

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

Index: ASA 17/035/2014

20 June 2014

Hong Kong: Human trafficking 'wake-up call' for authorities

Amnesty International urges the Hong Kong government to take concrete and immediate action to end the widespread abuse and exploitation of migrant domestic workers following the US State Department's release of the Trafficking in Persons report on 20 June 2014. The report placed Hong Kong in Tier 2 where it had been downgraded since 2009.

The tier 2 ranking is a reflection of the widespread problem of trafficking for exploitation and forced labour of migrant domestic workers employed in Hong Kong. It also highlights the Government's lack of commitment in addressing the systemic exploitation of these women.

A damning report by Amnesty International, *Exploited for Profit, Failed by Governments*, published in November 2013, exposed the Hong Kong government's failure to adequately protect the city's 300,000 migrant domestic workers. Abuses include restrictions on freedom of movement, physical and sexual violence, lack of food, and exploitative hours.

The US State Department report was published as the high profile trial of an employer accused of horrific abuse against Indonesian domestic worker Erwiana Sulistyaningsih continued in Hong Kong. Sulistyaningsih's case along with countless others documented by Amnesty International and civil society demonstrate that exploitation and abuse of migrant domestic workers are not isolated but endemic in a system that puts migrant women at risk.

In May 2014, Amnesty International's Secretary General, Salil Shetty, raised these concerns directly with Labour and Welfare Secretary Matthew Cheung. He handed over a petition with more than 100,000 signatures calling on the Labour and Welfare Secretary to:

- Establish a robust, proactive body that monitors, investigates and punishes agencies that charge excessive and illegal fees, confiscate passports and encourage underpayment of wages;
- Introduce a government-run system for payment of recruitment fees and wages so agencies and employers cannot exploit workers; and
- Establish a body where relevant government agencies, workers and employers agree on recruitment fees, and work towards the international standard of no fee to the employee.