



Transient Workers Count Too
DIGNITY OVERDUE

NEWSLETTER

WEEKLY
DAY OFF
FOR ALL

Volume 7

Number 2

March - April 2012

Editorial

On March 5th, Minister of State for Manpower, Tan Chuan-jin announced that, as of 1st January 2013, domestic workers in Singapore would receive a mandatory day off or a day's pay in lieu.

TWC2 has its reservations about the new measure, which were spelt out in the press release that we put out that day, but we believe that this is a big step forward. It is something to be celebrated.

Our forerunner group, The Working Committee 2, started to campaign for a regular day off for domestic workers in 2003: the case was argued and we had a Sundays Off Campaign that year, aimed at persuading more employers to give days off. The campaign was continued by Transient Workers Count Too: not a year has gone by without us raising the issue, whether with government, the media or through public education. In 2008, we joined hands with the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME) and the UNIFEM National Committee-Singapore in a joint public education campaign.

The Day Off Campaign has been the toughest and longest lasting initiative that TWC2 has handled. By 2006, the case for a weekly day off had been made, and we had put forward sound answers to all the objections employers raised against it. What was left then was a refusal to give a day off that was often based on a sense of entitlement to have a domestic worker on hand day and night, week in, week out. This was why we concluded that the day off needed to be made mandatory: all the letter writing, leafletting and publication of advice barely changed the proportion of employers giving a day off throughout the nine years put into working for this goal: it hovered around 50 per cent.

The goal was perfectly reasonable: who doesn't want time off from work? And if we want time off, we have to be ready to accept that others want it too. It is as simple as that, though we have put forward arguments about rights, health, access to assistance and advice.

There is still much to be done. We'd like to ensure that all domestic workers are able to have days off and that none are pressured into giving them up against their will. We want to see how the genuine problems raised by some employers about, for example, caring for those who need constant attention, can be resolved.

This will be new territory, in some ways. What we heard for years could not be done has been, and it must be made to work well.

TWC2 wishes to thank all those who worked with us since 2003 for a weekly day off for domestic workers. This success was the result of many people's efforts. At the same time, our members can say with some pride that the society they joined initiated the day off campaign and never gave up. It is a time to celebrate.

TWC2's AGM

The society's Annual General Meeting (AGM) is on Sunday, 25th March, beginning at 2pm. It will be held in the SCWO building, 96, Waterloo Street. Nearest MRT: Bras Basah (CC2)

Agenda:

- 1. Adoption of minutes of the 2011 AGM/matters arising**
- 2. President's report**
- 3. Committee report**
- 4. Treasurer's report**
- 5. Constitutional amendments**
- 6. Any Other Business**

It is hoped that as many members as possible will attend. Please note that to be entitled to vote, you will need to have an up to date membership subscription.

In this issue...

Website information.....	Page 2
MOM press release on mandatory day off.....	Page 3
TWC2 press release.....	Page 5
A Day Off for Domestic Workers: The Long Road.....	Page 6
Events.....	Page 8
Migrant Forum in Asia statement on International Women's Day 2012.....	Page 10
Membership form.....	Page 11

This Newsletter

We were not planning to bring a newsletter out so soon after the January-February issue, but the news of the introduction of a mandatory day off seemed to call for it. We apologise that it has had to be put together quickly and therefore may be less well presented than we'd like.

Website information

New stories appear on our website www.twc2.org.sg regularly. There's quite a bit of helpful information on it, as well as interesting articles. Day off-related items readers might find helpful in responding to those who are critical of domestic workers having time off include:

<http://twc2.org.sg/2011/11/16/where-we-stand-on-fair-treatment-of-foreign-domestic-workers/>

<http://twc2.org.sg/2011/11/16/fact-sheet-foreign-domestic-workers-in-singapore-basic-statistics/>

<http://twc2.org.sg/2011/11/16/fact-sheet-foreign-domestic-workers-in-singapore-complaints-and-abuses/>

Besides the website material, we have other resources, including the colourful day off poster produced in 2009.

