

“NO ONE SHOULD WORK THIS WAY”

PREVENTING THE ABUSE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS



International
Labour
Organization



The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the UN agency for the world of work. It was founded in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the principle that universal and lasting peace can only be achieved if it is built on social justice. The ILO is the only 'tripartite' United Nations agency that brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to shape policies and programmes for social justice and decent working and living conditions for all women and men. For this it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969. The ILO is also responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards (Conventions and Recommendations). This unique arrangement gives the organization an edge in incorporating 'real world' knowledge about employment and work.



www.ilo.org/asia



www.facebook.com/ILO.ORG



www.youtube.com/user/ILOTV



www.flickr.com/iloasiapacific



[@ilo](https://twitter.com/ilo)



To see more photos taken by Steve McCurry for the “No One Should Work This Way” project, visit:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/iloasiapacific/sets/72157639783402295>



ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

United Nations Building
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Tel.: +66 2288 1234

Fax: +66 2280 1735

Email: BKK_COMMS@ilo.org

www.ilo.org/asia

This project is sponsored by the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The Office is very grateful to both Karen Emmons and Steve McCurry, who gave their time *pro bono*. This project and exhibition would also not have been possible without the courage of the people who agreed to be photographed and talk about the abuse they experienced. The staff of several organizations working with domestic workers and/or migrants also gave generously of their time, contacts and resources. In particular:

HONG KONG

Elizabeth Tang, International Coordinator and General Secretary with the International Domestic Workers Network. IP Pui Yu (Fish), Regional coordinator (Asia) with the International Domestic Workers Federation. Sring, a domestic worker and member of Indonesian Migrant Workers Union. Wong Siu Woon (Michelle), Organizing Secretary with the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and General Secretary, Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union. Shiella Estrada, a domestic worker and founder leader of the Filipino Migrant Workers Union. Chuni Thapa, a domestic worker and Chairperson of the Union of Nepali Domestic Workers in Hong Kong. Edwina Antonio-Calimutan and Esther C. Bangcawayan with the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge. Rey Asis of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant Workers. Eni Lestari of the Indonesian Coalition to Stop Overcharging-HK and Chairperson of the International Migrants' Alliance. Translators Kanitka, Chitra and Siti Nurhadiyah.

INDONESIA

Anis Hidayah, Executive Director, field officer, Nurharsono and the supportive staff of Migrant Care. Translators Gita Tampubolon and Binti Mukaromah Muhtarom.

NEPAL

Pemba Lama, Deputy Secretary General, and Binda Pandey, Planning Commission member with GEFONT. Sonu Danuwar, President of the Nepal Independent Domestic Workers Trade Union. Pradhup of CWISH. Manju Gurung, Bijaya Rai Shrestha and Muna Gautam of POURAKHI. Chandani Rana with ABC Nepal. Maiti Nepal. Translator Kesang Renchen.

PHILIPPINES

Ma. Cecilia Flores-Oebanda, President and Executive Director, and Alfred Ari Regino, Karen Navera, Sheryl Losena and Agnes Villegas of the Visayan Forum Foundation. Luther Calderon from Kampi. Fe Nicodemus of Kakampi. Noel Valencia and Vikki with Kanluga. Jerome with the Ople Center. Leah Valle helped with introductions to a Hong Kong shelter. Minette Rimando and Ana Valencia of the ILO. Translator Mishka Bosch.

NO ONE SHOULD WORK THIS WAY

PREVENTING THE ABUSE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

The abuses presented here are only a snapshot from a greater reality. Much has been left out.

The domestic workers photographed are young and old, educated and illiterate. Some were abused in their own countries while others were employed elsewhere in Asia or in the Gulf States. What links them is poverty, limited choices and a lack of the protection mechanisms that most workers take for granted.

Their abusers also varied – rich and middle-income, male and female, families and individuals.

The cases represented here are not isolated incidents. Steve McCurry and Karen Emmons photographed and recorded interviews in four Asian locations – Hong Kong, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines. They found physical, mental and verbal abuse, child labour, forced labour, trafficking, rape, imprisonment, starvation, unpaid wages, restrictions on movement and communication.

