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Tales of Survival:

Migrant Domestic Workers' Stories in Their Own Words

The dreams of Indonesian migrant domestic workers and their families are simple: seeking their fortune to improve the family economy and to enjoy a better standard of living. Yet, they must endure a long and difficult journey to try to realize their dreams, and for some, the dream turns into a nightmare.

Some Indonesian migrant domestic workers return home injured and traumatized by horrific experiences of rape, abuse, violence and entrapment in war-zones. Some return in a coffin, killed by violent employers or struck down by disease or accidents. Their grieving families are left with enduring feelings of strong guilt and regret, and they face an future with sorrow and deprivation without the main breadwinner of the family. Parents who have lost their children, husbands who have lost their wives and children who have lost their mothers.

These are the stories of Indonesian migrant domestic workers and their families whose realities turn out to be far removed from their dreams. Their stories have become familiar to us through TV screens and newspaper headlines over the last few years. But in spite of the hardships and unbearable suffering they have endured, they refuse to be defeated, and they continue to speak out publicly for the sake of saving other migrant domestic workers from the same fate.

Their stories speak volumes of immense courage, endurance and ingenuity in the face of extreme danger. And they are a testimony to the enduring faith of migrant domestic workers and their families that one day, in spite of set backs, they will succeed in achieving their dreams. ✱

The Story of Cassina **Trapped** in the **Midst of War**

LIKE most of her peers in Subang, West Java, Cassina had a strong desire to lift her family out of poverty as it had had a debilitating effect on them since her marriage in 1996. Her husband's daily income as an ojek driver was insufficient to cover their daily needs and pay for their ten year-old son's monthly school tuition fees. Having heard success stories about her fellow villagers working in Malaysia and Middle East, she decided that she wanted to work in Abu Dhabi.

With the help of a local labor middleman, Cassina was recruited

by labor supply company PT Delta Rona Adiguna. The recruitment agency required her to pay Rp 3 million but did not give her any training before she departed to Abu Dhabi at the end of January 2007. She entered Abu Dhabi on a tourist visa and spent almost two months in the dormitory of a foreign labor agency before being employed as a housemaid at a big family with a salary of US\$200 a month.

After working for a month, Cassina felt unhappy with her employer's nine member family, as they were treating her poorly and kept her working for more than 12 hours a day. "In reality it was slavery, rather than work. When my employer turned down my resignation request, I ran away from the house one night and went to my agent asking for other employment. My agent was furious and detained me in an isolated room without any meals for two days," she said, adding that she was not paid for the two months she had worked for her employer.

When her agent finally agreed to find her other foreign employment in another city, she was then, along with several other migrant workers from Bangladesh, the Philippines and Indonesia, flown to another country, the name of which the agency kept a secret. "Several times I asked the name of our destination, but instead I was told that we would soon arrive in a country where we would be paid well," she said.

After landing at an airport in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Northern-most province of Iraq, Cassina and her fellow migrant workers were housed in a dormitory where many other Indonesian migrant workers were also waiting to be deployed. At the start of her second month at the dormitory, she was deployed to a big Iraqi family with the promise of a monthly payment of US\$200.

While waiting for a job at the dormitory, she was afraid to go outside, as she saw many foreign soldiers and heard bomb explosions almost every day. "You will never get out of here because this country is torn by a bloody war. We are in Iraq. It is impossible for you to go back home, instead you have to stay and work," she quoted Elly, a fellow worker from Lampung, as saying.

After working for three months she told her employer that she wanted to resign because she was unable to work for more than 15 hours a day. When she went back to her agency, the agency urged her to continue working and to honor her two-year labor contract for which the agency had received US\$4,000. She was then brought back to the dormitory.

One night her fellow worker, Elli, asked her to escape from the dormitory and they went to the local office of an international organization to seek help. The staff told them that they were unable

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to help them to go back home, unless they had their own passport and working visa. However, these documents were kept by their placement agency.

They stayed at a closed shopping mall for several nights before they were eventually found by their placement agency staff and brought back to the dormitory. "By then Elli and I were both in a bad condition. I could hardly speak because of a lung infection, while Elli suffered as a result of complications from an earlier breast cancer operation," she said. In spite of their health problems, the agency staff beat up both of them repeatedly as punishment for escaping.

