



Transient Workers Count Too
DIGNITY OVERDUE

NEWSLETTER

WEEKLY
DAY OFF
FOR ALL

Volume 10

Number 5

September-October 2015

Global Goals: Recognise Migrant Workers' Role

First there were Millennium Development Goals; now, world leaders have agreed on 17 Sustainable Development Global Goals, to be worked for over the next 15 years.

The old goals were not fully realized, but significant progress was made towards them. The new goals, agreed on 25th September, follow up and expand on the original set of eight goals.

Reading through them, anyone who is familiar with the position of migrant workers in the global economy can hardly fail to be struck by how relevant their status and role is to how much progress is made on realizing the goals*.

Eliminating poverty and hunger, promoting good health provision and education, securing access to clean water and sanitation: all these goals can be furthered by migrant workers getting decent pay (without high recruitment costs), being able to remit it home or save it for their own use and spend their money in effective ways that promote real development rather than simply enable survival. Paid work by migrant women workers has, in many societies, raised the status of women to a certain extent, thus promoting gender equality, another goal.

Other goals, such as promoting renewable energy and sustainable cities and communities, are also fruits of the development that migrants' earnings may promote, in a supportive framework. With improved living standards, communities will be readier to pay attention to goals such as responsible consumption and protection of the environment.

When migrants working in developed countries have opportunities to do more than labour for a living, but can study if they wish, and take the time to learn about the strong points of the societies where they are employed, this has the potential to enable them to contribute to many aspects of sustainable development in their countries of origin. Helping to facilitate this can be a way of building partnerships for the development goals: that's goal 17.

In short, migrant workers may potentially make a big contribution to achieving the sustainable development goals, and the people and institutions of the countries where they are employed can make a difference to that by how they pay them, how they respect their rights, how readily they accept their empowerment and how far they recognize the need to work in partnership for a better world.

* For the full list, see: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Lunch With Heart: We'd Like Your Support

On December 13th, TWC2 has its main annual fundraising event. Want to help? See Page 11 and find out what you can do.

We'd Also Like An Editor

This newsletter, now over ten years old, needs a new editor. If you support TWC2's goals and think that you could volunteer the time and energy to take on producing it on a two-monthly basis, we'd like to hear from you.

In this issue...

Page 2.....	Events
Page 2.....	Caring for Carers
Page 3.....	Singapore Accedes to Anti-Trafficking Protocol
Page 4.....	Purpose-built Dormitories: Whose Purposes Are They Actually Fulfilling?
Page 6.....	A Need-And a Right - To Rest
Page 7.....	What Parties Said About Migrant Workers in the General Election
Page 9.....	Migrant Workers Convention

Events

August 31st: TWC2 took part in a programme for the Japan-based organization, Peaceboat. Participants travel between various Asian countries on the boat and when they put into port, they find out about initiatives that foster friendship and respect between peoples. This year, the 21 participants came from Japan, Korea, China, India and Nepal.

TWC2 arranged a programme in Little India, which included a briefing session and a short walk in the neighbourhood. Debbie Fordyce, Christine Pelly and some of the workers TWC2 is currently assisting provided the briefing. Debbie later took part in a panel at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore; John Gee, from TWC2, was another of the four-person panel.

October 6th: TWC2 hosted a discussion on “Caring Who Need Care” (See below)

October 18th: The Filipino Family Network (FFN) held its fifth annual graduation ceremony for women who had completed courses in the past year. It took place in a room above the Banana Leaf Apolo restaurant in Little India.

FFN Founder Davy Animas gave an opening address warmly welcoming everyone to the ceremony, in the course of which she referred to projects FFN has undertaken to assist fellow citizens in need back in the Philippines. She thanked TWC2 for its support for FFN’s activities.

TWC2 President Noor Abdul Rahman congratulated the women who are graduating and expressed appreciation for FFN’s work.

Antonio A Morales, Ambassador of the Philippines to Singapore, welcomed the fact that the women at this gathering were looking to the future, raising their skill levels and preparing for a time when they would return home and make a living there.

Elegantly dressed cosmetology students then ended the morning session by making a modeling presentation, showing their skills with make-up and hair-styling.

During lunch time, there was a song performance by Ms Princess and dance performances by women from the Indonesian Family Network, Filipino Family Network and JAM Group Dancers.

After lunch, John Gee from TWC2 spoke about the current work of the society on domestic worker-related issues, including a weekly day off for all and the cost of placement in a job.

Then it was time for the students to come on stage and be presented with their certificates by Noor and John. These were for those who had done arts and crafts, floral arts, computer and cosmetology courses, as well as the FFN volunteers and a best student award. Plenty of photos were taken during the graduation and afterwards!

