

# Strengthening

the Capacity of and Social Protection for

# Domestic Workers

*International NGO Consultation on the ratification of the  
ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers*

**Geneva, Switzerland  
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Convened by Catholic-Inspired NGOs and Co-Organized By:

Association Catholique Internationale de Services pour la Jeunesse Feminine (ACISJF); Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance (BICE); Caritas Internationalis; Franciscans International; Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW); International Catholic Center of Geneva (CCIG); International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC); International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (CIJOC-ICYCY); Kolping International / German Commission for Justice and Peace; Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA); Mouvement Mondial des Travailleurs Chrétiens (MMTC); Mouvement International d'Apostolat des Milieux Sociaux Independents (MIAMSI)

## Table of Contents

A. Introduction—Dr. Hildegard Hagemann, Kolping International/German Commission for Justice and Peace.....	2
B. Executive Summary.....	3
C. Recommendations.....	7
D. Keynote Address—Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and International Organizations, Geneva.....	9
E. Panel 1—International Protection for Domestic Workers.....	11
Overview of the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.....	11
The UN Committee on Migrant Workers’ “General Comment” on Migrant Domestic Workers.....	12
F. Interactive Workshops on Organizing Domestic Workers .....	15
Workshop 1: Organizing local domestic workers.....	16
Workshop 2: Organizing migrant domestic workers.....	19
G. Panel 2—Challenges to the Ratification and Implementation of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers.....	22
H. Panel 3—Strategies for International and National-Level Advocacy.....	25
Global Campaign on Decent Work and Rights for Domestic Workers.....	25
Caritas Internationalis Campaign for Domestic Workers’ Rights.....	26
Continental and regional campaign strategies.....	27
I. Interactive Workshops on Advocacy Strategies.....	27
Workshop 1: Strategies for International-level advocacy.....	27
Workshop 2: Strategies for National-level advocacy.....	29
Annex	
I. List of participants.....	31
II. Programme.....	33
III. Press Release.....	36
IV. Important links .....	38
V. Contacts for this publication.....	39

## Introduction to the June 2011 NGO Convening

*Dr. Hildegard Hagemann,  
Kolping International/German Commission for Justice and Peace*

In June 2011, the *ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers* (ILO Convention) was adopted by a wide margin at the 100<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference in Geneva, opening it up to *ratification* by states. At the same time, linked directly to that process and led by the International Catholic Centre of Geneva, a group of Catholic-inspired NGOs and partners convened in anticipation of the advocacy necessary to encourage states to ratify the Convention. This conference, **“Strengthening the Capacity of and Social Protection for Domestic Workers,”** provided a platform for global participants to share organizing strategies in their regions, and identify strategies for national and international advocacy for the ratification of the ILO Convention and other pertinent international conventions.

This year’s convening was preceded by a June 2010 NGO conference on **‘The Rights of Domestic Workers: Chances and Challenges for International and National Advocacy Work and Networking,’**<sup>1</sup> organized to coincide with the introduction of the first draft of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers at the 99<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva that same month.

Since the introduction of that first draft of the ILO Convention, the domestic workers rights movement has gained considerable momentum. In December 2010, the United Nations Committee on Migrant Workers adopted a “General Comment” setting detailed standards and recommendations on the rights specifically of domestic workers who are migrants, as well as the members of their families<sup>2</sup>. That year also saw the inclusion of migrant domestic workers rights in the Civil Society Days statement of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) process.<sup>3</sup>

With the Convention still in its beginning stages, NGOs and Catholic-inspired organizations came together to keep the issue in the public eye and move the Convention towards ratification and implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> The report of the 2010 convening is available online at [http://www.ccg-iccg.org/travailleurs\\_domestiques.php](http://www.ccg-iccg.org/travailleurs_domestiques.php)

<sup>2</sup> The General Comment on Domestic Migrant Workers is available online at [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw\\_migrant\\_domestic\\_workers.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw_migrant_domestic_workers.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The closing statement of the Civil Society Days of the 2010 GFMD is available online at <http://www.gfmd.org/en/process/civil-society.html>.

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

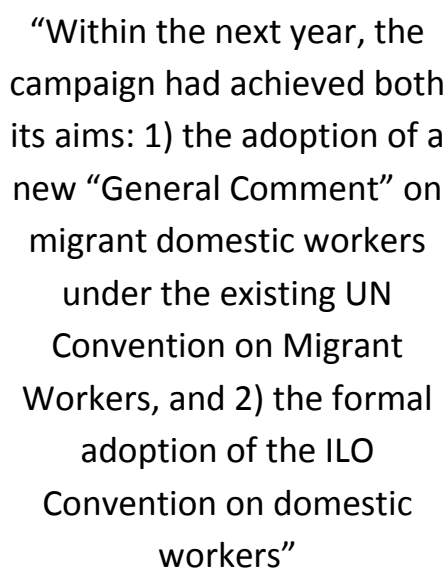
How do we define a landmark event? It has taken some 60 years, but in June 2011 the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a global convention setting forth the fundamental rights of domestic workers, and the obligation of governments worldwide to protect them.

Like certain other international treaties whose adoption grew out of the insistence and organizing of regular people in grass roots action (recent treaties against landmines and for the protection of people with disabilities for example), this new convention owes greatly to the direct engagement—the testimony and perseverance—of domestic workers everywhere.

### Domestic Workers Movement Gains Momentum

The domestic workers rights movement gained international attention in June 2010 when a first draft of the *ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers* was introduced at the International Labour Conference. The Convention set detailed labour standards for domestic workers, a group long excluded from most traditional labour protections, especially at national levels.

To increase public awareness and support of the draft Convention and to institutionalize broad international protection for domestic workers, a group of Catholic-Inspired NGOs and global partners met in Geneva to coordinate a “two-track” advocacy strategy. Within the next year, the campaign had achieved both its aims: 1) the adoption of a new “General Comment” on migrant domestic workers under the existing UN Convention on Migrant Workers<sup>4</sup>, and 2) the formal adoption of the ILO Convention on domestic workers at the International Labour Conference in June 2011<sup>5</sup>.



“Within the next year, the campaign had achieved both its aims: 1) the adoption of a new “General Comment” on migrant domestic workers under the existing UN Convention on Migrant Workers, and 2) the formal adoption of the ILO Convention on domestic workers”

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<sup>4</sup> The General Comment on Domestic Migrant Workers is available online at [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw\\_migrant\\_domestic\\_workers.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw_migrant_domestic_workers.htm)

<sup>5</sup> The ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers is available online at [http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/provisional-records/WCMS\\_157836/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/provisional-records/WCMS_157836/lang--en/index.htm)

On the eve of the adoption of the ILO Convention in June, the groups met again in Geneva in anticipation of the work ahead—a campaign for the *ratification* of the Convention by individual states and *implementation* of its standards.