The website of the **joint Day Off Campaign** will soon be updated and is a useful resource. To date (March 9th), 2689 visitors have recorded their support for it. If you haven't done so, please visit it, take a look around and show your support. The site is at: <http://www.dayoff.sg/> You can find the joint UNIFEM-Singapore/HOME/TWC2 report, Made to Work: Attitudes Towards Granting Regular Days Off to Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore (2011)

<http://unwomen-nc.org.sg/uploads/Day%20Off%202011%20June%202012.pdf>

Then there is <https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/whyiwantadayoff>, which has messages on it from domestic workers about why they want a day off.

Below: A 2007 advertisement.

Close to half the population of domestic workers in Singapore work every day of the year throughout their time here.

Country	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
2	2	2	4	2	2	4	2	2	4
3	3	3	6	3	3	6	3	3	6
4	4	4	8	4	4	8	4	4	8
5	5	5	10	5	5	10	5	5	10
6	6	6	12	6	6	12	6	6	12
7	7	7	14	7	7	14	7	7	14
8	8	8	16	8	8	16	8	8	16
9	9	9	18	9	9	18	9	9	18
10	10	10	20	10	10	20	10	10	20
11	11	11	22	11	11	22	11	11	22
12	12	12	24	12	12	24	12	12	24
13	13	13	26	13	13	26	13	13	26
14	14	14	28	14	14	28	14	14	28
15	15	15	30	15	15	30	15	15	30
16	16	16	32	16	16	32	16	16	32
17	17	17	34	17	17	34	17	17	34
18	18	18	36	18	18	36	18	18	36
19	19	19	38	19	19	38	19	19	38
20	20	20	40	20	20	40	20	20	40
21	21	21	42	21	21	42	21	21	42
22	22	22	44	22	22	44	22	22	44
23	23	23	46	23	23	46	23	23	46
24	24	24	48	24	24	48	24	24	48
25	25	25	50	25	25	50	25	25	50
26	26	26	52	26	26	52	26	26	52
27	27	27	54	27	27	54	27	27	54
28	28	28	56	28	28	56	28	28	56
29	29	29	58	29	29	58	29	29	58
30	30	30	60	30	30	60	30	30	60
31	31	31	62	31	31	62	31	31	62
32	32	32	64	32	32	64	32	32	64
33	33	33	66	33	33	66	33	33	66
34	34	34	68	34	34	68	34	34	68
35	35	35	70	35	35	70	35	35	70
36	36	36	72	36	36	72	36	36	72
37	37	37	74	37	37	74	37	37	74
38	38	38	76	38	38	76	38	38	76
39	39	39	78	39	39	78	39	39	78
40	40	40	80	40	40	80	40	40	80
41	41	41	82	41	41	82	41	41	82
42	42	42	84	42	42	84	42	42	84
43	43	43	86	43	43	86	43	43	86
44	44	44	88	44	44	88	44	44	88
45	45	45	90	45	45	90	45	45	90
46	46	46	92	46	46	92	46	46	92
47	47	47	94	47	47	94	47	47	94
48	48	48	96	48	48	96	48	48	96
49	49	49	98	49	49	98	49	49	98
50	50	50	100	50	50	100	50	50	100

NO DAY OFF!

EVERYONE NEEDS A DAY OFF

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WEEKLY REST DAYS FOR FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS

Flexibility to compensate worker with pay

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) will require a weekly rest day for foreign domestic workers (FDWs), while providing employers the flexibility to compensate their FDWs with extra pay if the FDW agrees to work on their rest day. The new weekly rest day requirement will apply to FDWs whose work permits are issued or renewed from 1 January 2013

