

Domestic workers call on Downing Street in visa justice plea

31 March 2014

Campaigners from Unite, Justice for Domestic Workers, The Showroom and Kalayaan will hand in hundreds of signed postcards to 10 Downing Street tomorrow (Tuesday, 1 April) demanding that the Prime Minister reinstate basic visa rights for migrant domestic workers (MDW) and end to this modern day form of slavery.

Despite strong opposition from charities and unions, the government, in April 2012, abolished the rights of MDWs to change employer once they are in the UK. Under the terms of the new 'tied visa', overseas domestic workers cannot legally leave their employer and find new work, meaning thousands of workers being trapped.

Two years on, thousands of migrant domestic workers have found themselves being tied to their employer, being abused and exploited with no redress living with the added fear of deportation if they speak out.

Diana Holland, Unite assistant general secretary, said: "The powerful alliance that achieved the Overseas Domestic Workers visa in 1998 is coming together again to expose how the new tied visa has reintroduced slavery status, preventing migrant domestic workers from gaining their rights.

"We call upon the Prime Minister to make sure that the domestic worker visa is restored. By doing so, the UK could proudly proclaim itself a world leader in combating trafficking and slavery."

Marissa Begonia, Justice for Domestic Workers coordinator said: "Many MDWs have been criminalised by a system that allows perpetrators to exploit, abuse and enslave an already vulnerable workforce. Having seen first-hand the effects of this blatant exploitation and horrifying abuse of our fellow domestic workers from one employer to another, this must end.

"We urgently need to reinstate the Overseas Domestic Workers visa rights and ensure protection for this vulnerable group."

Kate Roberts, Kalayaan community advocate added: "Two years on it remains clear that removing the most basic workers' right - the ability to resign - leaves

MDWs in the UK completely at the mercy of their employers. If the government is serious in its stated aim to prevent slavery, then reinstating the basic rights of these workers in the form of the original Overseas Domestic Worker visa is essential.”

ENDS

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Notes to editors

Unite is Britain and Ireland’s largest trade union with over 1.4 million members working across all sectors of the economy. The general secretary is Len McCluskey.

Justice for Domestic Workers (J4DW) was established in 2009. It is an organisation of migrant domestic workers who work in private houses in the UK.

Kalayaan is a charity in established in 1987 to provide advice, advocacy and support services in the UK for migrant domestic workers.

The Showroom: Since spring 2012, The Showroom gallery and Tate have been meeting with J4DW - the wider context of working in partnership with J4DW and artists and curators. Working with The Showroom and Tate aims to draw affinities, alliances and most importantly to use art as a way to make domestic work visible in British society and to recognise the workers' many contributions to the UK.