After one week of such maltreatment in the dormitory, Cassina had no alternative than to accept working for a new employer, an Iraqi official, Husein Jabari, who promised to pay her US\$200 a month. The employer's residence was guarded by Iraqi soldiers 24 hours a day because of the poor security situation in the city.

I am still receiving regular therapy at the hospital... I wish to stay here to raise my son, and I am now expecting my second child.

One day, she got a chance to contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta to ask for immediate assistance, but one of the senior officials instead told her to escape on her own, saying that there was little that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could do to help her in the war-zone. She then managed to make phone contact with the Indonesian Embassy in

Amman, Jordan, and talked with embassy staff there who promised to help her and asked her to remain calm.

With help from the Indonesian Embassy in Jordan and Migrant Care in Jakarta, who hired a volunteer named Usman in Iraqi Kurdistan, she traveled from Iraq to Jordan and from there she flew back to Jakarta. On her arrival at the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, she was brought to the National Police General Hospital in East Jakarta for treatment of her stomach problems and psychological traumas.

"I am still receiving regular therapy at the hospital," she said, adding that she has vowed that she would never go abroad again to work. Her mother died while she was working overseas in 2004 and her father died 40 days before she arrived home. "I wish to stay here to raise my son, and I am now expecting my second child," she said. ✨

The Story of Siti Tarwiyah **Beaten to Death** in Saudi Arabia: Blood Money Is All That Remains of a Mother's Love

"THEY abused all the migrant domestic workers working in the house, not only Tarwiyah," said Hamid, a 39-year old resident of Macanan village, Jogorogo district, Ngawi regency, East Java, while his daughter plays at his feet. The employer's family consisted of four married children who had offspring of their own. The four families lived together in a two-story house and employed four migrant domestic workers: Tarwiyah, Susmiati, Rumini and Tari.

As a result, Tarwiyah and Susmiati were hospitalized in a critical condition, while Rumini and Tari were sent to jail for witchcraft, although severely injured. "A migrant worker who had just been deported back to Indonesia told me that Tarmiyah was hospitalized in a serious condition," Hamid said. "She was imprisoned in the same jail as Rumini and Tari, and from them heard about the critical condition of Tarwiyah and Susmiati." In spite of their severe injuries, Rumini and Tari

Jakarta, but they said my wife was okay," he said.

Not satisfied with the answer, Hamid, accompanied by a Migrant Care officer, went to Jakarta. He visited several government institutions, such as the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Board for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI). He was informed that his wife had passed away while in hospital. "My wife



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During the investigations, the Saudi Arabian employers accused the migrant domestic workers of witchcraft, and claimed that they beat them up and tortured them in order to punish them and exorcise their evil spirits. Tarwiyah was then locked up in a room on the first floor along with Susmiati, while the remaining two migrant domestic workers, Rumini and Tari were confined in a room on the second floor of the house. A member of the family seemingly felt sorry after seeing the condition of the domestic workers after the torture and urged the family to take them to the hospital.

had been caned 150 times before being deported, just like all other migrant workers that were held in the prison.

Hamid said that the deported migrant worker also reported the condition of Tarwiyah and Susmiati to Migrant Care. The organization then sought information about them and discovered that the two workers had died after a few days in the hospital. "An officer from Migrant Care visited my house and told me that my wife had had an accident. I contacted the employment agency, PT Prima in

passed away and Susmiati died two days later," he said.

Hamid remembered his wife asking for his permission to go overseas to work as a migrant domestic worker three years ago. "She wanted to renovate our house. She wanted to improve the economy of our family," he explained. Many of their neighbors who worked as domestic workers in the Middle East earned a good living there. Tarwiyah's mother then gave her Rp. 1 million to finance her plan. "I did not have any money. I am just a blue collar worker," he said.

When Tarwiyah left home to work overseas as a migrant domestic worker, her daughter was two years old. She asked Hamid to take care of their daughter. "She once phoned me to ask me to take care of her and to fulfill my daughter's needs," he said. After working for three months, Tarwiyah sent Rp. 3 million home. "That's all the money she ever sent home," Hamid said.

