

News: Asian Union Leaders Meet their Counterparts in the Gulf to Discuss Labour Migration

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Union representatives from 5 Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines) discussed the protection of migrant workers with leaders of workers' organisation in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, key destination countries for Asian migrants. The meeting took place in Kuwait City from 30 June to 1 July 2010.

It was jointly organised by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities and the American Solidarity Centre. While it was made clear that the meeting was not a decision-making event and aimed as a first step at facilitating the dialogue, identifying issues and challenges common to both trade unions in countries of origin and of destination, discussion led participants to point to certain avenues for action to be considered in future by the trade union movement.

It also came out clearly that the problems of migrant workers' rights could not be addressed simply through action at the level of the countries of destination, as much of the problems faced by migrant workers start at point of departure. In that respect, special emphasis was placed on the need to regulate employment agencies which organize the bulk of migration from Asia to the Gulf countries. Among the challenges identified by participants and of direct interest to ILO and ILO/ACTRAV activities were in some countries legal obstacles to union organizing of migrant workers; the role of employment agencies (and the need to promote ratification and implementation of Convention 181), the need to provide capacity building for trade unions in the field of organizing and campaigning and in the field of building alliances with other civil society organisations.

Trade union representatives considered among other things, developing a trade union to trade union connection, through the adoption and implementation of bi-lateral and multi-lateral trade union agreements.

In May 2009, the three first separate bilateral cooperation agreements on the protection of the rights of migrant workers were signed in Colombo (Sri Lanka). The signatories were on the one hand, leaders of three national trade union centres in Sri Lanka and, on the other, their counterparts in Bahrain, Jordan, and Kuwait. The signature of the agreements was the tangible result of an initiative launched by the ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities to develop, with the international trade union movement, a model trade union agreement on migrant workers' rights. It also materialised thanks to contributions from the ACTRAV-run project for the promotion of social dialogue supported by the Norwegian Government, and from the ILO International Migration Programme.

Signatories to the ACTRAV model trade union agreement commit themselves to promote the ratification and respect of ILO migrant workers Convention and to actively campaign against racism and xenophobia in society and combat discrimination and misleading propaganda in both the countries of origin and countries of destination of migrant workers.

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