**MOM’s Intervention for Singapore’s 3rd UPR**

Madam President,

Introduction

* My name is Lee Chung Wei, and I am the Divisional Director of the Workplace Policy and Strategy Division at the Ministry of Manpower. I will speak about Singapore’s approach to migrant workers.
* Migrant workers are an essential part of Singapore’s developmental journey and we sincerely value their contributions.
* The Ministry of Manpower’s Foreign Domestic Worker Study and Foreign Worker Experience Survey show that around 9 in 10 are satisfied with working in Singapore. Most would recommend Singapore as a place to work.
* We are committed to supporting the well-being of migrant workers in Singapore. Let me share some of our key policies and programmes in this regard.

Legislated protections

* All migrant workers, including foreign domestic workers, are protected by a comprehensive legal framework.
* The majority of migrant workers are accorded the same rights as local workers under the Employment Act and Work Injury Compensation Act. To account for different work environments and unique protection needs, foreign domestic workers are protected under other legislation such as the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act. For example, domestic workers assist with duties such as care-giving for the elderly and young children in the homes where they also live in, which is different from the responsibilities of migrant workers such as in the construction sector.
* These are laws and not merely guidelines. Employers who violate our laws protecting migrant workers face stiff fines, jail terms, and can be banned from hiring migrant workers.
* Beyond legislation, there are readily-available channels through which migrant workers may seek assistance. NGOs are invaluable partners in this regard. For example, the Migrant Workers Centre and the Centre for Domestic Employees maintain a 24-hour helpline for foreign workers and foreign domestic workers, respectively. Migrant workers can also walk in to the Ministry of Manpower’s Services Centre.

Abuse of foreign domestic workers

* Singapore does not condone any abuse of foreign domestic workers. We have adopted a three-pronged approach of education, detection and deterrence to safeguard against this.
  + First, we educate employers on their responsibilities towards their foreign domestic workers through the Employers’ Orientation Programme. All newly-arrived foreign domestic workers are also given information on their rights and where they can seek help if their rights are violated.
  + Second, we work with the Centre for Domestic Employees to interview all first-time foreign domestic workers in their native language, within the first few months of their employment, to check on their well-being.
  + Third, to deter abuse, we amended the Penal Code in 2019 to double penalties against individuals who abuse vulnerable victims, including foreign domestic workers.
* To enhance support for foreign domestic workers and reduce the incidence of abuse, we recently introduced house visits to check on their well-being as well as their working and living environment.

Change of employer

* Generally, an employer’s consent is required before a migrant worker can seek new employment in Singapore. This is to balance the interests of migrant workers to change jobs and the interests of employers for stability and predictability in the employment relationship.
* That said, an employer’s consent is not required when there are breaches of legal protections such as non-payment of salary. We investigate all reports seriously and if breaches are found, migrant workers can find alternative employment in Singapore, even if their employer terminates their work pass.

High recruitment fees

* We recognise that high recruitment fees create unnecessary financial burdens for migrant workers, and have put in place measures to prevent this practice in Singapore.
* For instance, we have legislation on the maximum amount that Singapore-based employment agencies can collect from a migrant worker.
* While we do our best to protect migrant workers here, there are cases of such workers being charged high agency fees in their home countries. To combat this, we share relevant findings from our investigations with foreign authorities to facilitate their own investigations into such practices.

Response to COVID-19 pandemic

* During the COVID-19 pandemic, our priority has been to ensure that our migrant workers are able to receive the medical care required.
* All migrant workers are given the same level of medical care as any Singaporean who contracts COVID-19, with the full cost of in-patient treatment borne by the Government. We also provided migrant workers in dormitories with free COVID-19 tests.
* To limit the spread of the virus in the migrant worker dormitories last year, we quickly set up an Inter-Agency Task Force. This enabled us to mobilise resources across the Government early on to ensure the safety of those living in the dormitories, and to provide comprehensive support for migrant workers.
* We provided daily meals and essentials such as thermometers, masks, and hand sanitizers. We also provided WiFi access across the dormitories and SIM cards so migrant workers could keep in touch with their families. We ensured that they continued to be paid their salaries.
* Given the highly transmissible nature of the virus, we put in place rules to minimise mixing of workers across the dormitories and workplaces to reduce infections.
* We recognise the need to care for the well-being of migrant workers in a holistic manner. To this end, we are implementing a comprehensive plan to support their medical and mental health needs under DAWN which addresses Depression, Awareness of mental needs, mental Wellness and Normalise them back to the workforce. This includes providing telemedicine services, ensuring that all migrant workers have access to 24 hour medical care and improving their access to mental health care such as counselling. We are also taking a gradual approach to easing the rules in the dormitories.
* Looking ahead, we are working with dormitory operators and employers to conduct a holistic review of the migrant worker dormitory standards and management processes. We are also enhancing regulations on migrant worker accommodation and building new dormitories with improved living standards that meet or exceed the standards set by the International Labour Organization.
* We remain committed to ensuring the well-being of our migrant workers through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.
* Thank you, Madam President.

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