The convening drew over 60 participants from church, non-government (NGOs) and labour organizations on six continents. The program was organized by several groups and led by the International Catholic Center of Geneva (CCIG).

Over the two-days of the conference, domestic workers, local and regional NGOs, faith-based organizations, and union representatives painted a comprehensive picture—directly “from the field”— of domestic work today, shared local organizing strategies, and developed recommendations for states and civil society organizations. They collectively covered a wide range of issues with breadth and depth summarized in this report and laid the foundation for joint-advocacy for a global movement for domestic workers’ rights.

### Domestic Work Today

Historically considered “women’s work,” domestic work is still largely performed within the informal sector, and socially and economically undervalued. In fact, in most countries, domestic work is *expressly excluded* from national labour and contract law. The adoption of the ILO Convention is a milestone officially recognizing domestic work as work and domestic workers as workers with labour rights.

The narrative from the participants and discussion at this year’s conference paints a global picture of domestic work in the world today. The sector is characterized by high vulnerability. Typically, the work is performed by poor women with few other employment options. The ILO estimates that over 80% of domestic workers are women and young girls. Most of the work is hidden from outside view, inside private homes. Indeed, most domestic workers live inside the homes in which they work, perpetually on-call, which places them at even higher risk of undetected exploitation and abuse. In the few states that have implemented laws requiring a day of rest per week for domestic workers, participants report that it is widely ignored in practice. Many domestic workers are actually prohibited from leaving the house at all.

An increasing number of domestic workers are *migrants* who go to relatively more affluent countries to support their own families back home. The journey itself is often expensive and risky, with recruitment agencies charging exorbitant rates, employers withholding passports, and falling prey to human traffickers an added risk. In

“Two years ago there seemed to be such a divide between domestic workers who were nationals and the migrants. Today there seems to be recognition that their problems are mostly the same.”

—William Gois, *Migrant Forum in Asia*

addition to social, racial, and religious discrimination, migrant domestic workers widely face various forms of legal discrimination. States often issue specific permits for migrant domestic workers that give them fewer rights than migrant workers who work in other sectors such as construction or agriculture. In Singapore for example, holders of a domestic work permit are expressly denied a path to residency and the right to marry. Migrant domestic workers have particular difficulty accessing protection and justice, whether rescue or remedy, including the police and courts for non-payment of wages, even for physical abuse and rape. In cases of abuse, recruitment agencies and the embassies of the migrants' countries often respond inadequately, and local community and faith-based organizations are regularly called upon to fill the protection gaps.

Shifting domestic work into a more regulated, formal labour context requires innovative strategies due to the distinct nature and locus of domestic work. Beyond being engaged primarily in private homes, domestic workers cannot be organized in the same way as most other sectors of labour because of the lack of an industry or group employment relationship. In the vast majority of cases, there is no one employer of a large number of domestic workers or employer representative with whom to negotiate. This is one reason that labour unions have been slow to extend membership to domestic workers, which is one of the most complex challenges the domestic workers movement faces. While unionization is not the only way to advance domestic workers' rights, it affords clear benefits—beginning with solidarity with other workers and offering access to union resources, as well as the right to vote in ILO processes that include only governments, employer associations, and labour unions.

### International Instruments, Local Protection

Once codified, i.e., in international treaties, international labour standards can take practical effect in two ways: 1) through monitoring processes which the treaties elaborate to examine state implementation, and 2) by providing institutional support for local advocacy for national legislation.

“The key is to use international standards to push national and local standards and frameworks.”  
—*Cecilia Jimenez, Geneva Forum for Philippine Concerns in Switzerland*

Of course, the basic rights of domestic workers are already addressed by a slew of international human rights conventions that apply broadly to them as human beings. A number of additional rights and protections that are important to domestic workers are further elaborated in more specialized international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Within the period of December 2010 to June 2011, two new instruments were adopted to protect domestic workers as a distinct category of workers, in some cases simply reiterating their existing rights and in others elaborating further rights and needs for protection that are specific to them as domestic workers: the ILO Convention on all domestic workers, and the UN Migrant Workers Convention's "General Comment" on domestic workers who are migrants. The latter was adopted and made part of UN jurisprudence in 2010 after rigorous lobbying by many of the organizers of this conference. Addressing the situation of the large subset of domestic workers worldwide who are migrants, the General Comment sets even more detailed standards and recommendations regarding the rights of migrant domestic workers—and further, the members of their families, than the new ILO Convention, offering considerable and complementary value.

Perhaps most impressive is the way in which local movements have already been using these international instruments to advocate for national, enforceable legislation for the rights and protection of domestic workers. One of the presenters at this conference, Ms. Ip Fish, regional coordinator of the International Domestic Workers Network, noted the tremendous difference it makes to have the ILO Convention in hand when conducting advocacy visits to elected officials. The status of domestic workers as real labourers worthy of protection is still challenged in many countries, and international institutional recognition of the work is a big step towards practical change.

Indeed, participants pointed to a growing number of successes in recent efforts to broaden legal protection of domestic workers in national and local legislation. It was noted, for example, that just between the ILO's June 2010 decision to draft the Convention and its adoption in June 2011, 11 countries had adopted or changed legislation to offer greater protection to domestic workers—often in ways even more positive than ultimately adopted in the Convention.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendations for States:**

1. States should **ratify** the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and the UN Migrant Workers Convention, transpose their standards into national law, and ensure their proper implementation.
2. States should **monitor recruitment agencies** by:
  - prohibiting exorbitant fees to prevent debt bondage and exploitation
  - creating an accreditation process that requires agencies to meet minimum protection and human rights standards
  - prosecuting and suspending recruitment agencies with a history of abuse
3. States should **ensure equal treatment under the law** for all domestic workers and migrant domestic workers by:
  - including all domestic workers under labour law and contract law
  - extending labour regulations such as minimum wage to domestic workers
  - ensuring equal access to justice systems for all domestic workers
4. States should guarantee all domestic workers the **right to form and join labour unions** and associations and to participate in legislative processes that concern them.
5. States should **improve the enforcement of existing laws**, particularly those with widespread implementation problems, such as the right to have a day of rest per week, through methods such as public sensitization campaigns and enforced repercussions for those who violate the law.
6. States of origin must **protect their nationals working abroad** by:
  - ensuring and staffing sufficient and accessible consulates and embassies in countries and areas where large numbers of nationals work
  - training consulates and embassies to provide services and protection for domestic workers and to respond effectively to cases of abuse and trafficking
  - providing shelters and support for abused and trafficked domestic workers
  - advocating for equal rights for their migrant domestic workers in countries where they work
7. States should **bring domestic workers into social security schemes** available to other workers.



8. States of origin and employment should cooperate to **better organize labour matching** for domestic workers through transparent and protection-sensitive bilateral agreements.

