



Press Release

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## **Regularize undocumented heroes now, says new campaign for undocumented workers**

Vancouver – Undocumented migrant workers and their advocates today launched a campaign calling on the Canadian Government to regularize the status of undocumented migrant workers in industries facing labour shortages.

“These workers are risking their lives to make sure Canadians survive this pandemic – they are on the front lines making sure Canadians can eat, buy groceries, get our medicine and they keep our businesses and homes clean. Yet, they are not treated fairly,” says Juliana Dalley, from the Migrant Workers Centre (MWC), during the virtual press conference to launch their campaign “Amnesty for Undocumented Workers”.

“For too long, Canada has been blind to the circumstances of these workers. COVID-19 has shown us that these workers are essential and the jobs they fill are permanent,” she added.

There are an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 undocumented workers in Canada today and they form the most vulnerable section of “essential service” worker heroes during this pandemic. For some, the restrictive policies of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program mean they are no longer allowed to work if they are laid off or forced to leave the employer who is on their work permit. This is the case for Carlos, a migrant worker from India.

“I earned my nursing degree in the United States and was working in healthcare here in BC as a home support worker. I lost my job recently and because of my employer specific work permit, I’m not allowed to work. If I had an open work permit, I would be able to contribute my skills. I want to be on the front lines helping our communities,” said Carlos, whose name was changed to protect his identity.

For other migrant workers, their precarious situation is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I am a victim of labour trafficking who was brought to Canada by my employers on a business visa to work as a domestic worker. I was able to leave that abusive situation, and am currently undocumented and unable to access healthcare. My case in the Federal Court has also been marked with delays worsened by the pandemic and I remain in limbo. I want to work and if I had an open work permit, would be able to,” recounts Maria, whose name was also changed.

Many other undocumented migrants workers are in similar situations and the Amnesty for Undocumented Workers campaign, led by the Migrant Workers Centre and endorsed by community groups, hopes to highlight and address their plight.

The campaign calls on the Canadian government to:

1. Create a new permanent residency program for migrant workers, including undocumented workers, in industries facing labour shortages; and
2. Allow 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.

“The exploitation and precarious state of undocumented migrant workers has to stop. These are workers who often perform the dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs in our communities. Jobs that COVID-19 now highlight as essential. Beyond calling them heroes, let’s give them the justice they deserve,” said Dalley.

“After COVID-19, we cannot go back to an old normal of exploitation and precarious status. This unfair treatment has to stop now,” she added.

Along with a letter to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Minister Marco Mendicino, the campaign is also mobilizing community members to contact their Members of Parliament to heighten their calls for regularization.

“We invite the Canadian public to join us and support the campaign. Together let’s work to protect the rights and welfare of all our heroes,” concluded Dalley.