



April 29, 2020

The Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Mendicino:

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Migrant Workers Centre has launched the ***Amnesty for Undocumented Workers*** campaign calling on the Government of Canada to regularize the status of the thousands of undocumented workers in Canada. Regularizing the status of individuals whose status has expired, or is about to expire, just makes sense from economic, public health and humanitarian perspectives in these uncertain times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed who some of the truly essential workers are – grocery store clerks, cleaners, care workers, truckers, and agricultural workers – and the level to which our society depends on temporary foreign workers to perform these low-wage jobs. It has exposed the vulnerability of Canada's food supply due to farmers' dependence on workers with temporary, rather than permanent status in Canada. Many of the workers filling these essential jobs are undocumented and face insecurity despite their vital contributions to the Canadian economy.

With employers facing labour shortages and fewer temporary foreign workers entering the country, Canada should look to the pool of undocumented workers who have Canadian work experience. They are already here, and are ready, willing, and able to fill these positions.

From a public health perspective, it is prudent to employ workers who are already in Canada. Regularizing their status will also allow these workers to access health care if needed.

Undocumented workers have contributed to the Canadian economy for years, filling labour market shortages, yet their lapsed immigration status makes them more vulnerable to abuse and less likely to exercise their rights. Workers in the agricultural, cleaning, retail, trucking, and care work sectors will continue to be in demand in Canada. And in most cases, the labour needs they fill are permanent ones.

Amnesty for Undocumented Workers calls on the federal government to regularize the status of undocumented workers by immediately:

1. Creating a new permanent residency program for migrant workers, including undocumented workers, in industries facing labour shortages
2. Allowing migrant workers in Canada to apply for a 12-month open (unrestricted) work permit to maintain or regularize their status while their application for permanent residency is in process.

These changes will strengthen Canada's economy by ensuring that hardworking undocumented workers can contribute to our country during these uncertain times with legal status.

We look forward to meeting with you in the near future to discuss our proposal. Please contact Natalie Drolet, Executive Director – Staff Lawyer of Migrant Workers Centre at (604) 669-4482 or natalie@mwcbc.ca to establish a meeting with representatives of the undersigned organizations and individuals.

The Migrant Workers Centre (MWC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to legal advocacy for migrant workers in BC. Established in 1986, MWC facilitates access to justice for migrant workers through the provision of free legal advice and representation. MWC also works to advance fair immigration policy and improved labour standards for migrant workers through public legal education, law and policy reform, and test case litigation.

Sincerely,

MIGRANT WORKERS CENTRE, BC

Endorsed by:

Organizations

1. Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)
2. Bayanihan Centre, BC
3. British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
4. Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS), BC
5. Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia (CUPE BC)
6. Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1004, BC
7. Dignidad Migrante, BC
8. Filipino Bicol Association of BC
9. Filipino Canadian Association of Saskatoon (FILCAS), SK
10. Filipino Canadian Construction Society

11. Filipino Rising for Inclusion and Equity to Nurture Democracy (FRIENDS), AB
12. Philippines Canada Trade Council (PCTC)
13. Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS), BC
14. RAMA Okanagan, BC
15. Retail Action Network, BC
16. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 2, BC
17. South Asian Legal Clinic of BC
18. Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre (TRAC), BC
19. The Association for the Rights of Household Workers and Farm Workers (ARHW/ADDPD), QC
20. Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS), BC
21. Tulayan Filipinx Diaspora Society, BC
22. United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) 1518, BC
23. University of the Philippines Alumni Assn in BC
24. Vancouver & District Labour Council (VDLC), BC
25. Victoria Filipino Canadian Caregivers and Migrant Workers Association, BC
26. West Coast LEAF Association, BC

Individuals

1. Dr. Leonora C. Angeles, Associate Professor School of Community and Regional Planning and Social Justice Institute, University of British Columbia
2. Dr. Glenda Bonifacio, PhD, Associate Professor, Women and Gender Studies, University of Lethbridge
3. Ed Broadbent, PhD, Chair of the Broadbent Institute, former Member of Parliament and Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
4. Dr. John Paul (JP) Catungal, Assistant Professor, Social Justice Institute, University of British Columbia
5. Dr. Susana Caxaj, Assistant Professor, RN, PhD, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, University of Western Ontario
6. Dr. Gerardo Otero, Professor of International Studies, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University
7. Dr. Abe Oudshoorn, Assistant Professor, RN, PhD, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, University of Western Ontario
8. Dr. Geraldine Pratt, Head, Department of Geography Professor, Canada Research Chair of Transnationalism and Precarious Labour, University of British Columbia
9. Dr. Kendra Strauss, Director, the Labour Studies Program, Simon Fraser University
10. Dr. Ethel Tungohan, Assistant Professor, Department of Politics, Canada Research Chair in Canadian Migration Policy, Impacts and Activism, York University

CCs:

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, P.C., Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion

Ms. Jenny Kwan, Member of Parliament for Vancouver East, House of Commons