**Recommendations for Other Relevant Actors:**

1. **Trade unions** should:
  - a. extend membership rights to all domestic workers and eliminate any discrimination against domestic workers who are migrants
  - b. develop innovative ways to advance labour rights in the domestic work sector
  
2. **Recruitment agencies** should:
  - a. cap reasonable recruitment fees to avoid conditions of debt bondage
  - b. fully inform domestic workers of their rights and working conditions before departure by providing transparent and understandable contracts
  - c. provide sufficient language and skills training for domestic workers
  - d. swiftly respond to cases of abuse without punishing the employee
  
3. **NGOs and community organizations** should:
  - a. empower domestic workers to speak for themselves rather than speak on their behalf
  - b. advocate for policy reforms and implementation at the local, national, and international level for equal protection of migrant domestic workers
  - c. encourage state ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions that affect domestic workers and the migrants among them
  - d. act as a watch-dog for recruitment agencies by developing working relationships and monitoring their practices
  - e. sensitize the public and the media to humanize domestic work
  
4. **Faith-based organizations** should:
  - a. sensitize their congregations and followers to humanize domestic work and to work to improve the treatment of domestic workers
  - b. reach out directly to domestic workers to provide them with support and advocacy

## Keynote Address

*Archbishop Silvano Tomasi,  
Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and  
International Organizations, Geneva*


Archbishop Tomasi affirmed the role of the Catholic Church and its partners in championing domestic workers' rights. Domestic workers are amongst the most vulnerable due to the nature of their work. It is often performed by poor young women with few alternative employment opportunities. The work is "hidden away" in private homes, increasing the likelihood of undetected abuse and exploitation. Domestic workers are also often migrants at risk of discrimination, trafficking, and various forms of exploitation along the way and in their destination country.

### The impact of mobility in a globalized world


Mobility has had a significant impact on social structures as globalization leaves certain communities behind economically. Poverty has forced many women to migrate to more affluent countries to work for other families as domestic workers, sending earnings to—but leaving—their own families behind. That is, much of the migration—and family separation—is compelled by a sense of necessity, not by choice. It is essential to look at the migration-remittances-development nexus with a commitment to human rights and the right to family unity.

Restoring dignity to domestic workers requires a shift in perspective about domestic work itself. Historically performed by women, domestic work has been undervalued in most societies. It is important to value the contributions women make by performing domestic work, whether as mothers and family members or paid employees. Communities must also become more accepting of "the other." As domestic work is increasingly being performed by migrants, social integration and acceptance must be a priority in the domestic workers movement.

The Church fully supports the ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and the step it takes towards better protection for domestic workers. But we



*"Poverty has forced many women to migrate to more affluent countries to work for other families as domestic workers, sending earnings to—but leaving—their own families behind." –Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva*



must remember that the work is not complete after state ratification of the convention. After ratification, civil society in particular must ensure that the Convention's standards are [a] converted into national law [b] widely implemented, and [c] actively monitored. Catholic-inspired NGOs and their partners must maintain strong joint advocacy at all levels to uphold the dignity and human rights of domestic workers.

## Panel 1—International Protection for Domestic Workers

*Overview of the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers*  
*Ip Fish, Regional Coordinator for the Domestic Workers Campaign in Asia,  
International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)*

Ms. Fish emphasized: [1] the desire and right of domestic workers to represent themselves; [2] the underlying social values that make organizing for domestic workers rights particularly challenging, and [3] the importance of international legal frameworks such as the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers in supporting real, local, advocacy movements.

1. Ip stressed that domestic workers want to represent themselves, but also want to network with labour unions and other allies. However, many labour unions will not accept domestic workers because they do not recognize them as legitimate workers. Many trade unions also only work with employees with industrial relationships. Nonetheless, domestic workers have found other ways to organize, form unions, associations and networks. In her experience in Hong Kong, in addition to organizing into associations and labour unions, domestic workers also effectively organize informally. For example, they share experiences and exchange tips on issues like wage-negotiation when they see each other at the market.
2. Another obstacle is the social perception of domestic work as “women’s work” without monetary value. An essential step to recognising domestic workers rights is to first recognise them as real *workers* entitled to the same rights as workers in other sectors, such as protection under labour law and the right to a minimum wage. Their recognition as workers will allow them to claim workers’ rights.
3. Ip also emphasized that when knocking on the doors of elected officials—most of whom are men and most of whom challenge the legitimacy of domestic work as work—it makes all the difference to be able to refer to and call upon the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers. It shows elected officials that domestic

“When we try to talk to elected officials, many of them challenge the legitimacy of domestic work as work. It makes a big difference to be able to show them the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers.”  
—Ip Fish, *International Domestic Workers Network*

work is real work that the international community recognizes and values.

Ip took the participants through the history of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and expressed how touched and empowered domestic workers were to have the support of a legitimate international institution. They felt valued by the international community that suddenly began to look at their situations and rights. They are pleased to have an ILO Convention on Domestic Workers despite hoping for more in the Convention, such as the inclusion of *au pairs*, who also perform domestic work.

While passage of the statutory minimum wage law was a victory for many workers in Hong Kong, it still excludes live-in domestic workers. Fish observed that it would take even longer for domestic workers to gain the protections workers in other sectors have gained as they are “the workers of workers”. Progress varies in other parts of the world. As had been the case earlier in the state of New York, in June, a domestic workers’ bill of rights was passed in California, and similar laws protecting domestic workers have been passed in Brazil, Finland, and the United Arab Emirates.

After adoption, the next step is the road to state-by-state ratification. The ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers would give domestic workers further protection and guarantee them the right to organize and form labour unions. Fish ended her presentation by echoing the statement of the IDWN chairperson, Myrtle Witbooi: “Women will not be free until domestic workers are free.”

*The UN Committee on Migrant Workers’ “General Comment” on Migrant Domestic Workers*

*Mr. John K. Bingham, Head of Policy, International Catholic Migration Commission, President of the International NGO Platform on the Migrant Workers Convention (IPMWC)*

John opened with reminders of the realities of mistreatment many domestic workers face. He went on to speak on the “General Comment” on Migrant Domestic Workers recently adopted under the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*.

The General Comment is a piece of new jurisprudence—formal guidelines under the UN Convention on Migrant Workers—that ICMC, the NGO Platform, and Caritas Internationalis worked with the UN Committee on Migrant Workers to create to elaborate detailed standards on the rights of migrant domestic workers under an existing international convention.

Accordingly, it is possible to pursue strategies for *both* the General Comment and the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers to protect migrant domestic workers, regardless of immigration status.

John explained [1] where the General Comment came from; [2] who it covers; [3] its major provisions, and [4] what its legal status or effect really is.