October: Our website’s number of “likes” passed 6000 this month. It continues to have material added regularly, which ensures that it has a flow of new articles to read, as well as providing a resource for long-term research and advocacy. For anyone who has not visited the site yet, it can be found at www.twc2.org.sg

Caring for Carers

The Care Transitions in Aging Societies Project is an initiative that considers the impact that having aging populations will have on developed societies and how those societies can best manage the care of the elderly in the future. They have worked on *Making Difficult Decisions with Patients and Families*, an online casebook that is intended to help physicians and other healthcare professionals who have to grapple with ethical questions concerning the very elderly and infirm or others in life-limiting circumstances.

The project tries to avoid the simple stereotypes that it is all too easy to slip into – such as seeing the elderly as a monolithic bloc of fairly helpless people, but recognize that they come with a wide range of capabilities, including in most cases, caring for themselves and one another.

One question that the project recognizes as important is that of the necessity of taking full account of the needs of those who provide care to the elderly, whether they are relatives, medical staff or others. This includes, in Singapore, domestic workers, who provide a great deal of care within families for the elderly.

This is a matter of interest for TWC2 as well. Talking with domestic workers about their jobs, we have been told quite consistently that looking after elderly people is demanding – rather more so than caring for children. Yet the needs of elderly relatives are one of the reasons some employers give for not agreeing to their domestic workers having days off. We find that, though having an elderly relative who needs care is one of the main reasons families give for wanting to hire a domestic worker, there is little in the way of specialized training and virtually no interviewing of workers to test their aptitude for looking after the elderly. Furthermore, many agencies do not take the trouble to match domestic workers to families needs, but are only concerned to place general purpose domestic workers with employers, nor do most employers try to hire domestic workers with specialized skills and abilities. It’s no wonder that serious problems for both families and workers can ensue.

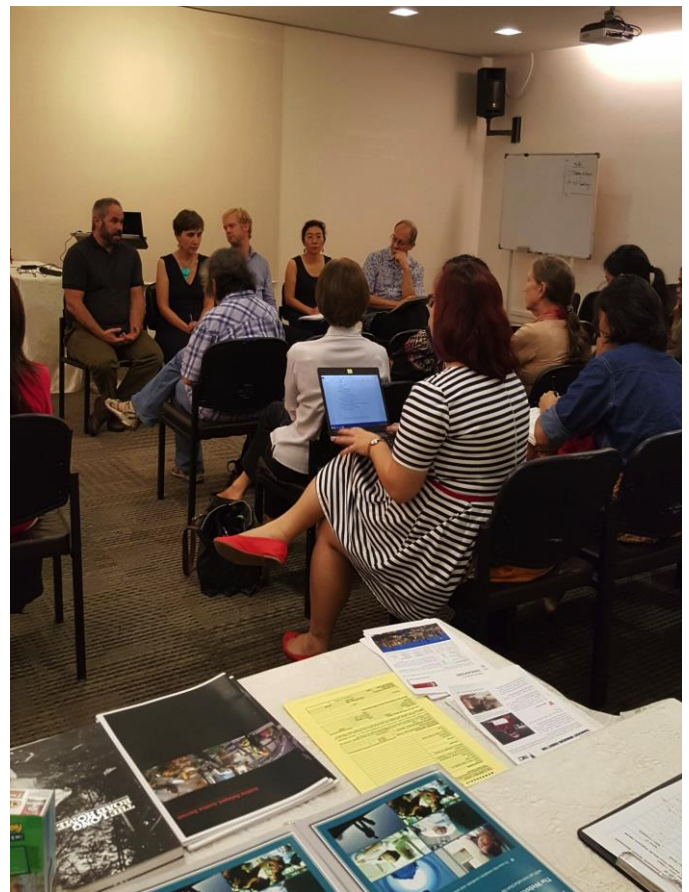
On October 6th, TWC2 hosted a small meeting involving members of the Care Transitions in Aging Societies Project and individuals from a range of interested organisations. It

was titled “Making Difficult Decisions When Domestic Workers Fall Ill”, but became a wide ranging discussion. It turned into a very fruitful exchange, in which there was quite a meeting of minds. Thoughts were exchanged on the status of domestic workers as care providers and their own needs, on training of existing domestic workers and future practices in recruitment of care workers, perhaps as professional care workers rather than domestic workers, as well as some of the ways in which the existing structures for elderly care might be reformed. There was general agreement that we should look to a future in which change favours both those who provide care and the elderly themselves.

