

Beirut, 01/12/2015

Major General Abbas Ibrahim

General Security

Beirut, Lebanon

Subject: Allow Abused Migrant Domestic Workers to Change Employers and Grant them Grace Period

Dear Major General Abbas Ibrahim

We are writing this letter to you because we, as domestic workers, feel trapped, by the inhumane Kafala system and its mandatory condition of obtaining a notarized release paper from the current employer to another employer in case of a change of employers.

Because of this system, we can't leave or change our employer even if we are being abused. An abused worker does not have many options, except to stay in the working relationship and suffer abuse silently, or to escape and risk being arrested and deported. The third option is to file a complaint, while being aware of the institutional bias and social prejudice against migrant domestic workers. And we also know that in most cases, workers end up being deported without getting their rights, even though they wish to stay in Lebanon and work for another employer. We are here to work in order to support our families, but very often, it is up to the employers or "sponsors" to unilaterally decide to renew the contract of the worker, "release" her, or send her back home.

To illustrate, A Nepali friend of ours, Nikisa, was not able to claim her rights after being abused for years. Her employer used to beat her and to withhold her salary, until she had to run away where we found her on the street and decided to help her. In another case, 18 year old Qamar was in debt by the time she paid brokers, recruitment and travel expenses to come and work in Lebanon. She planned to work to repay her debt, but her employer never paid her salary. He beat her, locked her in the house, and kept her hungry. Qamar sought help but did not fully achieve justice because her employer stubbornly refused to sign her release papers to work in another place in Lebanon. Instead, she ended up being deported by the authorities.

Major General Ibrahim, we are paying a very high price due to the sponsorship system, and in some cases we are paying with our lives. We are therefore asking you to take the necessary actions to allow workers like Nikisa and Qamar, who are suffering from physical and sexual

abuse, and/or withholding payment of their salary, and/or deception in the nature of work (which are three grounds for termination of employment by workers, as stipulated in the standard employment contract) to stay for a grace period in Lebanon and to find another employer.

We convey to you our sincere regards and will be looking forward to hearing your response.

Rahel Zegeye

Ikhlas Dauaa

Laxmi Chefri

Sarada Pokhrei

Major General Ibrahim Basbous,

Beirut, 01/12/2015

Director General of Internal Security Forces,

Beirut, Lebanon

Subject: Request for serious investigations in cases of Migrant Domestic Workers' Deaths

Dear Major General Ibrahim Basbous,

We are writing this letter to you on behalf of the many domestic migrant workers who have been dying on a regular basis in Lebanon for many years. Airports in all sending countries have received numerous coffins with bodies of dead domestic workers who were in Lebanon. Across all communities of migrant domestic workers, we regularly hear that someone died either because she fell from the balcony or she was found hanging in her employer's house. The Togolese community alone, which is one of the smallest and most recent community of domestic workers, has witnessed lately 4 cases of suicide.

General Basbous, we came here to work not to die. We didn't come here to commit suicide either. Are we sure that all these cases are really suicide? In almost all cases of death, forensic medical reports and police investigations are conducted hastily and they quickly conclude that the worker committed suicide. But we never find the causes behind the death! What if she was killed? One of our friends in the Nepalese community died hanging herself on the balcony, but one could easily notice that there is no appropriate hook/place where she could hang herself there. The official story is that she used a small wire to hang herself. But we know that her weight was 80kgs and such a wire would break if she really used it.

And even if she was not physically pushed to her death, even if she really committed suicide, what reasons prompted her to take her own life? We often hear employers say that the worker was crazy and killed herself. But are all these workers crazy? If they are, why wouldn't the majority of the cases commit suicide in the first period after they arrive, not after years when they have almost finished their contract? In our experience of being domestic workers, the first 6 months are the hardest, because we suffer from homesickness, exhaustion from hard work, and frustration because of the language barrier and being in a strange environment. But so

many of the cases of alleged suicide are happening after 4-6 years, when the workers are about to go back to their country.

Could these deaths be caused by the inhumane working and living conditions of domestic workers in Lebanon? Studies have shown that, under the Kafala system, 56% work for more than 12 hours a day, 21% of workers are victims of physical and sexual violence, and more than 80% of employers don't allow the domestic worker to leave the house on her day off. The Kafala system also does not allow the worker to break the contract no matter how many years she has been in Lebanon, and even if she is suffering exploitation and abuse. We believe that such inhumane treatment pushes the worker to kill herself.

We are writing you today to demand serious investigations for every case of suicide among domestic workers, just as you would for any Lebanese person who has died. We would like the ISF to investigate using scientific procedures and by doing autopsies in order to determine the causes of death before the corpse is repatriated.

Suicide among migrant workers is a serious problem in Lebanon and we hope the ISF would take measures to respond to our request. It is the right of the family of the deceased to be given the reasons that led to their deaths. We just demand that our basic rights, which are human rights, are respected.

We thank you in advance and please accept our sincere regards,

Gentile Kaluga, Togolese Community Leader

Sujana Rana, Nepalese Community Leader and President of the Nepalese group of domestic workers "Nari"

Head of the Notary Public Council,
Ms. Raymonde Bachour

Beirut, 1/12/2015

Beirut, Lebanon

Subject: Translation of the Employment Contract of Migrant Domestic Workers

Dear Ms. Bachour,

As migrant domestic workers living and working in Lebanon, we are writing this letter to you concerning a very important and stressing matter for us.

From our personal experience, when we are in our home country, we sign an employment contract with our future employer in Lebanon in our native language. Then, when we reach Lebanon, we sign another contract which, in the absolute majority of cases, is different from the first contract in terms of salary and conditions of work. But we do not know the content of this second contract and we only find out what our salary is, and what the working conditions are like months later, after we have started working for the employer.

There are more than 200,000 domestic workers in Lebanon who have signed a contract in the notary public at least once during their stay in Lebanon. Most of these 200,000 workers have signed an agreement they do not understand, because it is written in Arabic, and because the notary public and the employer do not take the time to explain the content to them. "What am I signing? What is expected of me in my work? What are my duties and my rights? What will be my salary? Will I have insurance?" These are questions that pass through every workers' mind as she signs the two pages of the contract without being informed of its content.

Signing a document that we cannot read nor understand, and having no other choice but this uninformed consent, is a breach of our basic human rights. Simply, we need the employment contract that we sign with the employer at the notary public to be available in our own language, and to be explained to us.

Therefore, we're asking your institution to address this violation and take urgent measures to make the employment contracts available in the native languages of domestic workers.

Sincerely,

Niro Sabba
Sarce Gurung