2. FDWs play an important role in the lives of many families. Improving their well-being has a direct impact on the quality of care that the FDWs provide. More than just physical rest, a rest day provides the FDW with an emotional and mental break from work. This helps to improve their productivity at work, and reduce the likelihood of management problems.
3. A weekly rest day is regarded internationally as a basic labour right. Local workers and non-domestic foreign workers already enjoy this right under our Employment Act. As Singapore is among the few FDW receiving countries with no provisions for weekly rest days, this regulation is also expected to enhance Singapore's attractiveness as a destination for quality and experienced FDWs.
4. To ensure that the new requirement is pragmatic and balances the needs of employers and FDWs, time and flexibility will be given to employers to adjust to the new regulation. For existing FDWs, this new regulation will not apply to the remaining tenure of their work permit. The weekly rest day requirement will only apply when the FDWs' Work Permits are up for renewal on or after 1 January 2013. New employers who hire an FDW for the first time from 1 January 2013 will also be subject to the new regulations. Employers will retain the alternative option of compensation in-lieu if the FDW expressly agrees to work on her rest days.
5. Please refer to Annex A for key features of the changes
6. MOM's move follows a comprehensive year-long review of the FDW management framework, including a study of the major FDW destinations worldwide (Footnote 1) and extensive stakeholder consultations with employers, FDWs, employment agencies, NGOs, and source country representatives. As part of this review, MOM already announced that the FDW Entry Test would be replaced with a Settling-In Programme (SIP) for first time FDWs this year.
7. MOM's approach recognises that some employers may have genuine difficulties giving FDWs a weekly rest day, and that some FDWs may prefer the option to work and earn more by forgoing their rest days. Households that genuinely need an FDW – such as those with frail elderly who are most likely to offer compensation-in-lieu, can check if they are eligible for the new \$120 monthly FDW grant announced by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam in his Budget speech. This grant is over and above the existing \$95 monthly levy concession enjoyed by all households with elderly members above 65, young children under 12 years or disabled members.
8. Employers have also raised concerns regarding the activities that their FDWs may engage in on a rest day. The SIP will cover FDWs' employment responsibilities and give FDWs advice on what constitutes appropriate behaviour on a rest day. The Ministry will also be reviewing employers' obligations for medical and repatriation costs for exceptional circumstances that employers have little or no control over. This will be part of the review of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Regulations to ensure an equitable balance of rights and responsibilities between employers and workers

Annex A

KEY FEATURES OF THE CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED FROM JANUARY 2013

- (a) All FDWs are entitled to one rest day every week. Employers and their FDW will be given flexibility to mutually agree on which day of the week the rest day falls.
- (b) If the employer would like his FDW to work on her rest day, he should come to a mutual agreement with the FDW on the number of rest days to forgo each month. For each rest day forgone, the FDW shall be compensated with at least one day's wage (footnote 2) on top of her monthly salary;

(c) Instead of monetary compensation for a rest day forgone, employers can also give FDWs a replacement rest day which shall fall within the same month as the rest day forgone.

(d) Transitional arrangements will be in place to give employers time to adjust:

The weekly rest day requirement is planned to take effect for all Work Permits issued or renewed from 1 January 2013;

FDWs with Work Permits issued or renewed on 1 January 2013 are not covered by the new regulation and will be allowed to continue with any existing arrangements (footnote 3) until the Work Permit expires.

Footnotes

1. Out of 20 countries/cities polled, 15 legislated a weekly rest day for domestic workers. Countries which do not have a legislated rest day for domestic workers include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea. (While Malaysia does not have a legislated rest day provision for FDWs, its recent MOU with Indonesia includes a weekly rest day requirement with the option for compensation in-lieu of a rest day.)

2. One day's wage is calculated by dividing the monthly wage by 26 working days.

3. In 2006, a standard employment contract was introduced by the Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore) and CaseTrust requiring employers to stipulate the number of rest days in a month and compensation in-lieu for rest days not taken.



Geneva, 2010: Each handprint was made by a domestic worker in Hong Kong who called for the International Labour Conference to support a convention on domestic workers, which includes the right to days off.

The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, UN Women-National Committee Singapore, HOME and TWC2 issued statements welcoming the announcement. AWARE welcomed it in a letter to the Straits Times Forum Page: <http://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/AWAREletterSTForum.pdf> TWC2's statement follows.



Government Making Weekly Rest Day Mandatory for Foreign Domestic Workers a Progressive Move

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) welcomes the [announcement by the Ministry of Manpower](#) requiring a weekly rest day for foreign domestic workers (FDW). TWC2 has been advocating this ever since we started in 2003 and is pleased that this significant move forward is now being taken. Over the years, we have taken every opportunity to highlight the issue and to raise pro-day off arguments in meetings, consultations and the media.

Said Dr Noorashikin Abdul Rahman, TWC2 vice-president: “We welcome this news by MOM and are very pleased that the legislation will be introduced for 2013. This has been long overdue and signifies the first step to put domestic workers on a par with other workers who contribute to our economy significantly.”