Those from the project who spoke were Jacqueline Chin, Editor in Chief of the Casebook Project, who is Assistant Professor at the Centre for Biomedical Ethics at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore; Nancy Berlinger, the Casebook Project’s Consulting Editor and a research scholar at The Hastings Center; Michael Gusmano, an Associate Editor of “Making Difficult Decisions with Patients and Families: A Singapore Casebook” and Michael Dunn, an Associate Editor of the Casebook Project and a lecturer at the Ethox Centre, Oxford University

“Making Difficult Decisions with Patients and Families” can be read at www.bioethicscasebook.sg

(Right) Speakers and some of the participants at “Making Difficult Decisions When Domestic Workers Fall Ill”



Singapore Accedes to the UN Anti-Trafficking Protocol

Statement by Transient Workers Count Too: 2nd October 2015

On 28 September 2015, Singapore acceded to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN TIP Protocol), often known as the Palermo Protocol.

This is the key international legal instrument for combatting trafficking. Though just over 15 years old, it has been signed by most of the world’s states and is a crucial reference point for domestic legislation and international cooperation on trafficking in human beings.

Transient Workers Count Too welcomes this step. It is one that we have called for since 2008, at an early point in our own involvement with the problem of trafficking and having assisted individuals who we believed to have either been trafficked or in danger of being trafficked.

In considering acceding to international conventions, Singapore has been consistent in saying that it will only do so when it is able to be compliant with them. This would therefore be a good point at which to look again at the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) and think about ways in which its provisions may fall short of those of the UN TIP Protocol.

In particular, it is notable that the measures for the protection and support of victims of human trafficking in Part 4 of the PHTA are more limited than those called for by the UN TIP Protocol’s articles 6-8.

The UN protocol’s protective measures extend to all trafficked people, regardless of the purposes for which they have been trafficked. It seeks to empower them by making sure they are fully informed of the progress of relevant legal proceedings concerning them and that their views are heard; it provides for them to have “employment, educational and training opportunities”; it says that each state party to the protocol “shall ensure that its domestic legal system contains measures that offer victims of trafficking in persons the possibility of obtaining compensation for damage suffered.”

The PHTA’s emphasis is on prosecution of traffickers, and it is weak in its provisions for the protection and support for victims of trafficking. In all the respects mentioned in the previous paragraph, it falls short of the UN TIP Protocol. Its protective measures tend to emphasise protection for individuals trafficked into sexual exploitation, rather than other forms of labour exploitation. The PHTA does not provide the positive support to trafficking victims mentioned above that can assist them better to recover and rebuild their lives.

TWC2 hopes that these inconsistencies will be considered by Members of Parliament and by Singapore’s Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons. We suggest that, in 2016, when the PHTA will have been in force for a year, it should be reviewed, with the aims of:

1. Bringing its provisions fully into accord with those of the UN TIP Protocol
2. Introducing amendments to remedy gaps and weaknesses in the PHTA revealed through efforts to apply it in practice.

Purpose-Built Dormitories - Whose Purposes Are They Actually Fulfilling?

In a previous article*, I raised the question of whether purpose-built dorms were really the answer Singapore should be looking towards when it comes to migrant worker accommodation.

In July 2015, the first purpose-built dormitory in Singapore reported that only 50% of their 16,800 beds were taken up. While some of this was attributed to the downturn in the economy, the operator also mentioned that employees were pulling out workers from the purpose built dormitory in favor of alternative housing solutions that will help them to save money¹. While I'm sure cost saving is a legitimate reason, one should also think about if there are other factors contributing to lukewarm response to such dorms.

With more purpose-built dorms slated to be built, the freeze on temporary dorms² and the shift in rulings about which sectors' workers are allowed to be housed in HDB flats³, it does seem like there has been a continuous push towards housing as many workers as possible in purpose-built dorms.

I took the time to speak to some migrant workers to find out their experiences with living accommodation while working in Singapore and what (*if they had a choice*) form of accommodation they felt would be more beneficial for them.

The first man I spoke to was Satish. While he was employed as a driver, Satish lived alone in his company's workshop. Based on MOM's guidelines, this is not likely to have been a legal arrangement⁴. Satish's experience was also not an enjoyable one as he felt isolated and missed the social aspects of being in the company of peers.

When asked what he would have preferred, he reckoned that living in a dorm would be favourable as he would be able to interact with other likely minded people. He also mentioned that while he thinks preferred accommodation will depend on each particular worker and his job description, freedom of movement would be something that the men valued.

Shahbuddin and Shahidulla both stayed in small format dorms in central areas of Singapore. Both of them agreed that they preferred this to living in on-site accommodation. They liked these dorms as they provided the chance to mix with other workers. The location of these dorms also meant that they did not have an issue traveling to other parts of Singapore during their off days.

As most of the workers I spoke to did not have experience living in more than one type of accommodation, most of their responses was based on what benefits they felt each form of accommodation could award to them. As I spoke to more men, it became quite apparent that ease of movement and social interaction were things that they placed an emphasis on.

As luck would have it, I chanced upon Kamruzman. Kamruzman has had experience living in two types of accommodation - a large format dorm** and on-site temporary accommodation.