Following the death of his wife, he received an insurance payout of Rp. 40 million and condolence money from various institutions amounting to Rp. 35 million. Six months after the burial of his wife, Hamid was approached by a representative of her former Saudi employer. The man, a resident of Jember, said that the employer was prepared to give Hamid "blood money", a traditional Saudi means of compensation, of Rp. 400 million if he was prepared to forgive the employer who was being tried for his wife's murder in court in Saudi Arabia. This forgiveness in writing was a requirement for the employer to get a light sentence by the courts in Saudi Arabia.

"I was confused at that time. Migrant Care had told me that the money would be processed later. For me, the important thing was to return the body of Tarwiyah and to take care of it. Migrant Care did not know that I was approached by the man. I agreed to forgive Tarwiyah's former employers, but only on the condition that the two other domestic workers, Rumini and Tari, who were still in jail, would be released and returned home," he said.

Hamid and the man then went to an Indonesian court to seek a letter stating that he was

the husband of Tarwiyah. The letter was then translated into Arabic. "Once the two domestic workers, Rumini and Tari, had been released and returned home, I signed the statement of

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I am still so traumatized. I can not forget my late wife. Her body was covered in wounds as a result of regular caning," recalled Hamid, the husband of Siti Tarwiyah who died in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, three years ago. Her body was bruised everywhere because members of the employers family used to smash her up against walls. She was only 32 years old when she died.

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forgiveness and accepted the "blood money"." Hamid spent some of the money on religious alms and a donation on behalf of his late wife. He also gave his mother-in-law Rp. 100 million and the representative of the employer Rp. 25 million. He used most of the

"blood money" to buy a palm oil plantation and some dry land.

"It is for the future of our daughter, for her education. I do not want my daughter to become a migrant worker like her mother," he said, adding that he was only an elementary school graduate while Tarwiyah a junior high school graduate.

When he eventually told Migrant Care that he had received the "blood money" in return for granting forgiveness to his wife's former employers, the organization informed him that he was, in fact, entitled to a compensation of more than Rp. 1 billion. "I could have demanded much more than what I received. But at the time, I knew nothing. Yet, money is not everything. It did not bring my wife back. If you see my home, it is still the same. I am still traumatized. I haven't gotten married again although it has been three years," Hamid said while hugging his little daughter.

To avoid further losses to the victims of abuse, Hamid suggested that the government should inform families of migrant workers about their rights when losing their loved ones overseas. "I did not know about the "blood money", and neither do most other families of migrant workers."

He also suggested that the government should provide scholarships for children of migrant workers in order to relieve the hardship of their families. "My daughter will grow up without ever seeing her mother again. Yet, at least I now have money to pay for her education. Many other families who have lost loved ones overseas have received nothing." ✨

The Story of Elli Anita

Resilience in the Face of Adversity

ELLI Anita is the third daughter of a family who joined the government-sponsored resettlement program from Jember in East Java to Bandar Lampung, Sumatra, when she was 18 years old. She holds an elementary school level leaving certificate and was expected to work on the family farm. However, after listening to the stories of fellow villagers, she was keen to work overseas as a domestic worker and see other countries.

Elli was sponsored by the recruitment agency PT Karya Manpower Swakarsa in Jakarta. She was certified as baby sitter

after undergoing three months of training and was first employed as a migrant domestic worker with a Malaysian family in Kuala Lumpur in 1997, receiving a monthly salary of 500 Malaysian ringgit. "I often had to work ten hours a day and, in general, my employer paid me on time every month. Yet, when I worked less than seven hours a day, my employer was late with the payment," she said.

After two years and two months Elli returned home in 1999. She stayed at home for one month and then departed for Hong Kong to take up a similar job with a family who had a saloon business. Her labor contract stipulated that her monthly salary was HK\$3,670. "In reality, my employer only paid me HK\$2,000 and I was only given one day off a month, although the labor law in Hong Kong stipulates that workers, including housemaids, are entitled to have one day off every week," she said, adding that she learnt about this from the booklet of employment regulations which her employer gave her.