Much of the chronicling of domestic worker abuse focuses on statistics. One of the purposes of this project is to highlight the human side of what happens, to show in an unequivocal manner the nature of the abuses that are taking place behind closed doors, and the effects on minds, bodies and entire lives.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates there are more than 52 million domestic workers worldwide, more than 21 million of whom are in Asia and the Pacific. These workers make a valuable contribution to the economic development and social well-being of almost every country in the world. But although many migrate to find work without significant problems, the lack of legal protection in most countries leaves them exposed and allows them to be treated as property rather than as people. More can – and must – be done to recognize domestic work as work and to ensure that those who go abroad to work in private homes do so safely.



In 2011 a new ILO Convention specifically covering the rights of domestic workers came into force. Thus far it has been ratified by fewer than 20 countries – just one (the Philippines) in the Asia–Pacific region and none in the Gulf region or the Middle East. Convention No. 189 is important, not just because it obliges governments to bring their national laws and enforcement systems into line, but also because it sends a message to societies that domestic workers have rights as other workers do.

No longer should anyone work the way the women in these photos have worked.



STEVE MCCURRY

Steve McCurry is an internationally-known documentary photographer from the United States who specializes in India and South-East Asia. Best known for his work in war-torn countries like Afghanistan, he has covered many theatres of international and civil conflict, including Beirut, Cambodia, the Philippines, the Gulf War, the former Yugoslavia and Tibet. He focuses on the human consequences of war by looking at how it impresses on the human face. His image of a young refugee known as the “Afghan Girl” is considered “the most recognized photograph” in the history of National Geographic magazine. His work has won the Robert Capa Gold Medal, the National Press Photographers Award (given by World Press Photo) four times, the Magazine Photographer of the Year (given by the National Press Photographers Association) and the Olivier Rebbot Award twice. He received the Centenary Medal for Lifetime Achievement in the 2014 Royal Photographic Society Awards. His work has been featured in major magazines and frequently appears in National Geographic. His books include *The Imperial Way* (1985), *Monsoon* (1988), *Portraits* (1999), *South Southeast* (2000), *Sanctuary* (2002), *The Path to Buddha: A Tibetan Pilgrimage* (2003), *Steve McCurry* (2005), *Looking East* (2006), *Steve McCurry: The Iconic Photographs* (2012) and *Untold: The Stories Behind the Photographs* (2013).



KAREN EMMONS

Karen Emmons is an American journalist who has lived and worked in Asia for the past 25 years, after working as a staff reporter with LIFE magazine in New York City. Her reporting and editing work for newspapers, magazines and United Nations agencies have covered child labour, forced labour, human trafficking, migrant abuse as well as domestic worker abuse, among many other issues. Her work has appeared in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Time*, *People*, *Who*, *Reader’s Digest*, *Development Asia*, *The South China Morning Post*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *International Herald Tribune* and *London Sunday Times*. She contributed to *The Meaning of Life* books, produced by the editors of LIFE magazine. She and Steve McCurry previously collaborated in Vietnam on a documentary project for The Global Fund, called *Access to Life*, on the difference that access to antiretroviral drugs makes in the lives of people living with HIV.



Nining, now 32, from Indonesia, abused in Jordan.

“I said to the nephew, ‘If you bother me, I will kill myself.’ He said, ‘Then just kill yourself. Then see when you’re dead, we will send your body using the airplane and drop it and no one will find you.”

Nining was frequently sexually harassed by the father and a nephew of her male employer, a government officer. The young man groped her while she was cleaning a second floor window and she fell, landed on concrete and was left, unconscious, for a day or two until a neighbour called for help. She returned to her village in a wheelchair and for two years could only move about by sliding across the floor. Her family could not afford medical treatment. She willed herself to walk again but can’t stand for long or walk far. She hopes to open a small business.

“Once I had said, ‘If you don’t like me, please send me to the office, please send me home.’ She said, ‘How nice, how lucky you are to go home. If I don’t like, I just hit or I kill you.”