1. Where the General Comment came from:
  - a. Following a *Day of General Discussion* that the UN Committee on Migrant Workers (“the Committee”) held in 2009 with participation from NGOs, faith-based and labour groups from about 30 countries as well as states and international organizations. The General Comment was drafted by Caritas, ICMC and the NGO Platform together with Committee members and the Office of the UN High Commissioner, and then adopted by the Committee in December 2010.
2. Who the General Comment covers:
  - a. Naturally sharing the scope of the Migrant Workers Convention itself, the General Comment covers documented and undocumented migrants, temporary and permanent workers, and *also* their family members. Its scope ranges from the moment a worker is considering migrating for work to their return home—i.e., all phases of work-related migration. Moreover, state parties have obligations to protect their nationals *even in other countries where they work*.
3. Major provisions of the General Comment:
  - a. The twelve-page Comment is organized in two principal sections, covering pre-departure and post-arrival practices, each with multiple recommendations.
  - b. The Comment makes 38 specific recommendations under 14 headings: pre-departure awareness-raising and training, cooperation among states, recruitment agencies, conditions of work, right to organize for collective bargaining and protection, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, access to justice and remedies, access to regular migration status, respect for family unity, special protections for children, gender perspective, embassies and consulates, participation of migrant domestic workers and civil society, and monitoring and reporting.
4. What is its real legal status or effect:
  - a. The General Comment provides formal guidelines under an existing Convention—already ratified by 45 countries. While the Comment itself is technically non-binding, civil society actors, the Committee and other UN treaty-monitoring bodies can follow-up with states parties and ask about their implementation.

- b. Even for non-state parties, like any Convention that a fair number of *other* States have ratified, the formal comments or recommendations adopted by a UN Committee under a Convention have considerable authority as a global standard, i.e., a recognized reference.

John closed by recommending the next steps for both the UN Convention on Migrant Workers and the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers.

1. First, to raise **awareness** that the General Comment and ILO Convention now exist;
2. To improve **implementation** of the General Comment—not only under the UN Migrant Workers Convention but also under the new ILO Convention;
3. To actively **monitor** compliance!
  - For these three: we need training of NGOs, labour groups, and relevant actors.
4. And of course, to increase **ratification** of both Conventions.

## Interactive Workshops: Organizing local and migrant domestic workers

Two interactive workshops provided opportunities for participants to share organizing strategies for two distinct groups of domestic workers; [1] local domestic workers, and [2] migrant domestic workers.

The groups shared similar concerns, such as the need for:

- more legal protection from abuse and exploitation
- improved implementation of existing laws
- increased respect for the domestic work sector socially and economically
- increased collaboration with organizations and individuals with a similar vision
- creative strategies for engaging domestic workers who often have little free time outside of work

Participants also noted that unique approaches are required based on situational factors such as:

- the additional legal challenges faced by migrant domestic workers—legal discrimination, exorbitant fees charged by recruitment agencies, and increased risk of trafficking and smuggling
- the varying levels of education, e.g., migrant domestic workers tend to have a higher level of education compared to domestic workers who migrate internally from rural to urban areas
- the pronounced racism and social discrimination against migrant domestic workers who often look different, practice different religions, and are blamed for the economic problems and unemployment in the destination country

Several universally important themes emerged in the plenary group discussion. The complex relationship between domestic workers and labour unions caught the attention of most participants. It is difficult to organize domestic workers into unions given the informal and hidden nature of the work, the lack of an “industry” and hence employer representative, and the resistance of many labour unions to including domestic workers as members. Though it is a challenge, it is necessary to move towards a union relationship for domestic workers because among other things, it is essential at the international level for official participation and voting rights in the ILO’s “tripartite” process, which includes governments, employers, and workers in the form of unions only.

The workshop group also dedicated a significant amount of energy to defining what genuine empowerment looks like. Too often, NGOs and community organizations speak on behalf of domestic workers rather than facilitating platforms from which



domestic workers can speak for themselves. Sufficient capacity-building however can be key to equipping domestic workers to speak for themselves, such as education on local political processes, but such empowerment must be coupled with the goal of letting domestic workers speak for themselves.

## Workshop 1: Organizing **local** domestic workers

*This workshop featured four panellists from India, Paraguay, Senegal, and Switzerland who work at the national level to organize, train, and support domestic workers.*

**Sr. Sally Michael** is the Coordinator of Migrant Forum in India and the National Movement of Domestic Workers, India. The National Movement conducts various workshops for domestic workers. They began by going door to door to reach domestic workers, and moved on to organize at the neighbourhood level. They hope to replicate the successful and well-attended program at the national level. The program addresses health care, sexual abuse, withheld wages, and raises awareness of rights and resources. Additionally, there have been national campaigns to recognize January 2<sup>nd</sup> as a Domestic Workers Day. All these efforts have successfully brought the government's attention to the situation of domestic workers.

“Even where we had a law, such as minimum wages, no one knew it, so we had to publicize it ourselves—even to the government.”

—*Sr. Sally Michael, Migrant Forum in India*

**María Liz Almada** works with Young Christian Workers in Paraguay, a member of the International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (YCW). The organization works on youth issues, democratization, and community organizing. Many young girls come from rural areas in Paraguay to urban areas to work as domestic workers and are at high risk for exploitation. YCW Paraguay has a hostel and recreation center where they organize various workshops. This center serves as a meeting point for domestic workers when they finish their work. YCW collaborates with partner organizations on the most pressing issues facing young domestic workers in Paraguay, the most common one being poor sanitation and living conditions for domestic workers, who live in separate quarters from their employers. The organization also commonly deals with insurance laws affecting domestic workers, late salary payments, and physical and verbal abuse.

**Celestine Diouf** is the Coordinator of the Domestic Workers Project at Young Christian Workers, Senegal, a member of the International Coordination of Young

Christian Workers (YCW). YCW Senegal attaches great importance to establishing rapport with domestic workers and developing trust. They conduct visits to make personal contact with domestic workers and better understand their specific working conditions. YCW Senegal also builds relationships with employers. With partnering community organizations, they provide courses in literacy, cooking and sewing, child care, and house work. Domestic workers began to organize in Senegal in 1995, followed by a national meeting in 2002. The advocacy movement has gained the attention of unions and the Ministry of Labour.

**Cecilia Jimenez** is the Chair of the Geneva Forum for Philippine Concerns in Switzerland. As an international human rights lawyer, Cecilia provides legal advice to domestic workers from the Philippines who work in Geneva and three other neighbouring “cantons” (counties). In Switzerland, almost none of the domestic workers are local Swiss citizens; they are almost all migrants. Many work in diplomatic households where protection against human rights abuses can be especially problematic because of their employers’ diplomatic immunity. Furthermore, laws concerning domestic workers vary by canton. The Geneva Forum provides domestic workers with necessary legal support, financial management training, and French courses to better integrate with their host society. In Geneva, the Church also provides support to domestic workers and a platform from which they can network with one another and with other organizations.

