

May 22, 2008

Mr. Vayalar Ravi

Minister for Overseas Affairs

New Delhi

Regarding: Sharing Our Concern about the Indian Guest Worker's Plight in the US and Seeking Your Attention to the Ongoing Hunger Strike

Sir,

We are extremely concerned about the exploitation and human rights violations that the Indian guest workers have been undergoing when they were fraudulently recruited to work for Signal International, Inc. in the US. We are writing this letter to share our concern as trade unionists with some one like you who is also a trade unionist and also the Minister for Overseas Affairs.

Over 500 guest workers from India have been working and living in slave-like conditions at a shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi owned by the company Signal International. Signal is one of the employers that, after Katrina, has used the United States' "guest worker" visa program (H-2B) to import cheap labour. At Signal, they were forced to live in company trailers, 24 men packed into each, isolated from the world. For this, the company took \$1,050 a month from their paychecks. Their visas prevented them from working for any other company and left them in the constant threat of deportation. Some of the workers attempted to organize for their rights. In response, the company sent armed guards into the camp while they slept and took the organizers away at gunpoint. They were locked in a room and told they would be deported. In desperation, one of them attempted suicide by slitting his wrist. The family members of these workers are living under constant fear of the possibility of suicide by the victims and themselves.

Several workers have been on hunger strike since May 14th to seek justice from the US government as well as the Indian government. With due respect to the earlier attempts made by you, we strongly urge you and your Ministry to take up the issue and find an immediate solution to the problem. We hope that your Ministry's intervention would open the doors to justice for the workers. We strongly urge you to ensure that the workers' and the families' misery does not go unaddressed by its own government. We request you to take concrete actions to this end immediately.

Signed by Anannya Bhattacharjee, on behalf of R. A. Mital, National Secretary, Hind Mazdoor Sabha

Anannya Bhattacharjee

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