, rests equally upon both source and destination countries. Unfortunately, governments commonly treat migrant workers as commodities.

In the six years since the International Labour Organization adopted Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers in 2011, governments in nearly 50 countries have adopted labour reforms and policies and updated their legislation to provide better employment protection for domestic workers, and 24 countries have already ratified the Convention. Within Asia Pacific only the Philippines has ratified Convention 189. Shockingly many source countries in the Asia Pacific sending their citizens out to work as domestic workers have yet to ratify Convention 189. Ratification by these countries will enable them to seek reciprocal compliance through the MOU.

It is clear that the objectives of the labour sending countries is to earn foreign remittances at any cost and for the labour receiving countries it is to get work done with reduced wages in violation of international labour standards.

Governments are enforcing new and strict laws and practicing crackdown on undocumented migrants who are possible victims of forced labour, trafficking in persons, and have become undocumented due to the negligence and/or exploitation by their employers after entering into the country as documented or are brought in by the agents and/or syndicates via irregular means.

The crackdowns are being practiced for many years but still the authorities are unable to regularise labour migration which clearly means that the crackdowns on vulnerable migrants is not solution of the problem. Governments need to address the root causes rather than focusing on exploited groups of migrants.

Majority of migrant workers suffer due to massive debts after paying off recruitment agents in the hope of getting a job abroad to escape poverty at home. However unfortunately they become victims of human trafficking, fraud and undocumented during migration cycle.

Governments are often talking about exploitation, trafficking, cheated migrants and slavery which are becoming widespread. But the government, despite repeated calls by the CSOs to change the recruiting process so that the government themselves will be a party to the sending and recruiting migrants workers into the country has fallen on deaf ears. By doing so, the government will be able to remove the so called racketeers in the name of recruiters.

Tenaganita and CARAM Asia urge all countries sending and receiving migrants to urgently provide protection mechanisms for migrant workers' and to continue to work for wider ratification and practice of international conventions which provide migrants with rights protections.

Tenaganita and CARAM Asia reiterate its call to all governments that:

- Governments must consider migrant's enormous contributions in the development of the country and ensure that basic human rights are respected for all people at all times;
- to urgently take steps to ratify ILO Convention 143 concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers and the ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers;
- That the private recruiting industry is regulated and ethical practices followed in the interest of migrant workers;
- That domestic workers are given a standard and binding contract and contract substitution is stopped immediately;
- That labour trafficking and slavery is stopped immediately by host countries and the racketeers are brought to justice;
- That host countries take responsibility of migrant workers redress and develop a migrant friendly mechanisms and bring to justice their employers.

This statement is issued by: **Tenaganita and CARAM Asia**