### **Institutional Protections at the National Level**

In all four countries in which the panellists work—India, Paraguay, Senegal and Switzerland—some sort of law exists to protect domestic workers. The problems lie in their implementation, particularly in these areas:

- the right to have a day of rest and time off
- the right to receive timely payment
- the right to rest in case of illness
- the right to retirement and social security

In India, there is no national minimum wage. The country is divided into 33 states with different laws, and there have been efforts to begin negotiations on a nationwide minimum wage.

In Paraguay, the government has ratified some laws to protect the 290,000 domestic workers in the country. It is a step forward, but the laws are not always well-implemented. For example, the law says that domestic workers are entitled to access to a social pension, but this is often not the case because employers do not accept the law.

In Senegal, there have been several ministerial decisions for the social protection of domestic workers, but again, they are poorly implemented. Employers challenge minimum wage and benefits for domestic workers by arguing that households cannot afford the amount proposed by the government.

**Major themes from the plenary discussion:**

- *How can we lift the social status of domestic workers?*
  - Many girls are ashamed to say that they perform domestic work because in some communities, certain ethnic groups are destined to do domestic work. It is important to frame domestic work as dignified work, and of course advocate for the respectable working conditions that would make it work with dignity.
  - Some progress has been made in increasing the social value of the work, such as the use of the term "domestic worker" to qualify it as a profession.
- *How can we better educate those who move from rural to urban areas on how to minimize the risk of exploitation?*
  - YCW Senegal makes visits to villages to explain the potential dangers of the journey and work and to ask parents to support their daughters' education so they don't have to work at such a young age.
  - However, many young women dream of the opportunities they can find in the big city and do not realize those dreams are often unrealistic. As internal migration cannot be avoided entirely, YCW makes contact with newcomers as soon as they arrive to help them get fair jobs and housing and avoid having to live in the house in which they work, if possible.
- *How is the ILO Convention perceived at the national level?*
  - The Convention is not widely known at the national level and more advocacy work is needed for the campaign for ratification.
- *What are the existing networks for the ratification of the convention?*
  - In India, the campaigns that began in 2010 have successfully raised awareness and gained supporters among members of Parliament and civil society.
  - In Paraguay, YCW works with two other organizations on strategic advocacy and hopes to continue to involve more civil society actors in the domestic workers rights movement.
  - In Senegal, YCW works with religious networks such as Caritas, church congregations, UNICEF, and the African Center for Human Rights.

## Workshop 2: Organizing migrant domestic workers

*This workshop looked at the distinct challenges facing migrant domestic workers, beginning with speakers who presented experiences from their regions.*

**Father George Sigmoney** of Caritas Sri Lanka gave testimony on the situation of the 1.5 million Sri Lankans working in the Middle East. Sri Lankans are one of the most mistreated groups of migrant workers, as they face discrimination due to their dark skin colour, poverty, level of education, and their religion as Buddhists or Hindus working in Muslim countries. Many Sri Lankan workers face violent treatment in the Middle East, resulting in 350 dead bodies a year being sent home, and high rates of mental illness. Father George spoke of a domestic worker who had 23 nails in her body, and the subsequent discovery that the insertion of heated pins as punishment is not an unusual practice.

Discrimination against Sri-Lankan workers includes the payment of lower wages than given to migrant domestic worker counterparts who are lighter-skinned.

**Gilda Malaluan** of Humanitarian Organization for Migration and Economics (HOME) is a Filipina domestic worker who has been working in Singapore for 18 years. She still does not have permanent residency in Singapore because her domestic worker permit does not provide her with a pathway to citizenship or permanent residency. In Singapore, migrant domestic workers have no right to assembly or to organize. The enforcement is strict, with police often dispersing groups of Filipinos gathered together.

“I have lived in Singapore for 18 years and I am still not allowed permanent residency because of my domestic worker visa” –*Gilda Malaluan, Humanitarian Organization for Migration and Economics*

Despite such legal obstacles and the cultural resistance to respecting the “one day off per week” law for domestic workers, Gilda articulated the effectiveness of organizing through informal channels, such as during birthday parties and social activities.

**Raffaella Maioni** of Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratory Italiani (ACLI) spoke on the weaknesses of the social security system for domestic workers. Because domestic work is often conducted in the informal sector, employers do not pay into national

insurance for domestic workers. Sick leave and maternity leave are also often neglected.

There is a need for stronger labour market regulations and contracts, and broad cultural change, to give domestic workers access to social security and social welfare.

**Narbada Chhetri** of Adhikkar is a human rights activist from Nepal working in the United States. She shared the campaign victory in getting the states of California and New York to recognize domestic workers as social workers and the continuing campaign for a nationally approved Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights to set standards. In addition to legal advocacy, Narbada emphasized the importance of empowerment. For example, calling language classes "English for Empowerment" rather than "English as a Second Language," conducting "Know Your Rights" workshops, and building the confidence of domestic workers to speak up.

#### **Major themes from the plenary discussion:**

- *Institutional and cultural discrimination against migrant domestic workers is prevalent*
  - Father George and Gilda both attest to the reality that Sri Lankan workers are often paid less due to their skin colour and religion.
  - In Singapore, domestic workers do not have a path to permanent residency or citizenship, and are expelled if they become pregnant.
- *Things to consider when organizing migrant domestic workers*
  - If you must, you can organize through informal channels such as social activities.
  - NGOs must trust domestic workers with their own organizing strategies. For example, using SMS as a means of spreading the word.
  - NGOs must equally gain trust from domestic workers, who are often peddled many for-profit services such as remittance companies and recruitment agencies.
- *Recruitment agencies and skill-building courses need to be monitored*
  - NGOs should engage with recruitment agencies not only to work with them to improve conditions for workers, but also to serve as a watchdog should there be unethical or illegal practices.
  - The importance of skills-building courses before a job starts was reiterated throughout the discussion; for example, in Singapore, if a worker fails the language exam, he or she is immediately expelled.

- *Political presence and engagement is necessary*
  - There must be sufficient consulates that are competent and willing to act as safe-havens and political representation should a migrant domestic worker faces problems.
  - There must be better cooperation between sending and receiving countries, such as in monitoring recruitment agencies and developing bilateral labour agreements.
  
- *There must be local organizing and education about international legal frameworks*
  - It is important to train NGOs and courts and judges about the existence and relevance of international legal frameworks such as the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and the UN Convention on Migrant Workers so they can better utilize them at a local level.

## Panel 2—Challenges to the Ratification and Implementation of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers

*This panel examined the ongoing deliberations at the International Labour Conference (ILC) on the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and analyzed the potential challenges and opportunities for state ratification and implementation of the convention.*

**Barbro Budin** of the International Union of Food, Farm, and Hotel Workers (IUF) explained that while most European countries do not support a strong ILO Convention yet, the lobbying efforts are noticeable—especially with the presence of domestic workers at the ILC. In the ILC discussions, several states even made robust arguments in support of the Convention. It is important to maintain this pressure beyond the ILC. Globally, the movement for domestic workers has made gains with new protection legislation in Argentina, Kenya, and Zambia, and the US states of New York and California.