TWC2 believes that everyone should have a right to time off. It is essential to the mental and physical health of human beings. A weekly day off can provide a chance for a domestic worker to have a change of scene, to relax and to see friends. If they are interested, there are an increasing number of courses available for them to learn new skills that will be useful in the future. For those who are experiencing problems, this is also an opportunity to seek help and advice.

We note that the new provision will come into effect on 1st January 2013. However, as Dr Noorashikin points out, “Whilst I recognize the need to phase in the legislation to give enough time for employers to make the necessary preparation, I would strongly urge MOM to consider that the new legislation should also cover all domestic workers and not only those who are hired from January 2013 onwards. Otherwise, there will be quite a significant population of domestic workers who will have to wait for a considerable amount of time before they have access to this basic labour right. It should also be made clear what the penalty would be if employers do not oblige by the new legislation so that those who are inclined to take this new law lightly will be more wary of the consequences of doing so.”

The new rule will allow workers to be compensated for not taking days off, if that is agreed between a worker and her employer. TWC2 believes that flexibility is needed for both parties to allow, for example, for occasions when families have big celebrations or family members fall ill and the worker’s assistance is needed on her usual day off, but it is our view that at least half of all weekly days off should be taken and not surrendered on any terms, so that the workers’ health and rights are adequately protected.

We are aware that many employers will object and that there are some domestic workers who will say that they would rather be compensated than take days off. We believe that most employers can cope very adequately without having a domestic worker on call all day, every day and that there is no valid reason for denying domestic workers a right that almost everyone else takes for granted. Where there are pressing needs, such as support for an aged and infirm relative or a disabled person in need of constant care, a mixture of family care and social provision is the way forward: domestic workers handling such a role are particularly in need of rest and a break.

When domestic workers first arrive in Singapore, most are expected to pay their placement costs through monthly salary deductions by their employers, and these can account for the first 8 – 10 months of their pay. In these circumstances, it is understandable that many will seek to maximise their incomes to bring forward the day when they can send money back to their families. Eight to ten months is a long period to go through without a day off and it is an issue we believe needs to be tackled, preferably by reducing the costs of placement to workers, rather than maintaining a ‘no day off’ status, even one that is compensated for financially.

When the placement costs have been recovered, the pressure is off and most workers would want a day off. In this connection, certain refinements may still be needed to give substance to the weekly rest day policy.

One is that FDWs should be given a copy of any contract they have signed, with an additional copy lodged with a third party. This would lessen the risk of misunderstanding as to what had been agreed.

Another is the need to put in place measures to shield workers from undue pressure to give up their rest days (even if paid in lieu). Here is where requiring at least half of all weekly days off to be taken and not surrendered on any terms, may act as a useful buffer.

A Day Off for Domestic Workers: The Long Road

2003: The Working Committee 2 (forerunner of Transient Workers Count Too) launched on 9th March. Point 4 of its 5 point declaration of beliefs says: *'Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, to reasonable work hours and days off, and to fair wages.'*

At the launch, Filipina domestic worker Ellen Elecanal says, *'Even machines need time off, and we are human beings'*. Indonesian domestic worker, Maria Astuti, says, *'I feel sorry for most of my Indonesian friends. Most of them don't have an off day. Agencies often say quite clearly that there are no days off for their Indonesian maids, but my employer says, "I don't expect my maid to work for me 365 days a year"'*.

TWC2's research paper, *Support Systems for Domestic Workers*, notes that those who most need help are least able to look for it - workers who have no days off and who are not allowed out by their employers. Its first conclusion is: *'The introduction and enforcement of legal provisions that would oblige employers to give a minimum amount of weekly time off to domestic workers, including freedom to leave their accommodation, would help to remedy this problem.'*

First TWC2 meeting with Ministry of Manpower (MOM): Day Off issue raised regularly with it from then on.

Activities include the Sundays Off campaign and a photo exhibition called *'A Day Off'*, shown at five different venues across Singapore. A draft Foreign Domestic Workers Bill drafted by TWC2 says that domestic workers should have at least one day off every 15 days, as well as public holidays or days off in lieu.

2004: Transient Workers Count Too launched as a society. It supports a weekly day off for domestic workers, established by law. Four of the ten common myths it counters in *'Mutual Respect'*, a guide for employers, concern reasons offered for not giving a day off.

The Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME) is founded later that year. It supports a regular day off for domestic workers.

2005: TWC2's first AGM decides that *'the Time Off campaign is our chief public campaign for the coming year.'* The issue was highlighted by Indonesian visiting speaker, Sri Palupi in July, through Singapore's first International Migrants' Day event on December 18th (a sports carnival in Queenstown that drew 3000 participants), and on TWC2's website. Two TWC2 letters on the issue published in *'The New Paper'*.

Madam Halimah Jacob, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General, writes in a letter that she has long been on record *'as saying that if employers continue to deny their maids a day off, this should be legislated.'* (*Straits Times*, 14th December)

When news first comes out of the proposed standard contract for domestic workers (see below), HOME president Bridget Liew writes in a letter to *Straits Times* (27th October) that while HOME *'applauds the move to make rest days contractual for maids, we are disappointed that it is for only one day off a month. Many Singaporean employees enjoy a five-day week, including 11 public holidays.'*

2006: *'Remaking Our World: Foreign Domestic Workers Speak'*, a TWC2 presentation on 5th March at the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival highlights the day off issue.

Responding to an 8th March announcement in Parliament that the government had rejected calls for a mandatory day off for domestic workers, TWC2 issues a press statement titled *'Everyone Needs Time Off'*, which spells out the pro-day off case. A letter from the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI) published in *Today* says, *'Rest should be seen as a very basic human need and not a privilege that we give or deny to someone under our employ.'* It calls on the government to reconsider its decision. A *Sunday Times* editorial finds the government's reluctance to mandate a weekly day off *'perplexing'* and concludes *'The (MOM) should acknowledge mandated rest is what it takes to bring enlightenment to a medieval corner of the job scene.'*

Eric Khoo's film, *'No Day Off'* released. TWC2 assisted with information and translation.

The Association of Employment Agencies-Singapore and CaseTrust draft a new standard employment contract to be used by all agencies. It provides for 1/2/3 or 4 days off each month, but leaves the option of workers giving up their days off in return for payment. The clause allows 'no day off' employers to carry on being 'no day off employers'.

'Give the Maid a Break', an extended pro-day off comment article by TWC2 vice-president, John Gee, published in *Today* on 3rd August.

'A day off or \$20? Your choice' by *Straits Times* correspondent, Arlina Arshad, is the first extended sympathetic treatment of the day off issue by a correspondent in the mainstream media. Letters from TWC2 and HOME on day off-related issues published in *Today* and *Straits Times*.

Beginning this year, TWC2 produces a purse/pocket size directory for migrant workers listing sources of help and also places where workers can go to attend courses on their days off. Ten options already exist. The directory appears in English, Chinese, and Bahasa Indonesia versions and is updated as needed.

TWC2 Help line launched at IMD 2006 celebration: most volunteer helpers are domestic workers on their day off.

With the support of UNIFEM National Committee Singapore (hereafter, UNIFEM-Singapore), aidha launches Sunday courses in work and management skills for domestic workers. It is dedicated to '*enriching lives through financial education*'.

2007: Activities include talks at institutions and distributing day off information through the TWC2 newsletter. Our investigation of agency practices confirms that many recommend that new domestic workers should not be given days off, and this is said even to employers who approach them with an open-mind on the subject. Domestic workers who want a day off when they are first placed are often told that they will be sent home straight away if they do not accept employment on a 'no day off' basis. From this year, TWC2 AGMs are held on Sundays so that workers who have that day off can attend.

For International Migrants' Day 2007, HOME and TWC2 jointly produce pro-day off leaflets and distribute them along Orchard Road on Saturday, 15th December.

Besides TWC2 regularly providing information and comments to the media, our vice president talks about the day off in a November interview with Radio 938LIVE's '*Spotlight*' programme and also on 18th December on 938LIVE's Breakfast Club programme.

TWC2 affiliates to Migrant Forum in Asia; it originally applied to do so in 2006. This signals the start of ongoing cooperation with other groups across Asia in favour of a day off for domestic workers.

