

M'sia, Cambodia urged to end maids ban
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Activists called for safeguards to better protect Cambodian maids in Malaysia to end a ban that has left thousands of employers without domestic help.

Malaysian migrant rights group Tenaganita and Cambodian opposition lawmaker Mu Sochua urged the two countries to agree on basic guarantees to be able to resume employment within the next three months.

Phnom Penh imposed a temporary ban on sending domestic workers to Malaysia in mid-October following numerous complaints of abuse, leaving more than 3,000 maids in Cambodia in the lurch.

More than 40,000 employers in Malaysia are also waiting for maids, Tenaganita said.

Malaysia's main maid supplier Indonesia put a similar ban in place in 2009, leading to Cambodians filling the void with some 30,000 recruited this year alone.

Tenaganita director Irene Fernandez and Mu Sochua called on the countries to adopt a standard contract for maid employment with limited work hours and other basic guarantees and reduce agency fees.

"The recognition of the domestic worker in Malaysia is not there at all... and the employers therefore act with impunity," Fernandez told reporters.

"Most of them are in a condition of forced labour," she added.

Mu Sochua said her country needed to prevent recruiters from exploiting poor rural families by not having them send their daughters to Malaysia without safeguards.

"As a sending country we need to address this issue... and we have to clean our house," Mu Sochua said.

Tenaganita also urged Malaysia to sign an international labour convention to better protect maids.

About 1.8 million migrants, mostly from poorer regional countries, work legally in Malaysia in jobs on construction sites, in factories and in homes shunned by locals.

Cases of unpaid salaries but also mental and physical abuse surface frequently. Tenaganita said it has rescued more than 60 Cambodian maids so far this year.