“Among the positive arguments for ratification: good working conditions are good for the country; they decrease poverty, increase wages and tax revenue, etc.”  
—Barbro Budin, IUF

Barbro made the following recommendations to effectively push the ratification movement forward:

- It may be helpful to start with states who already show a level of support for the ILO Convention and encourage those states first to ratify the Convention
- Unions and workers must take and maintain the initiative to encourage ratification, because advocacy rarely comes from governments or employers
- We must support the networks of domestic worker associations and trade unions engaging together in these areas because they are still very weak. The best advocates of the ratification of the ILO Convention will be domestic workers themselves.

Strengthening domestic worker organizations must be a priority so workers can speak for themselves instead of always having someone else speak for them. Many domestic workers do not know that they can unionize to negotiate better working conditions and salaries, which in turn contributes to the host country through taxes and economic stimulation. Barbro echoed Archbishop Tomasi’s thought that a great part of the challenge only begins after adoption and ratification: the ILO Convention must be converted into national law and actually implemented.

**John Gee** works with the Singaporean organization Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), which engages in advocacy, research, and direct service for migrant domestic workers. John spoke of the importance of policy conversion into national law and implementation, improving public opinion, and empowering domestic workers and respecting their autonomy.

- John re-iterated Barbro's emphasis on the need for civil society to maintain the pressure to ratify the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers, as governments rarely have the same sense of urgency.
- He also concurred with Archbishop Tomasi's observation that international frameworks must be converted into national legislation in order for there to be practical implementation.
- John noted nonetheless that there are national laws in place that have poor implementation due to lack of public support, for example the "day off per week" law in Singapore.

On public opinion, John noted that one of the fears of host countries is the permanent resettlement of migrant workers.

- Sensitizing the public to the rights of migrant workers is essential. John presented a public campaign poster that showed a migrant domestic worker with the text "She's not just your domestic worker, her name is Lita. She works for her family, as well as yours. Give her a day off." Public campaigns like these strive to remind employers of their shared values with their migrant domestic workers, of working to create a better life for their families.

Equally important is cultivating the talents of domestic workers.

- Building capabilities and skills will help domestic workers fight for their rights themselves. For example, even where domestic workers do not have a legal status, there are ways to have their voice heard without fear of being expatriated or being at the mercy of the employer. It is also important to find effective ways to communicate with the workers, such as through contact with the media, and websites.

**Patrick Taran** is a member of the International Steering Committee of the Global Campaign on the Ratification of the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. The Committee consists of civil society and international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), who work together to promote the ratification of the UN Migrant Workers Convention.

Patrick has over 35 years of experience in migrant labour and expressed that it could be a positive sign that states are engaging in the amendment process at all, as it may mean ratification is not out of the question for them. He touched on the potential benefits of simultaneously campaigning for the ratification of the ILO Convention and



the UN Convention on Migrant Workers. There are over 80 labour and human rights conventions, most of them already ratified by a large number of states. Now, it is of the utmost importance that migrant-related human rights conventions are promoted and implemented as it is a global issue that will increasingly affect more people.

## Panel 3—Strategies for International and National-Level Advocacy

*This panel and two working groups focused on developing a joint strategy towards the ratification and implementation of the ILO Convention and the application of the Committee on Migrant Workers' General Comment. The panelists shared their respective experiences on ratification campaigns and lessons learned.*

### **William Gois, Migrant Forum in Asia**

*Global Campaign on Decent Work and Rights for Domestic Workers*

William cautioned against building a global campaign with the 'flavour of the month' approach—with high energy at the beginning only to fade with time. We must maintain the energy and ensure that the movement for domestic workers' rights continues to be a public priority. He raised four questions for consideration.

[1] What does it mean for those of us who are engaged in the campaign?

For the first time, we are here dealing directly with formal labour standards and protection in the informal economy, and we are not totally sure how to organize outside of an industry. The informal economy lacks the structures we are used to, which means it requires us to think creatively and develop new strategies. Unions also have to grapple with this challenge and find solutions. This is a new moment in our history.

[2] What does this say about the domestic workers struggle?

Domestic workers have been marginalized for many years, but have gained much more visibility because of the testimony and horrific experiences reported particularly of *migrant* domestic workers. Today's global media has picked up on this and awareness has increased as a result of the interconnectedness of today's world. Many of the debates in the ILC sessions were focused on the issues related to migrant domestic workers, indicating that the previous artificial divide between local and migrant domestic workers seems to be breaking down.

[3] What does this mean about women's struggle?

A large majority of domestic workers are women, and their vulnerabilities are quite gender specific. Accordingly, we must reflect on the alliances we need to make and maintain with women's groups in order to advance these rights and protections.

[4] What is the role of faith-based institutions?

Churches tend to be significant employers of domestic workers themselves. We must consider the broader dimensions and ask how the organizations like the church

stretch into the informal economy and how to better manage that. What does this mean for the world of work?

On the ‘flavour of the month’ phenomenon, and the launch of a Global Call to Action; the first ILC debates, as the idea and first draft of the ILO Convention were being discussed and prepared, were dynamic and many NGOs and community groups were motivated to take action by coming together and forming a “Global Call to Action.” The campaign would be driven by networks that would work together and sustain common action within our own networks. At the beginning, the thinking around the network was largely driven by a few, and strategies did not go much deeper than the sharing of information.

To launch an international campaign, you need to find effective ways to communicate, and the energy to do the work regionally and nationally while *also* keeping the international momentum. This takes a lot of effort, but this is a good opportunity to consolidate our efforts. For a solid campaign, it must move beyond posters and booklets and towards efforts that have transformative effects on the ground.

“The Steering Committee worked to create a campaign to drive the networks, and while networks do their own thing, there are also things that need to be done in common to add that global thrust.” –*William Gois, Migrant Forum in Asia*

### **Karin Keil, Caritas Internationalis**

#### *Caritas Internationalis Campaign for Domestic Workers’ Rights*

Karin shared insight from the campaigns Caritas has been engaged in on the domestic worker issue. Caritas recently launched the *One Human Family, Zero Poverty* campaign. This program is coordinated regionally to promote best practices in labour, migration, and counter-trafficking.

Analyses of the causes of poverty were carried out in order to inform policy, advocacy, and communication strategies. The campaign consisted of a message and an advocacy strategy. In April 2009, supported by the NGO Platform in Geneva, Caritas organized a side event to guide the UN Committee on Migrant Workers in their subsequent Day of General Discussion on Migrant Domestic Workers. This active involvement allowed Caritas, along with other NGOs such as ICMC and MFA, to help draft and encourage the Committee to adopt its General Comment on Migrant Domestic Workers.