She continued to work for nine months while documenting the employment violations undertaken by her employer. She planned to report the violations to the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong, but when she met with Philippine migrant workers, they instead advised her to seek advice and support at Christian Action for Domestic Helpers — a nongovernmental organization which provides assistance to

migrant workers. After learning there how to seek a settlement with her employer, she submitted a legal complaint to the relevant Hong Kong authorities.

"I got a full support from cleaning service workers who testified that I was employed as saloon worker and had to work more than ten hours a day. I was then released from my contract and my employer was ordered to pay me HK\$30,000 in compensation," she exclaimed. After winning her case, Elli returned home in 2002.

After a while, Elli decided to work in Hong Kong again through another recruitment agency, attracted by the more attractive employment conditions there. She was employed to take care of an elderly man who was suffering from stress. After working there for six months, however, she could not endure the work pressure any longer and decided to resign, in spite of the objections of her employer and the employment agency. Through mediation by the local labour authorities, Elli received the salary for her final month and got a plane ticket home. Again, she returned to her family home in Bandar Lampung.

Despite these negative work experiences, Elli still wanted to work overseas as a migrant domestic worker. This time, she used the services of a recruitment agency in her home town to go to Bahrain to work for a family of nine. However, it soon became clear that her employer expected

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her to work excessive hours from very early morning till very late night for the large family. Even worse, the eldest son of the household continuously harassed her sexually. After receiving her salary for the third work month, she decided to leave her employer and looked up information on employment opportunities in the city.

Elli applied for a job in a Starbucks outlet belonging to a German citizen and was hired with a monthly salary of US\$500. While working there as an attendant, she was sued by her former employer who had paid a local agency US\$5,000 to hire her. She won the case after documenting to the Bahrain District Court that she was exploited by her former employer.

"I enjoyed working at Starbucks for two years for a higher salary and I was also given a week-long holiday to Jordan with a return plane ticket, hotel and pocket money. Unfortunately, while on holiday, my German employer had to return to his home country," she said, adding that she then went back to her family home in Indonesia.

This time, Elli only stayed at home for two months. "I was bored because I was doing nothing while most of my peers were working overseas," she said. Early in 2009, she went to work in Dubai through an agency in Jakarta. She was employed as a secretary in a foreign labor agency in Dubai using falsified documents. She only worked there for three weeks, as her boss tried to rape her several times. She reported the attacks to her agency and they found her new employment as a domestic worker with an Iraqi official in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"My employer introduced himself as Shamal Abdullah and he paid me US\$300 a month. He had a big house with many bodyguards in a town called Selemania. I was aware that I was in war-torn Iraq and I felt very insecure because I heard many bombs go off, as well as shooting by the bodyguards and the Iraqi police."

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Upon our arrival
at the airport, the
Government gave us
a red carpet welcome,
led by the Minister
of Foreign Affairs
and the Minister of
Manpower.*

After working for three months, Elli succeeded in accessing the internet and getting the phone numbers of the Indonesian Embassies in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as of the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. However, before she had a chance to call them, she was hospitalized and underwent surgery for breast cancer with the hospital expenses covered by her employer.

"During my stay at the district hospital, I had a chance to make calls on my cellular phone to the embassy and the Foreign Ministry to let them know that I was trapped in Iraqi Kurdistan. I spoke many times with a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He said that he was not able to help me in the Iraqi war zone and told me to get out of Kurdistan. However, I realized I was not able to travel anywhere because of the war," she said.

Elli then filed a complaint with her agency in Dubai, however they insisted that she should honor the

labor contract she signed with the agency in Iraqi Kurdistan. After two weeks of intensive medical treatment, she returned to her work place, but on the advice that she should not work too hard. She continued to work for another six months before her agent placed her at a dormitory house where she met many other migrant domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia.

Elli refused to give up and continued to try to find ways to get her and other Indonesian migrant workers out of Iraq. With the help of an international organization, she finally succeeded in organizing transport for herself and her fellow Indonesian migrant workers back to Indonesia. "We were allowed to go back home for humanitarian reasons because we were suffering from various serious medical conditions," she said.