Kamruzman unhesitantly said that he preferred on-site accommodation. He mentioned that himself and some of his colleagues had even requested specifically to be allowed to stay on-site while they were working.

During the time Kamruzman lived in the dorm, he experienced issues with in-house catering. He said that the food quality was poor and that the produce used was often not fresh. He explained that, due to the inaccessibility of the location and rules against cooking, men often had no other options but to eat the food provided and that this often resulted in them getting stomach aches and falling sick.

He also mentioned that from his experience, having so many men living in one location also resulted in tensions running high. At his dorm, arguments and disagreements were a common occurrence. Unfamiliarity with each others' cultures also contributed to conflicts arising and being harder to resolve.

Kamruzman felt that on this front, conflicts were often easier to mitigate when living with a smaller number of people in on-site accommodation. Living on-site meant that the men had more time to get used to each other. Having peers from the same company around also meant that there was a higher chance of someone stepping in to mediate if any disagreements threatened to break out.

Kamruzman also brought up that the time it took to travel back and forth from the dorm was an inconvenience as it took away from the limited rest and recreational time he had. Having to live with a large number of people with different working hours also meant that there were people coming and going at all times of the night and this affected his quality of already limited sleep.

While Kamruzman mentioned that the conditions of on-site housing may sometimes seem ramshackle to outsiders, most of these physical factors were things he felt that he could overlook or work around. What was important to him was having more time to rest and not having to worry about meals after a hard day's work.

While four men's accounts during an informal conversation is not necessarily representative of what **all** migrant workers feel, it does raise some interesting points about what workers may find important when it comes to accommodation and if Singapore is drowning out the men's preferences as we race towards constructing purpose-built dorms.

It also brings up the point that each man has different preferences and while we are quick to criticise certain forms of accommodation over others, there are often important factors that the men consider that we sometimes overlook.

While purpose-built dorms may have their benefits, due to their structure and location, they also bring along their own set of problems and it should be worth exploring if these problems further exacerbate the problems our migrant workers face. Is this 'solution' really for their benefit or is it something Singapore is pushing because it serves our own purposes?

Nicolette Stewart

**Purpose-built dormitories: Exploring the fallacy of the 'cure-all', TWC2 Newsletter, May-June 2015.*

***As purpose built dorm is not a term many of the men were familiar with, I am hesitant to say without a doubt that Kamruzman lived in one of them. However, based on the scale of the accommodation described to me, it is likely that this was a purpose built dorm. If not, the dorm he lived in was similar in scale and location to a purpose built down and is likely to have similar issues.*

References:

1: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/tuas-view-dormitory-only-50-per-cent-occupied-050147750.html>

2: <http://www.stproperty.sg/articles-property/singapore-property-news/freeze-on-temporary-dorms-in-12-estates/a/189150>

3: <http://www.stproperty.sg/articles-property/singapore-property-news/bosses-get-ready-to-move-workers-staying-in-flats/a/189319>

4: <http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/work-permit-for-foreign-worker/sector-specific-rules/housing-requirements>

In Brief

Workplace Safety

In two articles in "Straits Times", "Safety efforts make workplaces safer" (18th September) and "Foreign worker dies after fall at worksite" (23rd September), figures for deaths (29) and injuries (5,950) in workplaces in the first six months of 2015 were set against those for the same period last year - 34 and 6,563 respectively. Readers could easily think that the work safety record is improving. However, the first half of 2014 was a particularly bad period for workplace accidents: nine workers died in accidents in January alone, so taking it as a base for comparison does not give a realistic picture of the overall problem.

If this year's figures are compared to those for the first six months of the year before, the statistics are less reassuring: 25 workers died in workplace accidents in that period in 2013, and a further 5,522 were injured, according to figures released by the Workplace Safety and Health Institute. When a TWC2 writer checked the figures for the last five years, they showed, apart from one small fall, a steady *rise* in workplace injuries. The full article can be read here:

<http://twc2.org.sg/2015/10/04/workplace-injuries-rises-2010-to-2014/>

This is not to ignore the efforts being made by the Workplace Safety and Health Council and by many companies Singapore-wide, but to recognise that further efforts are needed, including more unannounced inspections. There also need to be measures that proceed from the recognition that foreign workers form a disproportionate percentage of those killed and injured. In the long term, this should involve greater efforts to retain experienced workers in preference to recruiting new ones, making it easy for them to raise complaints without fear of penalisation (which includes being fired and sent home), and repeated safety training initiatives.

Haze

Many migrant workers labour in the open air where, in the recent past, they have been fully exposed to the haze that has disrupted daily life in Singapore. TWC2 put out a statement on 28th September calling for measures to protect migrant workers' health. It can be read at:

<http://twc2.org.sg/2015/09/28/twc2-urges-stop-work-orders-when-haze-psi-crosses-200/>

A Need – And a Right – To Rest

Most people who pass by building sites regularly will have noticed men lying down and dozing during their breaks. They are probably taking the opportunity to catch up on the sleep they didn't have the night before. Many migrant workers don't get enough sleep, and the consequences can be serious.

