

(Jakarta, Indonesia) Sitti says she often feels tired and lonely. Like most Indonesian domestic workers she must wake up every day at 4 am to work. As the sun rises, she cleans the house, prepares food for her employers, and tends to three young children and their sick grandmother. Each day is long and tiring and she must work and wait until the head of the household has returned from the office and the family has gone to bed, most days after midnight. She rarely has a day off.

Yet Sitti feels powerless to negotiate better working conditions, because as a domestic worker she has no labour rights under Indonesian law.

In a small village outside of Malang, East Java, the parents of a migrant domestic worker, Umi, view their daughter's portrait with fears that they will never see her again after her disappearance in Jeddah 6 months ago. When Umi was 17 she was approached by an informal agent in her village. Believing that she could earn an income that would support her family and community, Umi was provided with identification documents which falsely raised her age to 23, and was sent to Saudi Arabia. Initially in regular contact with her family in Indonesia, after a few months they stopped hearing from her. Umi's parents have no means of verifying the fate of their daughter because in Saudi Arabia, as in most countries to which Indonesian domestic workers migrate to find work, national laws do not provide labour rights protection for migrant domestic workers.

A rapidly growing number of Indonesian women are employed as domestic workers. Currently 4.3 million are employed overseas and a further 10.75 million work in Indonesia. They are indispensable in urban economies in Indonesia and destination countries in Asia and the Middle East, providing domestic and care services for the households where they work. This allows their employers in Asia to join the labour market, earn two incomes and contribute to national economic growth. Moreover, many domestic workers are the main breadwinners of their families, and their incomes play a vital role in poverty alleviation and economic growth in otherwise economically deprived areas.

However, despite domestic workers' vital role in providing services needed by society, they remain excluded from coverage by existing labour laws in Indonesia and destination countries. As a result, the rapid growth of cases of exploitation and abuse of domestic workers has reached alarming proportions. In 2011, 3070 cases of abuse, and 1,234 cases of sexual abuse of Indonesian migrant domestic workers, including rape and torture, were reported, with an additional 14,047 cases of unpaid salaries. In addition, thousands of domestic workers are imprisoned in Middle Eastern destination countries for breaking laws on "illicit sexual relations" although these "relations" in reality constitute rape by their employers. Several hundred domestic workers remain on death row in other countries, a consequence of gender-biased criminal laws which victimize rape victims defending themselves against perpetrators. These cases are just the tip of the iceberg and many more remain unreported, because domestic workers are impeded by stigmatization, discriminatory legislation, and the lack of effective access to justice.

The extensive human rights reporting and media coverage of cases of mistreatment of Indonesian domestic workers has placed the Government of Indonesia under increasing pressure to ratify key international conventions, notably the new ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, 2011 (No. 189), and the International Convention for the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (MWC), 1990. "These standards need to be integrated into national labour legislation and programmes in order to secure Indonesian domestic workers' labour and human rights", says Peter van Rooij, Director of [ILO Country Office for Indonesia and Timor Leste](#).

In Indonesia, the voices of domestic workers demanding their rights are growing louder by the day, strengthened by domestic workers coming together to organize themselves and form unions and associations, and join coalitions with confederations and civil society organizations. These coalitions extend to the regional and global level, and have recently been instrumental in ensuring that international labour standards for domestic workers finally were adopted by an overwhelming majority at the [100th ILO International Labour Conference](#) (ILC) in 2011.

Lita Anggraeni, leading activist of the domestic workers organization Jala PRT says that the Indonesian Government's vote at the ILC in favour of the adoption of international labour standards for domestic workers is a result of the persistent advocacy, lobbying, organizing and coalition-building by confederations, migrant workers organizations and domestic workers associations in Indonesia and abroad. The pressure yielded by these organizations has furthermore resulted in the ongoing revision in Parliament of the national law on placement and protection of overseas migrant workers, and the ongoing review of the national labour bill for domestic workers. It also contributed to the ratification of the International Convention for the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, 1990. "Our hard-won victories have greatly strengthened the momentum in the struggle for domestic workers' rights" says Lita. To rally the public and put pressure on Members of Parliament, activists of the Coalition for Domestic Workers' Rights recently chained themselves

overnight to the gates of Parliament to put pressure on law-makers to finally embed domestic workers' rights in national policies and legislation, "We will never give up until domestic workers' rights are secured," Lita says.

The ILO Project [Combating Forced Labour and Trafficking of Migrant Workers](#), funded by the Norwegian Government, technically and financially supports domestic workers, such as Lita, migrant workers, workers unions and their coalition partners at local, national and regional level in promoting domestic workers' and migrant workers' rights through support for their advocacy, awareness-raising, organizing and alliance-building.