Along with an Indonesian migrant domestic worker from East Nusa Tenggara, Elli arrived in Indonesia in November 2009. "Upon our arrival at the airport, the Government gave us a red carpet welcome, led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Manpower" she said. During the meeting, she expressed her disappointment to the Government representatives that the Indonesian government had taken no action to rescue the Indonesian migrant workers from the Iraqi war zone.

To this day, Elli is not keen to work overseas again. She is still traumatized by the many hardships and troubles which she encountered during her years of employment as an overseas migrant domestic worker. ✱

SUPARMO, 47 years old, still cannot forget his wife's condition. Her teeth were broken. Her backbone was fractured. She had bruises and stab wounds on her face and body. His wife's name was Munti. She was only 36 years old and was in a coma. "I couldn't believe that she could still be alive with all those severe injuries," Suparmo recalled. "She had been severely tortured by her employers."

Munti, a resident of Probolinggo, East Java, went to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, four years ago to work as a migrant domestic worker. But her first employer often beat her, so she moved to a new job. However, she never told her husband about the job change.

Trying to maintain regular contact, Suparmo had sent eight letters with no reply. He did not know that Munti never received the letters as they were confiscated by her employer. When Munti finally found her husband's letters in a drawer, she contacted him. She told Suparmo that her first employer often beat her. "I asked her if I should sue the employer. She forbade me to do so, saying that if I did, she would never get her outstanding salary."

One day, Munti telephoned Suparmo, asking him to send Rp. 2 million for the processing of a new passport. He sent the money to an account named Krisnamurti. She then asked for another Rp. 4 million, but Suparmo did not have any more money. Five days later, he was informed that his wife was in hospital. It was reported that she had been tortured by her second employer. She had been locked in a room, without food, by her employer for two days. She was found and rescued by a domestic worker next door.

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Munti passed away on 26 October 2009 after being treated at Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital, hub Klang, Selangor, for six days. Doctors said her death was caused by severe injuries to her body, such as a broken backbone, rib and hand, as a result of heavy blows. Munti was believed to have been tortured for long time, judging by her injuries.

The torture of Munti became headline news in newspapers and on television in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Indonesian ambassador in Malaysia visited her in the hospital. The issue of torture was discussed when President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited his counterpart in Kuala Lumpur, last year. "Pak SBY even visited the hospital and asked the state officials to take care of my wife," Suparmo said.

"Legal or illegal, she is an Indonesia citizen," Suparmo quoted the President as saying. The President said that the Indonesian administration should take care of its citizens, regardless of whether they were documented or undocumented.

Suparmo said that the hospital and the Indonesian officials did

The Story of Munti Tortured to Death in Malaysia

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not know the hometown of Munti. "It is a miracle that a person who happened to visit the hospital knew my wife. The man then gave them my address. Officers first visited Jombang regency, East Java, but my home was actually in Jombang village in Probolinggo, East Java. Eventually, they found my home," he said.

Suparmo was then taken to see his wife who was in coma at the hospital. One day after his visit, Munti passed away. "I couldn't stand seeing the condition of my wife. Her injuries were inflicted by people who do not believe in God. Many officials expressed their condolences. During a television interview, Manpower Minister Muhaimin Iskandar even said that he would authorize a condolence payment to me of Rp. 25 million. However, up to now I haven't received anything,," Suparmo said.

So far, he Suparmo has only received Rp. 14 million from Munti's first employer. Whereas, he did not receive anything from her second employer who had beaten her death. Neither did he receive compensation from Munti's insurance, nor from the recruitment company who deployed her abroad. A local newspaper quoted Malaysian Bernama news agency as stating that a migrant worker organization in Malaysia had collected a total of Rp. 28 million from migrant workers to be donated to Munti's family.

"However, I repeat that up to now, I have received nothing. People took advantage of the death of my wife. It was reported that many people gave money but I never received a single rupiah. I hope that her former employer will pay compensation of 150.000 Malaysian ringgit so that I can raise our children. We are poor people. We have to continue to live our life."

Munti had worked abroad for a total of six years, yet she had only been able to send home a total of Rp. 2 million, as most of her salary was never paid by her employers. The legal process against the employer did not really matter to Suparmo. The important matter for him and his family now is how to continue their life.