A 2010 study by a research team at West Virginia's Faculty of Medicine, published in the journal *"Sleep"*, analysed data from over 30,000 Americans. It found that people generally need about seven hours sleep each night. Those who slept less than five hours were at double the risk of having a stroke, heart attack or coronary heart disease.

In the March 2013 editorial of *"Annals"*, journal of the Singapore Academy of Medicine, Professor Michael Chee of the Centre for Cognitive Neuroscience wrote:

"The adverse effects of short sleep are multifaceted. Neurobehavioral effects include failure of sustained attention, reduced information processing capacity, impaired memory consolidation, emotional dysregulation and altered decision-making. Short sleep is associated with increased all-cause mortality, adverse cardio-vascular outcomes, as well as negative effects on glucose metabolism and an increased propensity to gain weight. Sleepiness increases the risk of transport, medical and industrial accidents. The economic cost of productivity loss and work-related events secondary to sleep loss runs into billions of dollars."

In a subsequent interview, he advised that adults should get seven to 7 ½ hours sleep: at the very least, it should be six, although this would still affect the performance of the majority. (Salma Khalik, *"Lack of sleep is nothing to yawn about"*, *"Straits Times"*, 20th May 2013)

More recently, Professor Chee warned that people in their 30s and 40s who did not get enough sleep could find themselves with dementia when they are in their 60s, citing growing evidence that sleep is needed to clear "junk" – the protein beta amyloid – from the brain. (Salma Khalik, *"Not enough sleep? Beware of dementia"*, *"Straits Times"*, 14th October 2015) In this interview, he associated peak performance with having around seven hours of sleep a night.

Many migrant workers don't get seven full hours of sleep each night: some of the consequences are obvious; others, revealed by considerable research and alluded to above, may only be revealed in years to come, after workers have returned to their countries of origin.

Migrant workers typically have long working days. Men working on a construction site who are housed at some distance from it may not only be undertaking a 12-hour day of physical work, but travelling or waiting for transport for an hour either side of that working day. Around that, they need to fit breakfast, showering, an evening meal and any personal work they have to attend to, and many feel they need at least a little time to talk and for recreation before they sleep. Sometimes they work more than the legal overtime permitted, and this makes them more tired.

It seems clear, in TWC2's experience, that over-tiredness is a factor in weakening the attentiveness of workers to their own safety, thus exacerbating Singapore's industrial injury problems.

Domestic workers in Singapore typically have to be available to work – on call to their employers, if not actually working – for around 15 ½ hours a day. For many, it is worse: their employers expect them to wait on them until late in the evening, and then be up in time to get their children ready for school and sometimes to wash a car too. Women in this situation regularly have less than seven hours' sleep each night.

Tiredness reduces the work capability of these domestic workers, and sometimes their employers complain about their attitude towards their work and even accuse them of being lazy, when the solution is in the employers' hands: make sure they are well fed and rested.

Rest and sleep are not the same thing. A person can cease working and take it easy without going to sleep, and normally needs to do so at two or three times during a normal working day. Normally, people need to wind down after working before they try to get to sleep, and pre-sleep relaxation makes a difference to how easily they fall asleep.

It would therefore seem reasonable to argue that people need at least eight hours of rest a day, including seven hours sleep.

Employers ought to recognize that, but in cases when they do not, the law should protect workers' right to rest.

The Employment Act, which covers most migrant workers employed in Singapore as well as locals, does not assert a right to rest as such, but sets limits on working hours, providing for weekly rest days and capping the normal working week at 44 hours. It

allows for overtime work, but limits that to 72 hours a month. That would work out at roughly three hours more work a day for workers working a six day week, and less for workers who work on Sundays, and therefore should allow adequate time for workers to relax and rest. In practice, many workers work much longer hours, and most probably do so willingly since they need the money. Even if they were aware of the threats to their health, they might feel that they just have to bear with them.

Domestic workers are not covered by the Employment Act. Under their work permit conditions, their employer is obliged to “grant the foreign employee...adequate rest daily”. In the past, TWC2 criticised the general terms in which some work permit protections were couched, and the Ministry of Manpower now offers some guidance on its website to employers about what constitutes sufficient food, but it does not provide similar advice about what it considers to be “adequate daily rest”.

Evidently, for workers in construction, shipyards and other sectors covered by the Employment Act, a more rigorous enforcement of the limits on working hours set forth in the Employment Act is needed, but this should go hand in hand with efforts to slash the burden of recruitment costs and raise basic pay, so that workers become more strongly motivated not to connive in a work practice that can seriously damage their health.

