

22 June 2020: Legal Action Worldwide

## Ethiopian domestic workers in Lebanon abandoned in the streets - The Lebanese Government must act now

On the week of the international day for Domestic Workers, Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) calls for the abolishment of the abusive 'Kafala system' in Lebanon. In the last few months, hundreds of migrant domestic workers; the vast majority women; have been evicted from their sponsors' homes without money, passports or belongings and are living on the streets in Beirut. The stories of abuse that they have told us are shocking.

*"I was not paid for 8 years. Whenever I asked about my salary, she (the employer) beat me and shouted at me. She locked me inside when she went out. She didn't give me enough food. She didn't let me contact anyone from my own country. When I wanted to leave after two years she said "you can't go. You have to stay here." She was always beating me. Beating me with wood. Kicking me. She wouldn't let me leave."*

This is the story of Makdes (pseudonym), 40 years old Ethiopian migrant domestic worker who is represented by Legal Action Worldwide (LAW). We have assisted her to return home to Ethiopia and are providing legal representation in her case against her sponsor.

LAW represents many women like Makdes. We have received horrendous reports of sexual violence, including rape; physical abuse including beatings; verbal abuse; including threats and intimidation or fraudulent debt. Women are locked in their sponsors homes sometimes for years with no means of escape.



*Evicted Ethiopian domestic worker sitting on the floor next the Consulate in Beirut – Lebanon June2020*

There are an estimated 250,000-300,000 migrant domestic workers within Lebanon who are employed under the notorious “kafala” system, which governs migrant workers’ rights and legal status in Lebanon. They are completely reliant on their employers, who are their ‘sponsor.’ These women are completely excluded from the protection of Lebanese labour law.

*“Many of these women have been forced to work seven days a week. Their employers lock them in their apartments and have withheld salaries for months, and sometimes for years. They are treated as disposable items and sold or traded as possessions by their employers. We have even seen sponsors attempting to sell domestic workers via social media. The conditions for some of these women can only be described as slavery and many have been subjected to torture. Ultimately, the Kafala system must be abolished and, in the meantime, the Government and Parliament can and should act immediately to protect these women”* said Antonia Mulvey, Executive Director, Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) Legal Action Worldwide.

LAW provides free legal information, assistance and representation to migrant domestic workers. It is a unique non-profit network and think tank of human rights lawyers who provide creative legal assistance to individuals and communities who have suffered human rights violations and abuses in fragile and conflict-affected areas.

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