One of his children is still in a senior high school. "We need money for the education of my son. The money would also be used for my other children." He also hopes migrant workers' organizations and the government will help him getting the unpaid salary and compensation from Munti's former employers. ✨

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The Story of Ceriyati **Escaping** Abuse in Malaysia

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My employer's wife was dissatisfied with my work. Due to my frequent mistakes, she regularly slapped, kicked and beat me, including hitting me on the head.

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CERIYATI Binti Dapin, a 37-year-old mother of a handicapped son, had no other choice but to become a migrant domestic worker in order to supplement the income of her husband Ridwan, who worked as an ojek driver in the Central Java town of Brebes. Despite the long recruitment process and delays in getting employment in Malaysia, she had a strong desire to help her husband cover her son's regular medical costs.

After undergoing job training to become a migrant domestic worker, managed by the employment agent in Jakarta, Ceriyati departed for Kuala Lumpur in 2006. After spending one month waiting for work in



a dormitory belonging to her Malaysian agency, she was hired as a migrant domestic worker by a Malaysian family with a working contract stipulating that she would be paid 450 Malaysian ringgit per month. For the first four months, however, she received only 200 ringgit a month due to deductions to cover her recruitment fee.

Problems developed at work as she was frequently assigned administrative office tasks which were not suited to her skills level because her employer's wife was in the business of selling apartments. "My employer's wife was dissatisfied with my work. Due to my frequent mistakes, she regularly slapped, kicked and beat me, including hitting me on the head," she said.

Ceriyati's female employer rarely gave her more than one meal a day with tap water. Accordingly, Ceriyati's weight dropped drastically due to starvation. After working for four and half months, she told the husband of her employer that she wanted to quit

her job, but he did not have the courage to discuss it with his wife. As Ceriyati was unable to endure her employer's abuse any longer, she made a plan to escape.

"When my female employer went to church, I took many bed spreads and connected them to make a long rope which I tied to a window of the flat. I climbed down from the 14th to the 11th floor while at the same time screaming for help from residents on the lower floors. The residents then asked some firefighters, who happened to be conducting an emergency drill nearby, to help me get down safely using the extendable ladder of the fire truck," she said.

The firefighters brought Ceriyati to the nearby police station to file a legal complaint about her employer's abuse. The police told her placement agency to bring her to the hospital for medical treatment, but the agency staff warned her not to tell the doctors there that her employer had abused her. Eventually, a couple



of Indonesian Embassy officials came to pick her up from the hospital.

In an interview with a labour attache at the Embassy, Ceriyati



told him everything about her employer's abuse and about the threat by the Malaysian placement agency. Subsequently she filed a formal legal complaint with the

Malaysian police, assisted by the Embassy.

In June 2007, Ceriyati returned to Indonesia with the support of the Indonesian Embassy and underwent medical treatment at the General Hospital in Brebes. With the help of the Indonesian government and Migrant Care, Ceriyati, along with her husband and son, returned to Malaysia at the end of June to answer a summon from the Malaysian police. Till this day, Ceriyati has yet to receive any information from the Malaysian police about the status of the criminal case.

With the help of Migrant Care, Ceriyati eventually received five months salary from her former employer, Rp. 40 million in compensation from the government-appointed insurance company that provides cover for

migrant domestic workers, Rp. 11.5 million from the Indonesian Embassy and Rp 5. million from the Central Java provincial administration. "While taking care of my handicapped son, I joined Migrant Care because they provide assistance to troubled migrant workers," she said.

Ceriyati's husband Ridwan has barred his wife from going to work overseas again. "My wife and I are happy now with our two children living our daily life on our farmland in our home village. My eldest son, who is 12 years old, is in third class at a special elementary school while my daughter is in second grade at a state elementary school," he said, adding that he really wants to go to Malaysia to retaliate against his wife's former employer. ✨

The Story of Halimah A Father's **Persisting Regrets**

KOHAR, 49 years old and a resident of Cianjur, West Java, has five children: four daughters and a son. His wife died in 1999 and his two eldest daughters have worked in Saudi Arabia. When his third daughter, Halimah, 27 years of age, asked his permission to follow in her sisters' footsteps working in Saudi Arabia as a migrant domestic worker, he could not say no. "It was hard to let her go, but we are living in poverty. She said she had to go to Saudi Arabia to earn enough money to renovate our house," he said.

