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Indonesia

Domestic workers take to the streets

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Scores of demonstrators from the Yogyakarta Domestic Worker Protection Network (JPPRT) took to the streets on Monday February 14 demanding decent wages and protection for domestic workers.

According to action coordinator Henny, the domestic workers' demands are totally reasonable because in reality domestic workers are still vulnerable to physical, psychological, social and economic violence.

Domestic workers (PRT) represent the largest group of working women, which in global terms total more than 100 million around the world, with 4 million in Indonesia and more than 6 million others working overseas. In the special Yogyakarta province of Central Java alone there are more than 36,000 domestic workers. Domestic workers' living and working conditions are still inadequate and they often experience rights violations, being paid extremely low wages, are vulnerable to exploitation and have no labour guarantees.

Domestic workers are still not acknowledged as part of the work force and legal protection, both at the national as well as international level, is still very low. This situation provides more and more room for the violation of domestic workers' rights. The government meanwhile gives the impression of simply waiting for a new case of abuse to occur and only then does it take steps.

"Because of this we are demanding that immediate wage improvements be made, the immediate enactment of a domestic workers' protection law and the immediate establishment of a legal protection system for domestic workers at the municipal and regency level", said Henny in a speech. [bw]

Domestic workers turn Hotel Indonesia into "giant laundry"

Despite the drizzle, scores of domestic workers (PRT) remained indifferent to the falling rain and continued washing their bosses' clothing. After being washed, it was then dried and ironed. So it was that on February 14 the Hotel Indonesia (HI) traffic circle in Central Jakarta became a giant laundry encircling the entire roundabout.

During the action the protesters also hung up T-shirts with "Bosses prosperous because of domestic workers" and "Recognition, rights and decent work for domestic workers" written on them along with a giant billboard with the message "100 pieces of domestic workers' washing drying so the bosses can wear neat and clean clothes".

The demonstrators, who came from the Domestic Workers Action Committee (KAPRT), also held a theatrical action depicting their demands and symbolising the labour performed by domestic workers.

"When Indonesia commemorates National Domestic Workers Day on February 15, around 2.6 million domestic workers will still lack legal protection", said one of the speakers, Umi (26), at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle on Jl. MH Thamrin on Monday.

"We are demanding the immediate enactment of the Domestic Workers' Law. This domestic workers' day [falls against] the backdrop of a 14 year-old domestic worker Sunarsih who died after being mistreated by their employer in 2001. The employer repeated this again with four of their domestic workers in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2005. However they were never punished", asserted Umi.

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The action attracted the attention of drivers racing past the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle with several opening their car windows to watch the comical theatrical action. One road user who also has a domestic worker said they were greatly assisted by the presence of a domestic worker in the home.

"In my case, everything is discussed with the domestic worker. If my domestic worker appears tired, okay enough, they're not made to work any more. There's also a washing machine in the house right, a vacuum cleaner and so on. So yes, it's quite light work for the domestic worker", commented Bayu (46), a resident of Pondok Labu in South Jakarta as they passed through the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle. (asp/nwk)