For domestic workers, from all that has been written above, it would seem that the Ministry of Manpower should advise employers that domestic workers should have a daily rest period of no less than 8 consecutive hours, and, to go further, that domestic workers should not be expected to work longer hours than the maximum specified for other workers in the Employment Act.

John Gee

International Status of the Right to Rest

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 24.

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

(The UDHR does not establish binding obligations, but asserts fundamental rights)

International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights

Article 7 of the ICESCR says: “The State Parties to the Present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work which ensure, in particular:

...

(d) Rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay, as well as remuneration for public holidays.”

What Parties Said About Migrant Workers in the General Election

As an independent society, not affiliated with any political party, TWC2 did not make any statements before the recent General Election in support of or against any of the parties taking part. However, the society was concerned that, given some of the controversies over the role of foreigners in Singapore, there might be attempts to capitalise on certain popular anti-foreigner sentiments for political advantage, which could worsen the position of migrant workers.

In the event, all parties raised the question of foreigners in Singapore, but to different degrees. A common thread was “We are not opposed to foreigners coming to work in Singapore; it is a question of how many and whether they put Singaporeans out of work.” This mainly applies to highly paid professionals; there is a general recognition that there are jobs Singaporeans don’t want to do, and certainly not at anything like the salaries paid to migrant workers. All embraced the view, to one degree or another, that curbs on the numbers of migrant workers allowed into Singapore were desirable, and the general implication was that the curbs should be tighter, to the extent that it is feasible.

In contrast, there was virtually no discussion around the rights and treatment of migrant workers.

There were differences though and perhaps a fair and relatively non-controversial way to illustrate them is to let the parties speak for themselves. Eight out of nine parties delivered broadcast statements on 3rd September, and so quoting from what they said then, on the same occasion, is perhaps a fairer indication of their positions than a more haphazard selection of quotations from election rallies and leaflets might be. The broadcasts made a week later, on 10th September, hardly touch on migrant workers, but an exception was perhaps the most positive reference to migrant workers during the elections, by Paul

Tambyah.

The order of the parties here is by number of seats contested. The parties mainly speak for themselves, but one called for comment.

People's Action Party

Lee Hsien Loong, speaking as the PAP's Secretary-General, speaking of the government's record, said, *"We moderated the inflow of foreign workers, and tightened rules on fair employment to ensure a level playing field for Singaporeans."*

Workers' Party

Daniel Goh, President of the WP's Youth Wing, said, *"Before 2011, the ruling party cruised along with policies that led to escalating costs of living, employment and retirement insecurity, and strained infrastructure due to runaway immigration",* which, in the minds of his listeners, would probably usually be taken to include the arrival of larger numbers of migrant workers, as well as immigrants.

National Solidarity Party

Lim Tean, Secretary General of the NSP, said, *"Singaporeans are denied the right to a minimum wage, but cheap foreign labour is allowed in large numbers. Singaporeans are told there is little that Government can do when they lose their lower- and middle-income jobs to foreigners."* Later, Lim Tean referred to the outgoing government as, *"A Government that is happy to find a foreigner a job but does little to help the Singaporean keep his job."*

Singapore Democratic Party

Chee Soon-Juan, Secretary-General of the SDP said, *"...we want a people healthy and happy, not an island overcrowded with unqualified foreigners competing with us for jobs."*

To this end, the SDP will push for policies where employers give priority to Singaporeans when it comes to hiring."

Reform Party

Kenneth Jayaretnam, Secretary-General of the RP, said of the outgoing government, *"They only know how to ask you to be self-reliant and tough, to put up with a bad job, to go without. In truth, they only have one idea: to bring in cheaper and cheaper foreign labour to generate economic growth."*

This in turn drives your wages down and puts a squeeze on every aspect of our society."

Later, in setting out RP policies, he says the RP wants *"a cap on foreign worker numbers."*

Singaporeans First

SF Secretary-General Tan Jee Say devoted far more of his speech to foreigner employment than any other speaker whereas others gave the questions a sentence or two, he gave over more than half of his speech (five paragraphs out of nine in the printed version) to this:

"A year ago, a group of us Singaporeans got together to form a new political party called Singaporeans First. We were concerned that government policies have deprived Singaporeans of their rightful place in their own country."

Our people are unhappy. Social tension is high. The fundamental cause is the massive influx of foreign workers. This is the direct result of the PAP's economic strategy of "growth at all costs". The huge influx of foreign workers has broken families, taken away jobs and space from Singaporeans, and shattered their self-esteem."

We are not anti-foreigners. We recognize that foreigners play an important role in the economy. But we do not want any Tom, Dick or Harry to come in with ease and in such big numbers. Current policy opens the doors so wide that they come in huge numbers when our infrastructure is not ready to accommodate them, like housing, public transport, schools, public parks."