2008: Main campaign priority is the day off issue. TWC2, HOME and UNIFEM-Singapore organise a public education campaign, launched with a press conference on 29th April. It generates a spate of reports in the following days. A Day Off website (www.dayoff.sg) is established to provide information on the issue: over 2000 people sign up to support it. Talks given at four colleges, and each weekend for a month, an information stand is set up at Toa Payoh Library. On 24th September, TWC2 and HOME issue a joint press release: '*Migrant worker NGOs call for domestic workers to be included in the Employment Act, among other reforms*': if included, they would have regular days off. 5000 brochures aimed at employers are distributed, as well as 3000 postcards.

Responding to the launch of the campaign, the MOM issues a press release on 29th April that opens:

'The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is committed to ensuring that the interests and welfare of all foreign workers, including foreign domestic workers (FDWs), are safeguarded while working in Singapore. In this regard, the "Day Off Campaign" to raise awareness among employers on the importance of a rest day for their FDWs is in line with MOM's effort to ensure that FDWs are accorded adequate rest.'

Each society also works through its own channels: TWC2 holds a public day school on 29th June which covers the day off issue, publishes day off information in every issue of our newsletter, strengthens the day off content on our website and has a series of information stands, mostly in colleges. UNIFEM-Singapore holds briefings for members and HOME steps up its provision of Sunday classes for domestic workers.

When the *Sunday Times* invites readers' responses to the question, "Should maids get a mandatory day off?" 230 readers respond: 81 per cent say 'Yes', 19 per cent say 'No' (*Sunday Times*, 13/7/08)

In September, ACMI, in association with Caritas Singapore Community Council, publishes '*Dignity in the Home*', a guide for Catholic employers of domestic workers, which includes among its recommendations for decent treatment of domestic workers that they should have a weekly day off.

2009: Three Day Off videos released by the joint campaign on its first anniversary. UNIFEM-Singapore shows Eric Khoo's *'No Day Off'* to a full house at INSEAD Asia campus on 29th June and UNIFEM-Singapore, HOME and TWC2 speakers talk afterwards.

On May 1st, Migrant Voices, HOME and TWC2 form a coalition known as Solidarity for Migrant Workers to promote migrant workers' rights, including a weekly day off for domestic workers.

TWC2 produces a pro-day off poster, with ILO support, and continues to raise the issue at talks, including at NTU, Murdoch University and the Sinema: International Social Action Film Festival and with the media. We also make space available for classes for domestic workers on Sundays.

2010: 14th April: TWC2's president is among speakers at The Forum, in Paya Lebar, where he speaks in favour of a day off for domestic workers. A largely Protestant Christian gathering is already supportive of Sundays off.

5th May: Proposals from a legal team brought together by TWC2 on the amendment of the Employment Agencies Act submitted to MOM. Section 2.14 refers to how many agencies encourage employers not to give days off and proposes that an agency should be *"prohibited from making threats, including the threat of repatriation, against workers in order to induce them to accept unfavourable terms and conditions under any circumstances. Such terms and conditions are to be understood as those to which the worker personally objects and any that she would be best advised not to accept as being prejudicial to her wellbeing."*

June: Representatives from TWC2 and HOME go with Migrant Forum in Asia to observe the International Labour Conference's first discussion on the proposal, *'Decent Work for Domestic Workers'*. The workers' delegation at the ILC is led by Madam Halimah Yacob, from Singapore, who speaks strongly and effectively in favour of the proposal.

21st August: Panelists at a session of the Caritas Singapore Community Council's Social Mission Conference, attended by 500 people, speak in favour of a day off for domestic workers. TWC2 president John Gee is one of the panelists.

17th October: HOME and TWC2, with support from the High Commission of Canada, hold a conference on *'Human Migration, Human Rights'*, where a proposed submission on Singapore's Universal Periodic Review is discussed.

31st October: Solidarity for Migrant Workers submits a joint report to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Singapore's human rights practices. The report calls for weekly rest days for all migrant workers.

TWC2 continues to promote the day off with talks, information distribution, and newsletter items.

2011: June: TWC2 and HOME, along with Singapore-based domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia, observe the International Labour Conference as part of a Migrant Forum in Asia team. The ILC adopts the Convention on Domestic Workers. Later, on June 19th, the worker delegates' spokesperson at the ILC and now Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Madam Halimah Yacob, says, *'I certainly think that this is one area we could consider legislating. One day off a week'*. She adds, *'One of the basic assumptions of the convention is that domestic workers should not be treated differently from other workers. So if other workers have one rest day a week to recover and recuperate, domestic workers also need that.'* Her comments attract considerable attention.

