

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
ITUC OnLine

Kuwait and Bahrain become first Gulf countries to forge an official trade union relationship with Nepal

Unions join forces to assist over 100,000 thousand migrant workers in Gulf

Brussels, 16 January 2012 (ITUC OnLine): Gulf states are relying on over 100,000 migrant workers from Asia to grow their economies.

As the economies of Kuwait and Bahrain thrive on migrant labour, Nepal's largest employer is the Gulf states, where families depend on making money overseas.

The rapid expansion of migrant labour has taken place without protection workers' rights. The new MOU agreed between the unions aims to improve conditions for migrant workers.

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, said many workers arrive with little more than a contract, leaving behind their family and too often their basic human rights.

Kuwait has 40,000 Nepalese workers. More than half of them are women domestic workers, while the majority of men work in the construction industry.

The international trade union movement has been at the forefront of supporting efforts to link up workers with union representatives.

Two Memorandum of Understandings have been agreed between the Nepalese trade union GEFONT and those in Kuwait (KTUF) and Bahrain (GFBTU).

"The MOU seals the solidarity between workers in both countries. Working together the unions will create better conditions for migrant workers," said Sharan Burrow.

In Kuwait, the MOU will tackle issues of worker intimidation and trade union rights among Nepali workers. The KTUF has committed to working with GEFONT to address issues associated with migration, such as problems faced by workers, through the establishment of a system to protect and improve workers' needs.

"We will respect the laws of Kuwait, but we need to better protect our workers abroad," said Ramesh Badal, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs of GEFONT.

Campaigns for legislative reform will also be pursued in both countries to abolish the restrictive sponsorship system for workers in Kuwait, and to improve recruitment agencies in Nepal through increased monitoring.

"Migrant workers pay huge sums to unscrupulous recruiters, sometimes leading to situations of debt bondage, whereas often fees have already been paid by Kuwaiti employers. In the absence of a solid legal framework and rigid monitoring, recruitment agencies and all sorts of middlemen get away with organised slave trading," said Abdulrahman Alghanim, General Secretary of the KTUF.

The two unions will also play a part in developing better orientation for workers in the two countries. The KTUF has already taken steps to produce brochures for new migrants to educate them on their rights.

The meeting was financially supported by the Dutch trade union FNV and the KTUF in Kuwait.

See the full text of the MOU signed between:

KTUF-GEFONT: English, Arabic: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/ktuf-gefont-memorandum.html>

GFBTU-GEFONT: English: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/gfbtu-gefont-memorandum.html>

Read the GEFONT statement http://www.gefont.org/activity_detail.php?flag=3&id=821

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