In 2010, Caritas rolled out a campaign to raise awareness of the ILC process and build support for the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers. Caritas is currently working on mainstreaming the issue into all other Caritas programs. The campaign stresses that

there are different needs for men and women that church and other organizations must address locally, regionally, and internationally. Of course, the campaign advocates for state ratification and implementation of the ILO Convention as the next steps.

**Anamaria Puscau, International Coordination of Young Christian Workers**  
Continental and regional campaign strategies

Anamaria presented two regional campaigns ICYCW conducted in 2010 – one in the Indian Ocean Islands, and one in Europe. In the Indian Ocean Islands, young workers discussed work-related problems such as lack of access to information about training for the labour market. Through a series of meetings, they developed a continental action campaign that could be adapted to various country contexts. In Europe, a two-year campaign with the theme “dignity” was launched by young workers. A survey was prepared by one country and successfully implemented in seven countries. 2,000 young people were engaged in the campaign, thus increasing awareness of the issues regionally.

## Interactive Workshops on Advocacy Strategies

The second day of the conference, led by John K. Bingham of the International Catholic Migration Commission, consisted of interactive workshops and plenary discussion to brainstorm strategies for advocacy at the international and national levels. Participants elaborated the following strategic directions within joint and independent campaigns to promote ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers as well as other efforts for domestic workers’ rights.

## Strategies for International-level Advocacy

- 1. Build and reinforce bridges connecting local and national organizations to the international advocacy process:**
  - a. Upon return to various home states, organize briefing sessions for constituents on the ILC process, the ILO Convention, and NGO engagement.
    - i. contextualize the international advocacy process to national organizations
    - ii. explain the relevance and methods of engaging in international processes such as UN and ILO convention-monitoring mechanisms as one more tool that national organizations can use to achieve their goals
    - iii. explain the content of international instruments such as the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers in laymen’s terms, without jargon, and for specific audiences

- iv. produce and circulate different versions of the instruments in print and video for different actors, e.g., domestic workers, community organizers, unions, law-makers
    - b. Coordinate international advocacy strategies between local and national organizations
      - i. determine who has the capacity to do what and at which levels. For example, designate a coalition of NGOs with experience in international advocacy to collect information from more local NGOs to submit input within international processes
- 2. Promote and facilitate the engagement of domestic workers and migrant domestic workers in and with labour unions:**
  - a. Strategies for working with unions:
    - i. identify key players who have the power to influence decision-makers at the national, regional, and international levels
    - ii. strengthen relationships with unions and leaders already involved in the domestic workers campaign
    - iii. reach out to domestic worker associations in other regions who are already involved with unions to gain support and insight
  - b. Strategies for engaging migrant domestic workers:
    - i. jointly structure organizing efforts within *their* common spaces and develop relationships on equal levels; learn and respect critical limitations such as restrictions on freedom of communication or movement, be reasonable about the amount of free time they may have and can give, and use effective means of communication such as text messaging
    - ii. center and respect domestic workers meaningfully in the campaign, including with information-sharing, the development of advocacy strategy and decision-making, recognizing both the importance and the ability of migrant domestic workers to speak for themselves through existing or new platforms and coalitions
- 3. Connect the domestic workers movement with existing groups, movements, and processes**
  - a. Forge or strengthen the attachment of the domestic workers campaign to strong, existing movements such as the women's movement, migrants' rights movement, faith-based organizations, children's rights, and general human rights groups. Ask these movements directly to take up the domestic workers rights campaign as important for the protection of their *own* constituents, e.g., the women, migrants and children who are domestic workers
  - b. Make use of the other United Nations human rights mechanisms such as
    - i. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

- ii. The treaty body monitoring mechanisms (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Migrant Workers Convention, etc)
  - iii. UN special rapporteur on migration and special rapporteur on trafficking
- 4. Engage and expand the global campaign of actors encouraging national leaders of all states to ratify and implement the ILO Convention and domestic workers' rights**
- a. Map and synchronize the efforts of labour unions, faith-based groups, and NGOs at local, national and international levels to maximize the lobbying efforts and results for domestic workers rights
  - b. Educate elected officials on the content and relevance of international conventions and show them a strong constituency that supports the issues
  - c. Lobby national legislatures for protection for migrant domestic workers
  - d. Maintain contact with supportive elected officials and keep them updated on international progress on domestic workers rights
  - e. Produce advocacy documents aimed at elected officials and policy-makers on the content of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and the UN Migrant Workers Convention

## Strategies for National-level Advocacy

- 1. Actively engage all stakeholders, in particular:**
  - a. Domestic workers and existing coalitions of domestic workers in unions, associations, and informal groups
  - b. Employers of domestic workers
  - c. Local and national policy makers
  - d. Community organizations and faith-based groups that support domestic workers
  - e. Local NGOs with international presence
- 2. Assess situation-specific factors that require distinct advocacy strategies, such as:**
  - a. The political situation
    - i. Where does the country stand on the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers?
    - ii. How politically charged is the issue and who are the main political actors?
    - iii. How strong is the country's own national legislation on the topic?
    - iv. What other relevant international conventions and human rights treaties has the country already ratified?

- b. The present limitations to organizing
  - i. Are domestic workers currently allowed to join associations and unions?
  - ii. Do migrant domestic workers have the same rights?
  - iii. How responsive are unions to letting domestic workers and migrants join?
  - iv. What are the risks to organizing and joining unions, e.g., for migrants?
- c. The migration status of the domestic workers
  - i. Do the domestic workers have regular or irregular migrant status?
  - ii. Are they migrants from other countries that need help registering at their consulates and learning about their legal rights in the destination country?
  - iii. Are they “internal” migrants, e.g., from rural areas, who may have special vulnerabilities and needs?

### **3. Develop public support for the migrant domestic workers rights campaign**

- a. Launch campaigns in communities to raise the social appreciation of domestic work
- b. Make use of media outlets such as television, radio, and blogs
- c. Network with faith-based organizations to sensitize members and congregations on domestic workers’ rights

### **4. Improve the implementation of existing rights**

- a. Advocate for the conversion of existing international standards into national law
- b. Follow-up on the implementation of existing national and international standards
- c. Identify and mobilize influential leaders within local and national government (including officials responsible for labour, justice, commerce and foreign affairs) and civil society
- d. Develop and mobilize voting bases, keeping in mind that elected officials are motivated by re-election

## Annex

### I. List of Participants

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*Strengthening the Capacity of and Social Protection for Domestic Workers*  
*International NGO Consultation ▪ June 3-4, 2011 ▪ Geneva, Switzerland*

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## II. Programme

### **Friday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011**

Moderator and Facilitator: Dr. Hildegard Hagemann, Kolping international/German Commission for Justice and Peace

#### 09.30 Introduction, Dr. Hildegard Hagemann

Kolping international/German Commission for Justice and Peace

#### Keynote Address, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi

Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and International Organizations, Geneva