Haryatin needed money to pay for her daughter’s education. She worked for a woman with nine children who continually insulted and hit her and made her sleep in a storage room. At 3 a.m. while Haryatin was washing school uniforms, her employer rubbed the baby’s faeces-filled diaper into Harayatin’s face because the maid hadn’t been quick enough to change it. Soon afterwards Haryatin lost her sight after being hit on the head with a pipe. She was forced to stay, and keep working, until the swelling disappeared.



Haryatin, now 36, from Indonesia, abused in Saudi Arabia.



Sritak, now 31, from Indonesia, abused in Taiwan.

“He took a hot fork that he had heated on the stove top and he put it on my hand. He pressed the hot fork onto my hand....It’s quite strange, like he had the devil inside.”

Sritak left her village because her family were too poor to eat every day. She worked from 6 a.m. to midnight daily. Her passport was taken away and her freedom to talk to her family or outsiders was restricted. Her employer beat her, once with an iron pipe. He accused her of stealing and poured hot water on her body. She has more than 20 scars, including a long slash across her face.

“If I didn’t have a house helper I couldn’t go out for work. My domestic helper wants a salary to improve her life. I have my work and I get my salary to improve my life also. It’s the same....I think domestic helpers need to be covered by labour law. Surely, what they do is labour.”

Judy, an Executive Committee member of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, initially opposed allowing domestic workers to join trade unions or fighting for better conditions for them. But her views changed. She now takes part in rallies and campaigns to support domestic workers and allow them to join trade unions.



Wai Ling (Judy) Ng, 54, trade union officer in Hong Kong.



Pavitra, now 34, from Nepal, abused in Oman.

“The husband came home and latched the door and attacked me. I told the wife later on. She said, ‘You’re telling lies and it’s not true.’ If my family, especially my husband, finds out, they will abandon me.”

Pavitra spent five months in prison in Oman. Her female employer refused to believe that her husband, a police official, had raped the housemaid, and pressed charges of seduction. Five months later, when Pavitra was released, it was too late to do anything about her pregnancy. She returned to Nepal in secret because she feared her husband and family would abandon her. She went to Oman to feed her four children because her husband was too sick to work. She was not fully paid.

“The owner of the agency is so bad. He said to me, ‘Fuck you. You bitch. All your family, your young son will die. You, fuck you. You are a bitch. Your son will die.’ Then he threw his coffee mug at my face.”

Mary Grace needed to earn money for school fees and to feed her family. She had two employers, neither of whom gave her enough to eat. One day she fainted while at a market. She woke up in an ambulance to find herself being sexually abused by the attendant. When she tried to report the assault at the hospital a nurse told her to be quiet. She left Malaysia with no earnings.



Mary Grace, now 35, from the Philippines, abused in Malaysia.



Saraswati, now 20, from rural Nepal, abused in Nepal.

“She took me to my room and started beating me with her hand. Pulling my hair. With no one at home to stop her, she would beat me a long time....The Government should not allow children to be used as domestic workers.”

Saraswati became a domestic worker aged 12 because her family could not afford to send her to school. A shopkeeper helped her escape from an abusive employer, but her next employer, in Kathmandu, was even more abusive. She has scars on her forehead and knee. She still works as a maid but is now finishing her education and helps other domestic workers learn about their rights.

“Good legislation, good laws, good social protection measures are still the first steps. In this part of this world, they don’t exist in most countries. Without them, people will not have a sense of right and wrong.”

Elizabeth is a former head of the Secretariat of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. More than two decades ago she was one of the first to stand up for domestic workers. Despite the political sensitivity, she pushed for unions to help domestic workers organize and obtain labour protection. Since 2011, she has been the International Coordinator for the International Domestic Workers Network.



Elizabeth Tang, 58, domestic workers’ rights activist in Hong Kong.



“She said, ‘Come here, dog. Come here. You are stupid. You are a dog. Helper come here’.”

In Saudi Arabia, Siti worked 20 hour days, didn’t get enough to eat and had to sleep on a mattress on the floor of a storage room. In Oman, when she complained about being sexually harassed by her male employer, his wife slapped and abused her. In Hong Kong, she had to work at night, was verbally abused and her food was rationed.