Halimah, who had dropped out of junior high school, started working in Jeddah in 2007 as a migrant

domestic worker for Abdul Wahab Muhammad Hasan Kholil. After working for one year, she sent home Rp. 10 million. She told her father that she had spent three months' salary going on Umroh (a small pilgrimage). She also once phoned home to say that she was ill.

Kohar never suspected that Halimah had a serious illness. He thought his daughter was working and living in her employer's house in Jeddah. Yet, his world turned up side down when a reporter from the private television station SCTV came to Cianjur and told him that another SCTV reporter had met Halimah in Jeddah. She was sick

and homeless, living with other Indonesian migrant workers under a flyover.

Kohar was then brought to SCTV the following morning for an interview. The station also aired the interview with Halimah which took place under the Al Kandarrah bridge. "I do not want to die in Jeddah," an ailing Halimah told the reporter. However, a few days after the interview, Halimah died. Her father was deeply shocked upon hearing the news.

"I did not know that she was living under a bridge in Jeddah. It's still unclear why she left her employer," he said. He learnt from



the interview that Halimah was “dumped” under the bridge by an unidentified taxi driver. She passed away on 3 August 2009 after living homeless under the bridge for three weeks. It was reported that Halimah suffered from a serious case of tuberculosis.

Kohar did not believe the report, saying that Halimah did not suffer any serious illnesses when she was at home. “If she had been sick, she would not have been deployed. She was well,” Kohar said. “But she probably got sick while living under the bridge.”

It was also reported that Halimah had twice reported to the Indonesian Consulate in Jeddah that she had been tortured by her employer. The torture continued until she got very sick. She was then “dumped” under the bridge and lived there with hundreds of other migrant workers who likewise had serious problems, mostly Indonesians. While living under the flyover, Halimah borrowed some money for her daily needs and repaid it.

In the TV interview, Kohar demanded that the body of his daughter be brought back home. He said that he would not demand anything else from the government, if they just helped the family return the body to Indonesia. Activists from Migrant

“I do not want to die in Jeddah,” Halimah told the reporter. However, a few days after the interview, Halimah died.

Care also staged a rally in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, demanding the ministry’s help to return Halimah’s body. The activists deplored the Ministry’s official statement that the migrant workers intentionally “neglected” themselves so that the Indonesian government would pay for their journey home.

Halimah’s body finally arrived back in Indonesia 26 days after her death. Kohar admitted that he did not check her body and just looked at the face of Halimah. The family also turned down the suggestion of a post mortem on Halimah, as they wanted the body to be buried as soon as possible. “I just saw the face to make sure that it was really Halimah. I do not know whether there were signs of violence on her body or not. We were sorry for her, she had already been dead for 26 days when we saw her,” he said.

Halimah was buried at a public cemetery in Salakopi hamlet,

Haurwangi, Cianjur on 29 August 2009. Kohar said he was informed that he would receive a total of Rp. 40 million from the government which included Rp. 5 million for the burial cost; however, Kohar said that the family only received Rp. 10 million. “I remembered that she once told me that she wanted to slaughter a goat during the Muslim Day of Sacrifice. I used some of the money to buy a goat and slaughtered it on her behalf to honor her wish.”

To date, Halimah’s dream to renovate the house so that all members of her family could live in the same house still remains a dream. The money received was not enough to renovate the house. Meanwhile, Kohar is struggling to make a living. “I do all kinds of jobs, such as helping people renovate their houses. Sometimes, I have no work at all.”

Kohar hopes that no other migrant workers will have to endure problems like his daughter did, and that no families will have to suffer the sorrows his family has had to endure. “Now, many people, such as our neighbors, have asked how to work safely overseas. Unfortunately, I have little knowledge about this subject but I believe migrant workers with problems should seek help from organizations that assist migrant workers,” he said. ✨



The Story of Umi Saodah

Tortured and Trapped in War-Torn Palestine

“I AM still angry and cannot forget what they have done to me,” Umi Saodah, a 34-year-old, recalled. It’s still crystal clear in her mind how four family members of her employer tortured her two years ago. “They showed no mercy. If they were living here in Indonesia, I would retaliate,” she said.

detained in the Saraya Reform and Rehabilitation Center in November 2008, without any official charge. The police could not find any evidence of the alleged theft reported by her employer. While still processing the case, the police contacted the Indonesian Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. An officer from the Embassy met Saodah and

promised to inform her family in Indonesia.

