

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 21/002/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 012
14 February 2007

Embargo Date: 14 February 2007 00:01 GMT

Indonesia: Government failing exploited domestic workers

"I cleaned the house, cooked, swept the floor, and took care of the children... every day from five in the morning until midnight... [My employer] threw hot water on me when she got angry... She also threw the boiler at me... The only time I could go outside was when I hung clothes to dry... once a week... [I slept] in the kitchen... with no mattress... just on the floor. My employer locked me in the room [every evening]... I couldn't go to the bathroom during the night."
Ratna, who started working as a domestic worker when she was 13 years old.

Domestic workers in Indonesia face withheld wages, working days of up to 22 hours, beatings, sexual violence and forced confinement, according to a new report released by Amnesty International. Moves by the government to address the problem are falling short, leaving millions of women vulnerable to abusive employers.

"Like every other human being, domestic workers have rights -- including the right to be free from violence, the right to rest and the right to be paid an adequate wage. The government is currently failing to protect these rights," said Natalie Hill, Deputy Asia Director at Amnesty International.

The estimated 2.6 million domestic workers in Indonesia are generally considered as second-class citizens. Most are women or girls who start working at ages as young as twelve or thirteen.

Even the government is discriminating against domestic workers, excluding them from legal protection given to other workers governing fair pay and limitations on working hours.

In a promising development, the government submitted a draft law on domestic workers to parliament in June 2006 -- but Amnesty International is concerned that it omits fundamental workers' rights, including clearly defined daily hours of work and rest periods and a minimum wage.

A law on domestic violence is not being implemented fully and most people are unaware that it applies to domestic workers.

"The government needs to stop viewing domestic workers as inferior and give them the same legal protections as other workers. It also needs to educate police, the courts, employers and recruitment agencies on the fact that violence against domestic workers is a criminal offence," said Natalie Hill.

Amnesty International is calling on the government to ensure that domestic workers are not given less

protection than other workers.

The report, *Exploitation and abuse: the plight of women domestic workers*, will be available from 14 February at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa210012007>.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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