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Fresh claims of abuse of Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia

Amnesty International today called on the Saudi Arabian authorities to protect domestic workers from abuse, following the reported discovery of the mutilated body of an Indonesian woman found in a skip in the town of Abha.

Reports today of the discovery of Kikim Komalasari's body came as Indonesian officials travelled to Saudi Arabia to investigate allegations of serious abuse of another Indonesian domestic worker, who has been hospitalised since November 8.

In the last few years, labour reforms have been belatedly introduced in several Gulf States to recognise the rights of migrant workers, but in virtually all cases, these reforms have afforded little or no protection to domestic workers.

“Saudi Arabia and all the Gulf States have to take steps to put an end to this horrific treatment of migrant domestic workers, by immediately removing the legal climate of impunity that allows employers to exploit, enslave, abuse, assault and injure their domestic workers with virtual impunity” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Amnesty International welcomed the Saudi Arabian government's swift cooperation with the Indonesian government over investigating the case of hospitalised maid Sumiati Binti Salan Mustapa, who alleges that her employer cut her face with scissors.

“We fear that these two abhorrent cases are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the systematic abuse suffered by women employed as domestic servants in the region” said Malcolm Smart.

Migrant workers from Asian countries such as Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka dominate service industries in the Gulf States, including domestic labour.

Other reports of abuse of Asian women in the region that have emerged in the past few days include allegations from Kuwait that an employer there drove 14 metal pins into the body of a Sri Lankan domestic worker and from Jordan that another Sri Lankan domestic worker was made to swallow six nails.

A Sri Lankan woman alleged in August that her Saudi employers hammered 24 nails into her body.

“These gross abuses will continue to come to light unless governments in the region give migrant domestic workers the rights that are their due,” said Malcom Smart.

Women migrant domestic workers in the Gulf States are extremely vulnerable to gender-based violence, other abuses, restrictions on their freedom of movement, discrimination, and harassment.

They are often not given access to legal advice or adequate language interpretation, and are often unable to obtain protection or redress under existing labour laws.

Employers commonly retain the passports of their domestic workers, which may result in detained domestic workers being held at deportation centres for weeks or months, while their paperwork is being completed. Some domestic workers are not allowed to leave the house where they work without permission from their employers. They are often required to work excessive hours for inadequate pay.