

**Release immediate**

## **Campaigners celebrate as government agrees to retain the domestic worker visa**

Oxfam and partner organisation Kalayaan welcome the Home Office announcement that it will retain the domestic worker visa for two years (announced in the *Government Response to the Consultation on Visitors* published today). Oxfam, Kalayaan and partners in the trade unions and other agencies have been campaigning against the abolition of the visa, which gives domestic workers the vital right to leave an abusive employer and find another job.

Migrant domestic workers come to Britain with their employers from overseas. The majority of migrant domestic workers are women from developing countries. Research conducted by Oxfam and Kalayaan revealed that many workers are sexually and physically abused by their UK employers in the UK and most are exploited and badly treated. Of the workers registered with Kalayaan in 2006, 43% reported not being given their own bed, 41% were not given regular meals, 70% were given no time off, and 61% were not even allowed out of the house.<sup>1</sup>

Kate Wareing, Oxfam UK Poverty Director said: "This is great news. Migrant domestic workers come from some of the poorest countries in the world to become some of the most vulnerable and exploited people in the UK. The domestic worker visa is a crucial protection for them as it allows them to leave an abusive employer and get another job. It's vital that the visa is retained beyond the two years promised by the Home Office today. We encourage the government to take further steps to protect domestic workers by increasing awareness about their rights among both domestic workers and the police, health service and other agencies who work with them."

Kate Roberts, Coordinator of Kalayaan, which works with migrant domestic workers, said: "In 1998 the new Labour government responded to public concern about the abuse of migrant domestic workers in the UK by giving them the status of workers and the right to change employer. We are delighted that the government has abandoned plans to remove the existing rights attached to the domestic worker visa and have promised to retain these vital protections for at least a further two years. It is essential that we use this time to ensure that migrant domestic workers are able to access their rights."

### **Case-studies**

Jenny, a domestic worker from West Africa, was beaten by her employer in the UK for nearly three years. She was paid very little, forced to be on constant call to her employer, and was hardly allowed out of the house. Fearing for her safety, she eventually managed to escape from her employer's house. Jenny says: "If you do not have the right to change employer then they have the right to do anything they want to you. They will know you have no options. We should not be treated like slaves."

Mary came to London three years ago. Her employer threw hot tea at her several times. She is now blind in her right eye. When her employer's husband attempted to rape her she ran away, even though she had no job to go to. Mary says: "For all those years I did not have the strength to leave and was thinking it was better to die than to endure this."

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For more information, including case studies, copies of the research, photographs, and interviews with migrant workers and Oxfam and Kalayaan spokespeople, contact: Louie Fooks, Press Officer for UK poverty, Oxfam: 01865 473280, or 07789946562

### **Notes for editors:**

1. *The New Bonded Labour* report will be launched at a parliamentary event in Westminster on 2 July 2008, sponsored by Chris McCafferty MP.
2. Kalayaan is based in Holland Park, London and is the only dedicated UK organisation providing advice and support to migrant domestic workers.

3. The proposed changes to the immigration rules for MDWs were communicated to Kalayaan by Home Office officials in March 2006. Kalayaan were told that migrant domestic workers would no longer be recognised as workers, but would enter the country on a business visitor visa. In order to avoid falling into irregular immigration status, domestic workers would have to continue to work for the same employer in the UK. These proposals were confirmed in Liam Byrne's answer to a parliamentary question posed by Vince Cable MP on 25 June 2007.