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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

Gulf Countries Should Revise Domestic Workers Contract

Brussels, 2 July 2013 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has called on the members Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the coordination body for Gulf country governments, to revise a planned standard contract for domestic workers to bring it into line with ILO standards. The Council is believed to be on the verge of adopting the standard contract to be applied across the six Gulf countries.

All the Gulf countries supported the adoption of the new ILO Convention 189 on domestic workers two years ago; however, the proposed new contract falls well short of that convention and other key ILO standards. Some two million people are currently employed as domestic workers in the GCC countries, mostly coming from Asian countries. Accurate figures are not available due to poor record-keeping by governments and an unknown number of undocumented workers.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said, "The Gulf region has an appalling record on workers' rights, and migrant domestic workers suffer from some of the worst treatment of all. Most have virtually no rights, and are kept in slave-like conditions by their employers. The cycle of impoverishment, exploitation and sexual assault has to stop, and the only way to ensure that is to follow the standards set by the ILO."

While in Bahrain, domestic workers are now covered by labour legislation including freedom of association, in the other Gulf countries they are excluded from any protection. The GCC is portraying the new contract as a means to tackle the raft of problems faced by workers; however, the new contract falls well short of ILO standards on freedom of association and collective bargaining and provides no protection for workers against abuse, harassment and violence. Provisions on working hours, overtime, freedom of movement and other important issues are weak or altogether absent. No reference is made to social security or maternity protection.

"The Gulf countries are amongst the richest in the world, and have no excuse for failing to adhere to international labour standards. Millions of migrant workers travel to these countries to work for a good life for themselves and their families at home, only to find that the promise of a better future is not real. We call on the GCC to revise this standard contract to meet the standards of decency that domestic workers everywhere deserve," said Burrow.

The Gulf Cooperation Council includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

To read the letter to the GCC: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/saudi-arabia-standardised>

Review of Model Contract: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/saudi-arabia-review-of-model>

To read Equal Times opinion article by Marieke Koning: <http://www.equaltimes.org/opinion/new-labour-contract-fails-to-protect-domestic-workers-in-the-gulf>

ITUC webpage on domestic workers: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/domestic-workers>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 156 countries and territories and has 315 national affiliates.

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