#### 10.00 Panel 1—International Protection for Domestic Workers

*Overview of the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers*

Ip Fish

Regional Coordinator for Domestic Workers Campaign (Asia)

International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)

*General Comment on Migrant Domestic Workers by the UN Committee on Migrant Workers*

John K. Bingham

Head of Policy

International Catholic Migration Commission

President of the International NGO Platform on the Migrant Workers

Convention (IPMWC)

#### 10.30 Plenary Discussion

#### 11.15 Interactive Workshops on Organizing Domestic Workers

Workshop 1—Organising Local Domestic Workers

Celestine Diouf

Coordinator of Domestic Workers Project

Young Christian Workers, Senegal

Sr. Sally Michael

Migrant Forum in Asia, India

Cecilia Jimenez

Chairperson

Geneva Forum for Philippine Concerns, Switzerland

Maria Liz Almada  
Young Christian Workers, Paraguay

Workshop 2—Organizing Migrant Domestic Workers  
Fr. George Sigamoney  
Director  
Caritas Sri Lanka

Gilda Malaluan  
Humanitarian Organisation for Migration and Economics (HOME), Singapore

Raffaella Maioni,  
Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratory Italiani (ACLI), Italy

Narbada Chhetri  
Adhikkar, New York, United States of America

14.00 Plenary Discussion

16.00 Panel 2—Challenges to the Ratification and Implementation of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers

Barbro Budin  
Representative of International Union of Food, Farm, and Hotel Workers

Patrick Taran  
International Steering Committee of the Global Campaign on the Ratification of the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families , Switzerland

John Gee  
Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), Singapore

17.00 Concluding Remarks

Jules Adanchédé Honkponou  
International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (ICYCW-CIJOC), Rome, Italy

**Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Moderator and Facilitator: Mr. John K. Bingham

Head of Policy, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Geneva, Switzerland.

09.00 Highlights from Day 1, Dr. Hildegard Hagemann

09.30 Panel 3—Strategies for International and National-Level Advocacy

William Gois

Regional Coordinator

Migrant Forum in Asia, Philippines

Karin Keil

Caritas Internationalis, Austria/Italy

Anamaria Puscasu

International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (ICYCW-CIJOC), Rome, Italy

11.15 Interactive Workshops on Advocacy Strategies

Workshop 1: Strategies for international-level advocacy

Workshop 2: Strategies for national-level advocacy

14.00 Plenary discussion

15.00 Concluding Remarks

John K. Bingham



### III. Press Release

#### **Catholic Groups and Partners Call for Ratification of ILO Convention on Domestic Workers**

Geneva, 21 June 2011—“After adoption, ratification!” was the call of over 70 NGOs and labour groups from 5 continents, including domestic workers themselves, at a conference hosted by the International Catholic Centre of Geneva on June 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

Organized by a network of Catholic-inspired NGOs and their partners, the consultation was held in anticipation of the adoption of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers and the advocacy for ratification needed ahead. The Convention was adopted on June 17th at the conclusion of the ILO Conference, opening it up for ratification by state parties. In order for the standards to take full effect, state parties must ratify the Convention and commit to converting it into its national laws and ensuring its effective implementation.

Domestic work has long been excluded from traditional labour protections such as minimum wage and access to labour courts, leaving domestic workers without social protection. With 80% of all domestic workers worldwide being women, domestic work is often seen as “women’s work” undeserving of real wages, remarked Ip Fish of the International Domestic Workers Network based in Hong Kong. John Bingham of the International Catholic Migration Commission presented reports from the field of the mistreatment of domestic workers, such as being burned with a hot iron as punishment, and the common practice of not letting domestic workers have time off.

Jules Hounkponou of the International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (CIJOC) reflected that the world is at a defining moment for domestic workers rights, a “domestic worker spring,” given the international and regional attention to the issue. In addition to the recently adopted ILO Convention on Domestic Workers, the UN Committee on the Migrant Workers Convention published a “General Comment” last year providing legal jurisprudence specifically on the rights of migrant domestic workers. Finland, Brazil, and the states of New York, and California recently passed legislation that better protects domestic workers.

The conference focused on developing strategies to encourage ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers as well as the complexities of organizing for domestic workers rights. The field of domestic work itself poses a challenge to labour organizing as its employers do not constitute an “industry,” and labour unions struggle to recognize and accept domestic workers as members. Migrant domestic workers face distinct obstacles, from job discrimination in national laws to racial and social discrimination, and the lack of diplomatic support from their states of origin in

the face of some of the most harrowing cases of abuse in the Middle East, Asia, and elsewhere.

Led by Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and international organizations in Geneva, speakers and participants emphasized the essential sequence of achieving adoption, ratification, national legislation, actual implementation and monitoring of the new Convention; with the organizing and participation of domestic workers, women's organizations, the labour movement and the Church important at national as well as regional and international levels.

## IV. Important Links

### **Official Websites related to Domestic Workers and Migrant Workers**

100<sup>th</sup> Session of International Labor Conference: Report of the Committee on the Decent Work of Domestic Workers:

[http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS\\_157891/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_157891/lang--en/index.htm)

General Comment on Domestic Migrant Workers

[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw\\_migrant\\_domestic\\_workers.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw_migrant_domestic_workers.htm)

Report of the 2010 conference, The Rights of Domestic Workers: Chances and Challenges for International and National Advocacy Work and Networking

[http://www.ccig-iccg.org/travailleurs\\_domestiques.php](http://www.ccig-iccg.org/travailleurs_domestiques.php)

Text of the Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers

[http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/provisional-records/WCMS\\_157836/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/provisional-records/WCMS_157836/lang--en/index.htm)

United Nations Committee on Migrant Workers

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/>

### **Websites of Co-organizers and other partners**

Association Catholique Internationale de Services pour la Jeunesse (ACISJF)

[www.acisjf-int.org](http://www.acisjf-int.org)

Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance (BICE)

[www.bice.org](http://www.bice.org)

Caritas Internationalis

<http://www.caritas.org/>

Franciscans International

<http://www.franciscansinternational.org/>

German Commission for Justice and Peace

<http://www.justitia-et-pax.de/en/start/index.shtml>

Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women

[www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)

International Catholic Center of Geneva

<http://www.ccig-iccg.org>

International Coordination of Young Christian Workers (ICYCW)

[www.cijoc.org](http://www.cijoc.org)

International Catholic Migration Commission

<http://www.icmc.net>

International Domestic Workers Network

<http://www.domesticworkerrights.org/>

International Young Christian Workers (IYCW)

[www.joci.org](http://www.joci.org)

Kolping International

<http://www.kolping.net/en/international/index.html>

Migrant Forum in Asia

<http://www.mfasia.org/>

RESPECT Network Europe (Network Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe)

[www.respectnetworkeu.org](http://www.respectnetworkeu.org)

World Movement of Christian Workers

[www.mmtc-infor.org](http://www.mmtc-infor.org)

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