In the past 10 years, more than one million foreign workers have been allowed to come into Singapore, or an average of 100,000 a year. As a result, house prices have shot up, public transport breaks down frequently and space for Singaporeans has been intruded. Social relations have also been strained."

This is irresponsible. We are for responsible immigration. In our pursuit of economic growth, we must be fair to Singaporeans and

not discriminate against them in terms of job placement, wage levels and space. We make no apology that we are advocating priority to Singaporeans: every country gives priority to its citizens except Singapore.”

This statement seems like an exceptionally negative one as far as migrant workers are concerned, littered as it is with unsubstantiated claims (Where is the evidence for families being “broken” by the influx of foreign workers?), illogicality (Foreign workers are said to have been allowed in in “huge numbers” before there was the infrastructure to accommodate them, but who creates Singapore’s infrastructure, to the benefit of all, if not foreign workers?) and victimology (Throughout, Singaporeans are represented as disadvantaged vis-à-vis foreign workers, when any objective survey of the system of migrant worker employment would show that the law does indeed advantage citizens over non-citizens in matters such as job security, security of residence, pay, work conditions, insurance, accommodation and access to justice).

Singapore People’s Party

Lina Chiam, Chairman of the SPP, said, *“We have become more insecure because we might lose our jobs to foreigners, despite all our hard work in school and after graduation.”* She refers to “work permit rules” later, but only goes onto talk about professionals on Employment Passes, saying the qualifying rate is currently too low and should be raised.

Singapore Democratic Alliance

Referring to the White Paper that suggested Singapore’s population would rise to 6.9 million, Harminder Singh Pal, Chief media officer, said, *“Now, we are not against the high-end foreign talents and investors that help to improve our economy; nor the low-end foreign workers; but we are against those who are taking over the jobs of Singaporeans.”*

The **People’s Power Party** did not make a broadcast on 3rd September.

In broadcasts at the conclusion of campaigning, on 10th September, foreign workers and professionals were hardly alluded to at all, apart from one forthright statement from Paul Tambyah of the SDP, in calling for a “democratic society based on justice and equality”, when he says, in part:

“Equality means a national minimum wage for all workers local or foreign, so migrant workers are not exploited and local workers are not afraid of being replaced by cheaper, less skilled workers.”

John Gee

Migrant Workers Convention

The 25th anniversary of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW) was marked at a ceremony at the United Nations headquarters in New York on 30th June. It was called a “celebration”, but the pace at which it has won support has been disappointingly slow. Almost all the states that have so far ratified the convention have been countries of origin of migrant workers. The problems were reflected in the speech given by François Crepeau, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants: the introductory paragraph has been omitted.

Throughout my mandate, I have called for the ratification of the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of their Families*. While encouraging the ratification of CMW, I have also often stressed that all the other human rights treaties also apply to migrants, whatever their status, including migrants in an irregular situation. In that sense, the ratification of the CMW is similar to that of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: the latter does not mean that the human rights of women are not included in other human rights treaties. As much as CEDAW is a recognition of the particular vulnerabilities of women, CMW focuses on the particular precariousness of migrant workers and their families and the need to provide them with guarantees and protection.

However, many states remain reluctant to ratify the CMW. To my mind, this is because migrants do not have access to the political stage. Migrants do not vote. Political leaders are not interested in protecting or fighting for the rights of migrants as they do not form part of the electorate. In fact, over the past year, elections in Europe have shown that, in order to be successfully elected, you must engage in migrant-bashing. The current political discourse in Europe seems to be one in which political parties try to out-do each other by being “tough on migration”. The party that comes up with the strongest anti-migrant discourse or policies wins the most votes and another term in office. There is no electoral advantage for politicians in affirming the need to protect the rights of migrants: in fact, to do so may often equate to political suicide.

Women’s rights were only taken seriously when women won the right to vote and could thenceforth electorally reward or punish politicians. In the same way, the situation of migrants will only really change when they gain the right to vote. We see this on the American electoral stage: as there’s a significant Mexican-American community who votes and who also cares about the fate of the undocumented Mexican population living in the USA, we see politicians actually trying to change migration policies in

order to respond to the need of this undocumented population, for example with projects to regularise the DREAMers - a term for people who came into the United States undocumented as children- and many more.

Until such time that migrants can vote and CMW be ratified, all those who can carry the voice of the migrants should go the extra mile to make it audible. Civil society organisations, trade unions, lawyers, social workers, labour inspectors, police officers, and all the other actors who interact daily with hardworking and law-abiding undocumented migrant workers should work together to allow their voice to be heard and help create legal avenues which will empower migrants to fight for their own rights, without fear of being arrested, detained or deported for doing so.

Migrants should have facilitated access to courts, administrative tribunals, labour dispute resolution mechanisms, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons, without difficulty, in order to ensure the implementation of their rights.

