

Opening Remarks

by

Mrs. Sutassanee Suebwongpat, Inspector-General, Ministry of Labour

at

The National Tripartite Consultation

on

Decent Work for Domestic Workers

Thursday, September 10, 2009

First Hotel, Bangkok

Ms. Thetis Mangahas, Senior Labour Migration Expert,

Resource Persons,

Distinguished Participants from the State Sector, Employers' Organizations, Workers' Organizations and Civil Society Organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Ministry of Labour is pleased to co-host with the International Labour Organization today's National Tripartite Consultation Workshop on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

The main responsibility of the Ministry of Labour is to protect all members of the workforce; both those in the formal and informal sectors and both Thai and migrant workers and to provide them with social protection and equality in employment-or Decent Work according to international principles. Decent work is work from which the worker obtains a sense of satisfaction, work which the worker accepts and is willing to undertake and work which must be secure and respectable, generating sufficient income for the livelihood of the worker and his family.

Domestic workers in Thailand are mostly women and there exists a large proportion which are migrant workers. In the present situation, these workers are categorized as service workers in the informal economy as they are yet to be protected by the labour law. Informal

workers make up the majority of Thailand's labour force. It can be said that they account for up to two thirds of the total workforce.

The Ministry of Labour holds in high regard the human value of all workers, including that of domestic workers, whether Thai or migrant, and it acknowledges these workers' important role in developing the country's economy since their contribution not only generates income to support the families of countless workers but also enables the employers' families to have time to be more economically productive. In this respect, domestic workers are the backstage support that effectively helps to alleviate the burden of household chores.

For the past many years, the Ministry of Labour has taken actions to expand the scope of labour rights protection to informal workers. The most important goal is to provide regular labour protection for informal workers, including domestic workers by means of a legislation on minimum labour protection standards.

In the past, the Ministry of Labour has placed emphasis on developing protection rights for all worker groups. In the context of informal workers, progress has been made in stages and our advocacy was successful in the respect that we now have two Ministerial Regulations: the Ministerial Regulation on the Protection of Homeworkers, B.E. 2547 and the Ministerial Regulation on the Protection of Agricultural Workers, B.E. 2547.

For the case of domestic workers, at present, the Ministry of Labour is in the process of drafting a Ministerial Regulation on the Protection of Domestic Workers of Households without Business Activities, B.E. The draft has been completed and is now under consideration by the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare.

Concurrently, work is in progress to amend the Social Security Act, B.E. 2533 by broadening the definition of workers protected in Section 33 to include domestic workers. The draft amendment is now awaiting parliamentary approval.

With respect to "Decent Work for Domestic Workers", which is today's workshop topic, the Ministry of Labour is committed to promote "Decent Employment" for all workers, including migrant workers. It has drafted the Decent Work National Plan Phase I to be implemented in 2010-2011 and a national tripartite conference was held on the 23rd of April, 2009. It is now in the process of improving the draft plan according to the comments

of employers', workers' and civil society representatives. The adjusted plan will be presented to a public hearing on the 25th of September, 2009 before it is presented to the Cabinet for approval and finally put to action. Furthermore, Phase II of the plan will be drafted for use in the years 2012-2015 to coincide with the completion of the Asian Decent Work Decade.

I have been informed that before today's national tripartite consultation, on the 8th and 9th of September, a workshop was organized by the ILO to create understanding on Decent Work for Domestic Workers for a specific target group of trade unions and civil society organizations with a view to develop a campaign for Decent Work for Domestic Workers and prepare for participation in today's tripartite consultation.

The Ministry of Labour is jointly organizing today's national tripartite consultation with the ILO to provide a forum for discussion, brainstorming and a sharing of experiences between the parties. The workshop's objectives are:

1. To develop knowledge and understanding in the Campaign for Decent Work for Domestic Workers

I think that in campaigning for Decent Work for Domestic Workers, we may need to begin by rousing the people's conscience and creating a common awareness in society that we should provide more opportunity and be more open in our acceptance of domestic workers' value and dignity. At the same time, there must be opportunity to work together in the form of building partnerships and networks, especially for civil society organizations. These organizations would help provide access to these workers since they work in their employers' private homes that are not easily accessible. In this respect, domestic workers are one of the most fragile groups of workers, vulnerable to exploitation and labour rights violation.

2. To discuss and brainstorm for comments and suggestions on Decent Work for Domestic Workers in Thailand, provide answers for the ILO questionnaire on Decent Work for Domestic Workers and prepare for the 99th session of the International Labour Conference in 2010.

The emphasis of today's workshop is on discussing the Ministry of Labour answers to the ILO questionnaire on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Comments from today's meeting will be incorporated into a report attached to the government reply to the questionnaire. Today's event is also a good opportunity for employers' and workers' organization to be informed and to develop an understanding about Thailand's participation in the next International Labour Conference.

3. To develop bodies of knowledge and create understanding about the International Labour Standard for Domestic Workers

I think this is an opportune time and the workshop's organizing is appropriate to the context of the ILO's

advocacy for the adoption of an international labour standard to protect domestic workers. I see this as a favorable trend where the development of a labour standard will provide more clarity about domestic workers' social space as well as pave way for more Decent Employment.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am confident that the views and experience of all who have been working for the labour protection of domestic workers will strengthen our network and be an important impetus for the joint efforts of the Ministry of Labour and all sectors: government agencies, employers' and workers' organizations and civil society organizations in the sustainable development of labour protection for domestic workers in Thailand.

Last of all, I wish to thank all resource persons and distinguished participants of the workshop, the International Labour Organization and Ministry of Labour staff who helped in organizing today's event. May today's workshop be successful in achieving all set objectives. I now declare open the National Tripartite Consultation on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

Thank you.