

**Opening Remark by Ms. Kathleen Speake,
Chief Technical Advisor
ILO Office for China and Mongolia**

**International Seminar on Decent Work and Employment
Promotion for Domestic Workers
(16-18 Dec 2009, Beijing, China)**

Distinguished Ms. Xie Lihua, Ms. Cui Weiyan (ACWF), Ms. Yin Yuqing (ACFTU), Ms. Liu Hansong (CEC), respected national and international experts, colleagues from ILO tripartite constituents and other partners, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to be here today to speak on behalf of the International Labour Office and bring regards to you from Ms. Constance Thomas, Director of the ILO Office for China and Mongolia.

Let me first express my gratitude to the organizers, Beijing Da Gong Mei Zhi Jia, for your vision and efforts in making this important international forum happen.

As a specialized UN agency on labour issues, the ILO is committed to promoting the goal of decent work for all. Decent work requires that fundamental principles and rights at work are respected, that men and women have productive employment, that they have workplace protection, as well as opportunity to have their voices heard. Social protection, including occupational safety and health and social security, falls squarely within the concept of decent work.

The most powerful instruments for the ILO to promote decent work are international labour standards, that is, ILO Conventions and Recommendations, supported by the tripartite constituents (government, workers' and employers' associations) of member States. China is a long-standing member country of ILO and has signed 25 Conventions.

Regarding domestic workers, ILO is a long-time advocate for their rights at work. In 1948, ILO adopted the Resolution Concerning the

Conditions of Employment of Domestic Workers. In 1965, ILO adopted a resolution calling for normative action. In 1970 they published the first ever world-wide survey on the status of domestic workers. Of key importance, in June 2010, tripartite constituents of ILO's member States will vote on whether to establish international instruments, in form of Convention or Recommendation or both to enhance the protection of domestic workers.

International instruments relating to domestic work can be helpful in providing guidance in a number of areas, such as identification of the special conditions in which domestic work is carried out; setting boundaries for the practice of payment in kind; guidance on identifying, limiting and appropriately calculating hours of work; standards for food and accommodation for live-in domestic workers, as well as whether this constitutes a portion of wages; protection of domestic workers, including both young and migrant workers, and identifying standards to support a secure work environment, respecting their rights.

In many countries, ILO is seeing efforts to promote decent work for domestic workers. This is also true in China, where recent years have seen progress at both the national and local levels. For example, this July, the Chinese Government established a national joint committee on domestic workers, comprised of eight national ministries and organizations (including All China Federation of Trade Unions and All-China Women's Federation) and lead by the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security. You may know that one of the committee's mandates is to further improve regulations and laws, related to domestic workers, a topic where much discussion has already been generated among participants here, and where you collectively have much practical experience to contribute.

But domestic work is also an issue of importance and interest to society. Domestic work allows the household and the economy outside the household to function. China's population is aging, and demand for trained domestic workers will only increase. Domestic work is an important occupation by which many women earn their livelihoods, particularly migrant women. Yet, we are aware that the unique nature of this kind of work carried out in private homes creates an invisible and undervalued class of workers. In many countries, it is

not recognised as work, therefore poorly regulated, resulting in serious decent work deficits. It is common for many people to misunderstand the relationship between domestic worker and their employer, seeing it as a consumer, rather than a labour relationship. So workers suffer not only because basic labour protection is not available to them, but also because the general lack of respect for domestic workers (including migrant domestic workers) within society frequently leads to other human rights abuses, as well as physical abuse.

Of course, all of us assembled here today are committed to changing this reality. And we have an important group of agencies represented: UN agencies; international organizations; government ministries; trade unions; employer's association; women's federation; research institutions; journalists; domestic service companies; and NGOs such as the Beijing Migrant Women's Club, who maintain close contacts with migrant women workers, and who also have domestic workers themselves as representatives.

With such a variety of relevant participants and speakers, we seek to:

- share experiences on the development of practices such as draft regulations, worker contracts, and peer support group models;
- share information on the regulatory needs of the sector;
- share other countries' practices and cases, in order to gain insight on addressing key challenges –for example, China is wrestling with whether domestic workers should be covered under the labour law; how to provide access to social benefits; and, the means to protect rights and interests of domestic workers;
- raise awareness through the media and our advocacy efforts on the imperative of protecting the rights of domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers;
- document our practical experience to serve as background information for the future drafting of regulations for the domestic work sector.

In conclusion, this is a timely event. There are both technical inputs and practical experience now available to us, many of which have been mobilised through partnerships with UN and Chinese agencies

over the past year. Our work will continue next year also. It is important for us to work together even more closely to facilitate the creation of an environment where domestic workers have the full respect and protection they deserve as humans, and as workers. The ILO will continue to support you in this important work.

I look forward to an active, constructive and fruitful discussion during and even after these two days. I wish the seminar every success.

Thank you.