Siti, now 37, from Indonesia, abused in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Hong Kong.

“After the first three weeks working there I tried to escape to the agent but the police took me back. The agent said, ‘If you try to escape again, I will sue you with legal action.’”

For two years Tutik was only allowed to sleep for three hours a night. Every day she cleaned the house and every evening worked in the family bakery. Her young male employer knocked out her front tooth with his shoe. Her ear is deformed by his constant twisting. His mother hit her with sticks and a rattan cane, fracturing her wrist and backbone. When she asked to go home the employer refused to let her leave.



Tutik, now 38, from Indonesia, abused in Malaysia.



A native of the Philippines, Buhay helped start Bethune House, a shelter for domestic workers in distress, 25 years ago. Originally, most of those coming to the Kowloon shelter were Filipina domestic workers, now they are mostly Indonesian.

Buhay Bangcawayan, 55, domestic worker supporter and activist in Hong Kong.

“To help protect workers from physical abuse you need to educate them to understand the laws in their workplace. They don’t know that they have rights.”

Sring’s first employer did not give her the legal minimum wage or her legally-entitled days off. For six months she had to give most of her salary to the recruitment agency. When her contract ended Sring was able to find another, better, employer. She still works for a Hong Kong family, but is now Chair of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union, where she is the first person called to help Indonesian workers in trouble.



Sring, now 34, from Indonesia, abused in Hong Kong.



Five days after Anis arrived, the family’s barking dog woke – and enraged – her female employer. Shouting in Cantonese, the woman pulled Anis into the kitchen and grabbed a butcher’s knife. Anis jerked away, but the ring finger tendon was sliced and the bone fractured. She escaped with the help of a building security guard and another domestic worker.

Anis, now 26, from Indonesia, abused in Hong Kong.



“My employer would bang my head on the wall and she would throw hot water on me. She would burn my skin with cigarettes. She said this was the punishment for my sins.”

Beth was sold by her sister to a couple in Manila when she was 10. She worked from 4 a.m. until late every day, cleaning and looking after their small child. She was not paid. Her female employer beat her frequently, with sticks, pots or pans, and, after the boyfriend once walked out, began burning her with cigarettes. After seven years locked in the house Beth escaped. She had never been to school, watched TV, or listened to music or the radio.

Beth, now 20, from rural Philippines, abused in Manila.

“Everyone has left me. My brothers spit on the ground when they see me....I will try my best to prevent anyone from ever going abroad for domestic work. I can work to stop it. I will do whatever it takes.”

Indra went abroad to pay medical and education bills, after her husband abandoned her and their three children. She never went to school and cannot read or write. She was hired to look after 13 children, but her employers’ family also ran a brothel in their building and beat her to make her work there too. When she fought back they tried, and failed, to sell her to a family in Saudia Arabia. She eventually escaped by climbing down an elevator cable. Injured, she returned to Nepal on a stretcher. Her family has rejected her and her injuries make it hard to earn a living.



Indra, now 31, from Nepal, abused in Kuwait.



“I go to the clinic regularly to get medication. Now it is not painful any more. It was most painful the first four months.”

Sumasri’s back and thighs are heavily scarred from the boiling water her male employer in Kuala Lumpur threw on her. The story of exactly what happened to her often changes, each time she recounts it. Neighbours in her east Java village fear that she may no longer be mentally stable.

Sumasri, possibly in her late 60s, from Indonesia, abused in Malaysia.

“My employer said she’s very rich. She said, ‘If I hit you and kill you, no one will know that’....The agent tried to calm me, saying, ‘I will give you a very good employer if you don’t tell anyone.’”

Susi worked 20-hour days, only sleeping as the sun came up. Her Hong Kong Chinese employer frequently slapped her and made her sign a paper saying wages had been paid. After seven months without contact her family forced a meeting, and Susi left. The agent then placed another domestic worker in that home.

Note: Susi’s Hong Kong employer subsequently hired (through a different agency) another Indonesian maid, Erwiana Sulistyanyingsih, whose eight months of ill-treatment made international headlines and resulted in criminal convictions.



Susi, now 30, from Indonesia, abused in Hong Kong.