

Benita Ferrero-Waldner
European Commissioner for External Relations

Brussels, 18 July 2008
Our Ref: B804

Dear Ms. Ferrero-Waldner,

Subject: EU-Jordan Association Council

In view of the upcoming EU-Jordan Association Council on 22 July 2008, Amnesty International urges the Commission to raise with the Jordanian authorities our concerns regarding the abusive conditions to which women migrant domestic workers continue to be exposed.

We recognise that the Jordanian authorities have introduced a number of measures to try to improve the situation of migrant workers, notably the Special Working Contract for Non-Jordanian Domestic Workers. However, Amnesty International considers that much more needs to be done in order to address and remedy continuing abuse, and to ensure protection of the rights of migrant domestic workers.

Earlier this year, during a visit to Jordan, Amnesty International delegates interviewed a number of women migrant domestic workers and representatives of organisations assisting them, who reported a disturbing pattern of abuses, including:

- Economic exploitation by employers: with migrant domestic workers being paid only part of their meagre wages or are not paid at all and, in some cases, being required to work for three or more months without pay ostensibly to reimburse the recruitment agency's costs, even though this is banned by Jordanian law.
- Being required to work excessive hours, seven days a week and without any holiday.
- Being confined effectively to their employer's home; in some cases, domestic workers are reported to have been injured or killed when seeking to escape from their employer's home by climbing or jumping from balconies.
- Being prevented from leaving Jordan promptly after completing their employment due to the failure of employers to have obtained up-to-date residency and work permits for them or to have paid the fines levied as a consequence by the Jordanian authorities.
- Being subject to physical and other abuse by their employers or members of the employer's household, including beatings, threats of violence and rape and other sexual abuse, without recourse to effective remedies or redress.

Amnesty International therefore urges the Commission to press the Jordanian authorities at the Association Council to develop a framework for legal, social and economic protection for women migrant domestic workers, and in particular to:

- Amend the Labour Law so that it covers domestic work and guarantees labour rights to migrant domestic workers;
- Expedite the establishment of a shelter for runaway domestic workers;
- Improve monitoring of recruitment agencies and working conditions, and ensure that employment contracts are enforced;
- Ensure that employers and representatives of recruitment agencies who abuse migrant domestic workers are brought to justice;
- Develop quicker and more efficient resolution mechanisms to prevent migrant domestic workers from a) being detained or prevented from leaving Jordan on account of their employer's failure to keep the appropriate work and residency permits, and b) being arrested on the basis of often flimsy allegations made by their employer;

If implemented, Amnesty International believes these reforms would contribute significantly to ending abuses and promoting respect for the rights of women migrant domestic workers in Jordan.

We look forward to hearing from you as to the outcome of these discussions, and remain at your disposal to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicolas J. Seger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "N".

Dr. Nicolas Beger
Director
Amnesty International EU Office