

May 23, 2008

To,

Mr. Ronen Sen

The Indian Ambassador in the US

Washington, DC

Sub: Seeking your attention to the plight of Indian Guest Workers in US

Respected Sir,

As you are well aware, hundreds of 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 14th of this month. They have been on hunger strike in front of the Indian Embassy to show their protest against the Indian Government's negligence of the issue. The Indian Embassy appears not to respect the hunger strike; instead, it organized cultural programmes in the Embassy while ignoring the hunger strikers outside. The desperate workers tried their level best to get Your's and Embassy's attention in this issue. Though you said in the beginning that you are open minded to the issue, your lack of response since then has proved otherwise.

As Indian Ambassador in the US, it is your duty to listen to the issues of Indians in US and attempt to resolve that. But absolutely nothing is done in this case. The Ministry of Overseas Affairs has contacted your office and communicated the workers' issues but the workers have received no reply from you.. Is it critical and appropriate for the Indian Embassy in the US to pressurize the Department of Justice to grant the workers Continued Presence so that they can fight for the justice they deserve. We also request you to communicate with US Congresspeople to hold a Congressional Hearing.

We express our solidarity with the workers and their families. We want your office to intervene in this issue and take necessary steps to resolve this serious problem immediately.

Signed by Anannya Bhattacharjee, on behalf of Ashim Roy, General Secretary, New Trade Union Initiative

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