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MIGRANT WORKERS Alliance for Change

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Food Sector Ban Punishes Migrant Workers for Employer Abuse and Government Failure

Toronto – The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC), Canada's largest coalition of migrant worker groups and allies, is calling for immediate changes to the moratorium imposed on temporary foreign workers (TFW) in the food industry. A moratorium is not the solution. Migrant workers need a just transition to a permanent immigration system in 'low-skilled' industries rather than being blamed for government mistakes. MWAC calls on the Federal government to:

· Process pending and in-country Labour Market Opinions and Work Permit applications for migrant workers; and

· Develop a just transition mechanism into permanent residency for migrants already in Canada, along with future immigrants in the low-wage, 'low-skilled' sectors

"The media is full of stories of migrant worker exploitation, but this moratorium won't end the abuse it will just make workers more precarious," insists Senthil Thevar, who came to Canada as a Temporary Foreign Worker in the food sector and was forced to switch jobs because of workers rights violations.

"A moratorium on TFWs is the wrong way to go. Migrant workers in Canada awaiting a decision on their LMOs and work permits will suffer immensely. Those trying to leave

abusive employers will be locked in," says migrant worker advocate Chris Ramsaroop from Justicia for Migrant Workers. "Those who have paid thousands of dollars to recruiters abroad to apply for jobs here risk losing their life savings. They should not have to pay the price of long-standing flaws in the immigration system. That's basic fairness."

Vinay Sharma, Human Rights Director for UNIFOR, Canada's largest private sector labour union adds, "We can't just get rid of workers that are already here. Migrant workers in Canada need full immigration status. That's the critical step. Right now the moratorium should exclude in-country and pending applications."

"Recent reports expose how provincial and federal laws exclude migrants from basic workplace protections. The solution is to change those two-tiered laws that create conditions of lowered wages and working conditions and that pit migrant workers against unemployed or under-employed citizens," adds Syed Hussan of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. "In the long-run, we need to return to an immigration system that gives access to permanent status to migrants in low-skilled industries."

 "Workers across Canada are facing precarious, low-wage jobs and tough economic times," added Deena Ladd from the Workers Action Centre. "Let's not repeat history's mistakes of blaming immigrants for unemployment in times of economic downturn. We need a decent job agenda that raises standards for all workers, not an arbitrary exclusion of migrant workers."

Key facts

· 44,000 migrant workers entered Canada in the food and accommodation sector in 2012.

· The actual number of migrant workers in Canada in the food sector is not currently known – but all of those workers are now unable to switch jobs within the sector leaving them vulnerable to employer abuse.

· Canada has no pathway for low-skilled immigrants to come here permanently. A moratorium on the TFWP should only happen after such a pathway has been developed – otherwise it will result in mass deportation.

· There is no inter-provincial or Canada wide ban on charging migrant workers recruitment fees. Thus recruiters charge migrant workers upwards of two-years' of salaries in home countries to find jobs in Canada. See this report for more.

Migrant Workers Alliance for Change includes Asian Community AIDS Services, Caregivers Action Centre, Justicia for Migrant Workers, Legal Assistance of Windsor, Migrante-Ontario, No One Is Illegal-Toronto, Parkdale Community Legal Services, Social Planning Toronto, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, UNIFOR, United Food and Commercial Workers, and Workers Action Centre. www.migrantworkersalliance.org

MWAC is seeking allied organizations to echo our demands, please get in touch with us if your organizations wants to issue a

statement.

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