However, before Saodah was able to contact her family, much of Gaza city, including the police detention center, were destroyed by Israeli bombardments. In January 2009, the Palestinian Authority closed the detention

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The migrant worker was punched by her Palestinian employers in their house in Gaza, Palestine where she was working as a migrant domestic worker for the family. Her head was banged against a wall for something she denied ever having done. Saodah was accused of stealing jewelry. The family then locked her in her room for a week. Not able to bear the torture any longer, Saodah told her employer to report the theft to the police.

A policeman who was a friend of her employer, then picked her up and brought her to the police station. Saodah was

“
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”

center as Israeli soldiers had blocked the access streets to it. Before the Israeli authorities emptied the center and evacuated the detainees, Saodah and the other detainees had run away to safety.

“I then lived on the street like a beggar. Really, like a beggar. I had no money and I was begging for days, asking everybody on the street for food. I kept saying I am hungry, please give me food,” she recalled pleading. “I can never forget it,” she said, shaking her head.

One day, she met a woman who offered her a place at her home. While staying there, she helped her clean the house which had been partly destroyed by an Israeli bomb attack. Meanwhile the bomb attacks continued. "At first I was afraid of the bomb explosions. But when I saw my new employer was not scared, I got used to it too."

She had to move to another house with the family, when bombs hit the area where they were living. After staying in the house for a few days, Saodah met the policeman who had processed her alleged theft case. "He was actually looking for me after the bomb attack which destroyed the police station." The policeman told Saodah that an official from the Indonesian Embassy wanted to pick her up and return her to Indonesia.

Yet, she refused to leave Gaza until her former employer had paid her salary of about US\$2,000. "I have worked far from my country. I do not want to go home empty handed. I want my money," she insisted. "I'd rather die here than return home without money. I am a poor person."

A few days later, the policeman visited Saodah again and told her that he had met Saodah's former employer. According to the officer, the employer only gave \$750 to him and asked him to give the money to Saodah. She did not

"I know how it feels to be stranded overseas, to have your rights violated and to be abused. The union is cooperating with other relevant organizations to help migrant workers and their families fight for their rights, such as unpaid salaries."

believe him and refused to go. "I do not believe it came from my employer. I do not know where the money came from. I want my salary of \$2,000."

The Indonesian Embassy in Cairo also asked her to leave Palestine for her safety. "Pak Abdullah from the Embassy said that my salary could be processed later. The most important thing is that I should leave the city," Saodah remembered. Yet, she refused. "I changed my mind when he started mentioned about my mother. He said that my mother had asked for me to go home. I could not resist anymore and agreed to go home."

All the memories just rushed back to her. She remembered her mother waiting at her house in Tlawongan hamlet, Karang Tengah, Tuntang, Semarang, Central Java. She remembered her husband, Puad, who had given her permission to work overseas in order to improve the economy of the family. She also remembered the time she was accompanied by her middleman, Saripudin, from her neighboring village of Cadang Pinggang and went to Jakarta in January, 2007.

She was told that she would be employed in Kuwait. "Kuwait was just the official destination and I was actually deployed to Gaza. I accepted because I needed the job. I was just a poor worker from a poor family. I know nothing and I just wanted to work," Saodah, who is educated to elementary school level, said.

To date, she never received her unpaid salary. Yet, she refuses to be beaten by her horrific experience. She is now leading a union for families and migrant workers who become victims of injustice and abuse in their jobs overseas. "I know how it feels to be stranded overseas, to have your rights violated and to be abused. The union is cooperating with other relevant organizations to help migrant workers and their families fight for their rights, such as unpaid salaries," she exclaimed. *

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*Combating Forced Labour and
Trafficking of Indonesian Migrant Workers*

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