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For immediate release*

“The opportunity and necessity of a new International Convention on Domestic Workers appears undeniable,” says Holy See

GENEVA, June 2010—The rights and responsibilities of migrant domestic workers took centre stage at the International Labour Organization’s 99th Annual Conference in Geneva last month, where ICMC joined with the Holy See and faith-based organizations including Caritas Internationalis, Kolping International and numerous civil society groups in insisting upon the urgent need for formal guarantees of international protection.

“The attention to domestic workers and the positive vote taken on a new binding instrument for their protection express preference for the most vulnerable members of society;” observed Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva, following the decision by members of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to proceed with the drafting of a new Convention that will be put to vote at next year’s annual ILO conference.

Domestic workers, he noted, are “doubly at risk.” Not only do many come from the most disadvantaged segments of society, but the working conditions of jobs taken up out of extreme necessity frequently leave workers vulnerable to exploitation. Archbishop Tomasi called especially for special attention to women and migrants—two groups that are exceptionally vulnerable in domestic work worldwide.

“Women and girls often lack juridical and social protection, fair remuneration, limits on the hours they are expected to work, a guarantee for a weekly period of rest and safeguards during times of illness or maternity,” underscored the Archbishop.

“If the domestic worker is an immigrant, especially if without proper documentation and/or a labour contract, his/her vulnerability is much greater. A new binding norm, an International Convention on Domestic Workers will promote opportune national legislation for their protection, support their rights of association, of collective negotiation and of union representation.”

ICMC has been working with the UN Committee on Migrant Workers on its development of formal guidance—officially called a “General Comment”—regarding the rights and protection specifically of migrants doing domestic work. This guidance, a form of jurisprudence under the International Migrant Workers Convention, has been approved in draft form and is being considered for final adoption at the Committee’s next session in November.

The effort to develop this General Comment has been endorsed by the International NGO Platform on the Migrant Workers Convention, a coalition of 21 international and national NGOs and civil society organizations currently chaired by ICMC and also including Amnesty International, December 18, Franciscans International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the International Centre for Migration, Health and Development, and Migrant Rights International.

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