I've also been calling on States to implement "firewalls" between public services and immigration enforcement, in order to avoid that the former be enlisted as auxiliaries of the latter and that their mission be interfered with due to immigration control considerations. Immigration enforcement authorities should be provided for and well trained, including on human rights issues. But irregular migrants should be able to access health care, education, local police, social services, health and safety inspection, and labour inspection, to name only a few, without risking being reported to immigration enforcement authorities.

It has taken 25 years to get 48 ratifications to the Convention and it may take just as long to get 100 ratifications. While pushing for the long term goal of more ratifications, we should also address the issue of protecting migrants in the short term by ensuring access to justice and access to public services for migrants, through the use of the international human rights instruments which countries have ratified.



Anti-Trafficking Review: Forced Labour and Trafficking

“Anti-Trafficking Review” promotes a human rights-based approach to combatting trafficking. Issue No. 5 is now out. It is on Forced Labour and Human Trafficking. This is what the ATR website says about this issue:

Human trafficking is now associated, and sometimes used interchangeably, with slavery and forced labour. Why does this matter?

As this issue highlights, this shift in how we use these terms has real consequences in terms of legal and policy responses to exploitation.

Authors in this issue- both academics and practitioners - review how the global community is addressing forced labour and trafficking. In 2014 governments across the globe committed to combat forced labour through a new international agreement, the ILO Forced Labour Protocol. Assessing recent efforts and discourse, the thematic issue looks at unions struggling to champion the protection of migrants' labour rights, and at governments fighting legal battles with corporations over enactment of supply chain disclosure laws. At the same time, many of the issue's authors show how regressive policies, such as the *Kafala* system of 'tied' visas for lower paid workers, are eroding these rights.

With case studies from diverse regions and countries including Southeast Asia, Brazil, India, Italy, the United Kingdom and United States of America, this issue features a mix of academic articles, a new 'policy and practice' section, as well as short debate pieces which respond to the question: *Should we distinguish between forced labour, trafficking and slavery?*

[See Complete Issue in PDF](#)



Treat a migrant worker to a nice meal at our 2015 annual benefit dinner

Lunch with Heart

For enquiries:
Please email info@twc2.org.sg or call Christine Scully at 62477001, weekdays 9.30am to 6.30pm

Sunday, 13 Dec 2015
11AM - 3PM
@Kebabs n Curries



A registered Charity



What's for Lunch

Venue: Kebabs n Curries
Level 7, Mustafa Centre,
171 Syed Alwi Rd

- 10-course buffet, Indian cosmopolitan dishes.
- Lucky draw, games and performances!

Your Money Helps

Our services for destitute foreign workers:

- Free daily meals.
- Medical assistance.
- Shelter for the injured.
- Subsidized transport to hospital.
- To find out more details please visit our website at: www.twc2.org.sg

Tickets - \$80 each

In the spirit of IMD:
•Buy extra tickets and donate them back to treat workers to a nice lunch.

•If you can't be there let us have your ticket for use by a foreign worker.

To book tickets:
•Make cheque out to "Transient Workers Count Too"

On the rear of the cheque please write:
•"Lunch with Heart"
•Contact details
•No. of tickets for self
•No. of tickets donated

Mail to us @
5001 Beach Rd, 09-86
Golden Mile Complex
S199588

LOG ONTO OUR WEBSITE www.twc2.org.sg AND JOIN OUR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR UP-TO-DATE NEWS, EVENTS AND FEATURES, AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COMMUNITY OF MIGRANT WORKER ADVOCATES.

TO HELP ENSURE TWC2 CONTINUES ITS WORK TO RAISE AWARENESS AND IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS, PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING OUR WORK THROUGH A DONATION. YOU COULD SEND A CHEQUE, DO A BANK TRANSFER (details below), or LOG ON TO THE WEBSITE and donate through the fundraising portals sggives.org or give.sg.

Account name: Transient Workers Count Too
Bank: DBS Bank Ltd Singapore, 12 Marina Boulevard, Marina Bay Financial Centre, Tower 3, Singapore 018982
Type: Current Account
Number: 006-900625-0
Bank code: 7171
Swift Code: DBSSSGSG

If paying in US\$ from overseas, provide details of DBS agent bank as follows: Pay to Bank of New York Mellon, New York (SWIFT address: IRVTUS3N) FED ABA: 021000018. For account of: DBS Bank Ltd, Singapore (SWIFT address: DBSSSGSG)

IF YOU WISH TO CEASE RECEIVING THE TWC2 NEWSLETTER, PLEASE EMAIL THE PHRASE "Unsubscribe TWC2 Newsletter" TO info@twc2.org.sg FROM THE EMAIL ADDRESS TO WHICH WE SENT IT