25th June: *'Made to Work: Attitudes Towards Granting Regular Days Off to Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore'* is released. A joint report by UNIFEM-Singapore, HOME and TWC2, the 70-page report was based on survey responses from 582 households. It found that only 12 per cent of domestic workers have a weekly day off, and that 70 per cent of Singaporeans who did not employ domestic workers themselves were in favour of them having a weekly day off. It recommended making a weekly day off mandatory and that, if workers agreed to give up some rest days in return for compensation, this should be limited to 50 per cent of days off in a given month.

18th July: TWC2 submits proposals to MOM on the amendment of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act and the work permit conditions under the Act. A legal team brought together by TWC2 drew them up. The proposed change to clause 11 of the work permit conditions for domestic workers says:

The employer of the foreign employee shall grant the foreign employee -

- a). At least eight hours of continuous rest per 24-hour period excluding reasonable breaks for meals and showers and*
- b). 1 rest day per week, provided that -*

(i) If the employer and the foreign worker mutually agree that the foreign worker will work on a rest day, the foreign employee will be compensated at the following hourly rate-

(Monthly wage of foreign employee divided by 24) X 2 divided by 8 and

(ii) The foreign employee shall in any event have a mandatory minimum of 2 rest days per month.

24th July: Joint HOME-TWC2 consultation with domestic workers.

15th October: TWC2 holds a forum for employers: 'Should Maids Have a Day Off?'

6th November: Catholic Archbishop of Singapore, Nicholas Chia, in a statement to mark World Day of Migrants, writes: 'Jesus' Golden Rule tells us to "do unto others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).....For example, if you enjoy having a day off during the week, would it not follow that your domestic helper would also enjoy and appreciate this "luxury"?' This is a long held stand.

23rd November: Radha Basu, Senior Correspondent of 'Straits Times', writes extended article headed 'Give maids their day off'. Five days later, the paper's editorial says, 'Whatever the needs of families with aged parents and young children to care for besides the cooking and cleaning, it is cruel to have the maid confined to the home. Objections raised through the years to giving rest days have bordered on the farcical, such as the worry maids would fall into bad company. Attitudes must change first, as work demands made of maids will remain complex. If it should take the force of law to bring change, it would make for an easier decision.'

4th December: Foreign Domestic Workers Day organised by the Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Skills Training and held at Singapore Polytechnic attended by thousands of domestic workers and employers.

2012: The work goes on...

Events

4th February: Over 25 TWC2 volunteers attended an MOM training session dealing with laws and measures concerning migrant workers.

16th February: Debbie Fordyce, Cuff Road Project Coordinator, and Immediate Past President John Gee spoke to 130 Occupational Health & Safety and Environmental Management students at Newcastle Australia University.

19th February: Outreach to Chinese workers near Aljunied MRT by TWC2 volunteers meets with a strong positive response. The volunteers distributed help desk information leaflets in Mandarin and were all able to speak to the workers in their own language.

Results of research on the costs and benefits of migration for Bangladeshi workers presented to a group of workers to share them and to hear their views.

21st February: TWC2 made a brief online submission to the public consultation on the Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action. The submission says:

We are convinced that any anti-trafficking initiative that does not have a sound definition of what trafficking is at its core will be severely impaired: such a definition is vital for detecting trafficking cases and implementing effective action to assist victims, prosecute offenders and conduct public education. In our view, the best way to tackle this would be for Singapore to sign the UN Palermo Protocol on TIP and bring its laws into conformity with the protocol's provisions. Failing that, at the very least, Article 3 should be adopted into Singapore law.

It highlights that current Singapore legislation does not cover the use: of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation as stated in clause 3a of the UN Protocol as part of its definition of trafficking. Neither does it cover the important qualification of 3b:

b). The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in the subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

It has been TWC2's consistent and often expressed view for the past four years that these elements are vital to the development of a comprehensive and effective anti-trafficking programme.

Migrant Forum in Asia Statement for International Women's Day-March 8th 2012

On the occasion of International Women's Day Migrant Forum in Asia stands in solidarity with the global community in celebrating the 2012 theme: "Empower Rural Women — End Hunger and Poverty."

