

WG on Domestic Workers' Issues

Convener's Report – 24.3.2011

As discussed in the last NAC meeting, the Bill on Protection of Women in the Workplace piloted by the WCD Ministry is now in the Parliamentary Standing Committee. The Bill as it stands excludes domestic workers and includes Clause 14 (you may recall this "chilling clause" from women's standpoint). Shri Oscar Fernandes, MP, Rajya Sabha, is the Chair. Written and oral representations are invited on the Bill. Farah has been arranging for the National Domestic Workers' Movement (NDWM) representatives to present their views before the Chairperson of this Committee. It should happen very soon.

2. After the last WG meeting, the NDWM representatives have been working on revising and refining the draft policy for domestic workers. Once they have the second revision, we will meet again as a group and move the policy forward, along with the task force set up by the Ministry of Labour (Shri Anil Swarup, Director-General, Labour Welfare and Joint Secretary is the Convener)
3. The Government of India has reviewed its position and will now support an ILO Convention for the Rights of Domestic Workers at the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2011. This is a welcome step. The Indian delegation comprising unions, employers and the government's representatives is expected to play a lead role at the ILO to protect, promote and ensure that domestic workers world-wide are accorded full rights as workers.
4. Simultaneously, a Bill drafted by the NDWM is being reviewed and revised by lawyers like Dr Kamala Sankaran. She gave very good ideas at the last WG. We hope to examine the revised Bill soon and also the version developed by the NCW (which we were unaware of and was obtained by Farah).
5. We are trying to bring about some level of convergence between the concerned ministries—Labour, WCD and Finance (for social security for the workers)—each is not really aware of what the other is suggesting for domestic workers. The Labour Ministry is the nodal ministry for the domestic workers and their rights, social security etc.
6. The Labour Ministry has proposed that domestic workers be covered under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), its flagship social security programme for unorganized workers. Apparently, this proposal has been under consideration for a while. We are trying to find out where it has reached in terms of approval.
7. Social security—RSBY, other insurance like life and accident, pension and maternity benefits, among others—must be extended to all informal workers, including domestic workers. At our last NAC meeting, Ritaji explained that the V.V. Giri Institute is preparing a paper on social security for all informal workers. We will get an update on facts and figures which we can then take forward.