



NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS, SEWA UNION

While things have been slowing down since already early March with many workers forced to stay home, the extended 21 day lockdown and other uncertainties at this time of crisis comes as a big blow to all informal workers who otherwise live a hand to mouth existence on daily wages. The migrant workers feel the most trapped- unable to go home and unable to send money home to their families. The social ostracism is also a factor of concern even for the workers who work in the essential services - who are treated with suspicion and even aggression for fear of spreading infection.

The majority of domestic workers have also been told to stay at home. Unlike other informal workers, the domestic workers have long work relationships with their employers. But being covered by no regulatory norms, they can be easily dismissed according to the whims of the employers. They also have no other social security or rights. Most of these workers are women who in many cases are the sole bread winners of the family.

When the COVID fear began to spread and social distancing was spoken about already in early March, many workers were told to stay at home because of the possibility of infection. Some employers have been very kind and have given workers masks; sanitizers etc to even take home to their families. So some workers continued to go to work. Some employers offered workers salaries till March 31st in states like Kerala where the partial lockdown which was announced on March 15 was supposed to be lifted. Some workers just could not reach work because there was no public transport as in Punjab already since March 16th. But now this lockdown is extended to April 15th. There is fear and distress, how will they feed their children. Even the noon meal that children received in schools or the anganwadis is no longer available. Hence, more hungry mouths to feed.

Many states have announced welfare packages for the workers but things will take time to roll out. Nevertheless, without cash for other needs, the distress signals will also become a social threat. According to conservative figures, there are over 40 lakh domestic workers in the country all of whom have employers and have provided service to keep the social fabric functioning all these years. It is only normal that the employers rise up to the occasion and agree to pay the workers their wages for these days when they are obliged to remain at home.

This appeal comes from the National Committee of Domestic Workers of SEWA which is a Central Trade Union of workers in the informal sector in India. As days go by, insecurity will convert into aggression which is the responsibility of all to manage and control. Hence extending this small gesture will be a way to cooperate with this global crisis by at least mitigating the woes of a small section of informal workers.

Convener: Ms. Sonia George

Members: Prabhatiben - SEWA Odisha, Durgaben - SEWA Rajasthan, Utraben - SEWA Delhi, Kiranben and Meenaben - SEWA MP, Jivanbalaben - SEWA Uttarakhand, Swarnlataben - SEWA Jarkhand, Meenaben and Veenaben - SEWA Gujarat, Sarojanben - SEWA Kerala, Sushilaben - SEWA West Bengal