Rural women comprise around 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, and more than 70 per cent of the labour force in some agriculture-intensive economies (ILO). Rural women face challenges and discrimination that are often linked to their sex. The dire conditions faced by rural women - lack of decent job opportunities, poverty, gender and ethnic discrimination, civil and political conflicts, climate-induced emergencies – are among the push factors that force women to migrate to urban areas, cities and across borders. They take up work that do not match their skills, or are forced to seek employment outside their home countries, usually as care workers and domestic workers. MFA therefore dedicates its actions and activities on this important day to all migrant women workers and migrant domestic workers for their continuous and significant contributions to our societies.

The adoption of ILO Convention 189—Decent Work for Domestic Workers on June 16th 2011 is a landmark victory towards securing the rights of domestic workers. This Convention recognizes domestic workers as *workers*, with rights that are equal to those of all other workers regardless of citizenship or legal status.

In celebration of International Women's Day, MFA welcomes the announcement by Singapore's Minister of State for Manpower on March 5th, that Singapore is to introduce a mandatory weekly day off for domestic workers from 1st January 2013. We hope to see further steps taken to ensure that all domestic workers enjoy regular days off and that this may encourage other states in the region that have no mandatory day off for domestic workers to introduce similar measures. We also urge the Singapore government to ratify and implement ILO Convention 189 on domestic work.

We also recognize the continuing challenges faced by women migrant workers including migrant domestic workers. The pervasive culture of discrimination and gender-based violence prevalent in Asia has seriously affected women's rights. As a result, their fundamental rights — the rights to life, health, security, mobility, political participation, and employment — are seriously violated, limiting their choices in all spheres of life. We also recognize that women migrant workers experience abuse in the various stages of migration and unjustly contend with dubious practices of recruitment agencies, merciless abuses and risks for exploitation, long working hours, the withholding of wages and slavery like conditions.

We note that many countries do not recognize domestic work as work and women migrant domestic workers are often subject to the denial of decent work and living conditions.

Migrant Forum in Asia, in solidarity with domestic workers and all workers in the informal sector, call on governments to recall and follow through on their ethical and legal obligations to extend to both local and migrant domestic workers the same rights as extended to all other workers, without discrimination on the basis of citizenship, gender, or legal status; in particular:

1. Ratify and implement ILO Convention 189 on domestic Work – Ratification signifies recognition of domestic workers as workers and upholds their rights to freedom of association, and to form and join associations and trade unions
2. Recognize the contributions of Migrant Domestic Workers in the economies of countries of origin and destination
3. Recognize the right of domestic workers to a Living Wage: States must guarantee that all migrant domestic workers are paid a living wage for their work, on par with that which is paid to local workers within their jurisdiction.
4. Recognize the Right to a Weekly Day Off: All domestic workers must be guaranteed a full day of rest each week
5. Recognize the right of Access to Justice: All domestic workers must be guaranteed access to adequate legal representation and redress mechanisms under the legal system of the state, regardless of their citizenship or legal status.
6. Ratify and implement the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families

Migrant Forum in Asia

MFA is a regional network of non-government organizations (NGOs), associations and trade unions of migrant workers, and individual advocates in Asia that are committed to protect and promote the rights and welfare of migrant workers. It is guided by a vision of an alternative world system based on respect for human rights and dignity, social justice, and gender equity, particularly for migrant workers.

Note: TWC2 is a member of the MFA network.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL *

Date of application / renewal * : _____

* Please delete as appropriate

MEMBER INFORMATION IS KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Personal Details

Name	
NRIC / FIN or other identity no	
Date of birth	
Gender	
Citizenship	
Status (If not citizen of Singapore)	
Occupation	
Languages	Spoken:
	Written:
Address	
Telephone	
Handphone	
Other contact number (if any)	
Fax	
Email	

Membership / renewal fee

(The fee is per year of membership. Please tick the appropriate boxes.)

Singaporean / PR / Employment Pass / S-Pass	S\$10.00	
Work permit holder	S\$2.00	
Additional donation (if any)	Amount:	
Payment by	Cash	Cheque (No)

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TWC2 event		Other org ⁿ / event	
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