

Migrant Workers Stage Demonstration at Minister Batt O’Keeffe’s Office **The Government has the power to liberate thousands of workers from exploitation**

Today over 200 migrant workers from across the country, along with trade union, community sector and employer allies, held a demonstration outside the offices of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, Batt O’Keeffe, T.D., calling on him to give workers employed through the employment permit system the right to change employer.

The current employment permits system binds a worker to one employer. This is a leading factor in the exploitation of workers. 80% of MRCI’s cases of exploitation involve workers in the employment permit system. Every day the MRCI hears from migrant workers who are unable to leave exploitative working conditions because of the rigid and inflexible employment permits system. The MRCI is seeking an administrative change which would give people the freedom to exit exploitative conditions and find alternative work within their job category, without having to go through an entirely new permit application with its unnecessary costs and delays. Many TDs are saying MRCI’s proposal is sensible and the right thing to do, as do ICTU and employer bodies.

“Minister Batt O’Keeffe can change the lives of thousands with a simple administrative change,” says Siobhán O’Donoghue, director of the MRCI. “Most workers on permits will only come forward to report exploitation if there is a way out that does not put their legal status at risk. The best way to protect workers and prevent exploitation is by giving the right to change employer, which gives them a fair chance to find an alternative and report exploitation.”

“We are here today because we are trying to get Minister O’Keeffe to make the employment permit system fairer,” says Zeno Arumugan, a work permit holder from Malaysia; “Right now it’s impossible for me and 25,000 others in the system to change employer freely. This is causing huge problems. We are not asking for special treatment, just the basic equality and rights that other workers have.”

“Minister Batt O’Keeffe’s lack of action on our ongoing calls to give workers the right to change employer has led us to take action here today,” says Hilda Regasi, a migrant worker from the Philippines and campaign volunteer. “Each day that passes without action from Minister O’Keeffe only enables this kind of exploitation to continue.”

ENDS.

Note for Editors: Audio recordings and testimonies of migrant workers are available at: www.mrci.ie

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