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Regularization Now!

Emergency Rallies Denounce Trudeau Government's Lack of Action



Montreal, June 23, 2023

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Regularization Now!

Emergency Rallies Denounce Trudeau Government's Lack of Action

Emergency rallies were held June 23-25 in Shediac, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and Windsor to denounce the federal government after another session of parliament ended without passing legislation to regularize all migrants and refugees. This was despite the Prime Minister directing the Minister of Immigration in his December 2021 mandate letter to "further explore ways of regularizing status for undocumented workers who are contributing to Canadian communities" and to "expand pathways to Permanent Residence for international students and temporary foreign workers." This lack of action means that for over 550 days, undocumented migrants have continued

to be shut out of schools, denied health care, exploited at work, separated from their families and detained and deported. Meanwhile migrant workers generally, such as those considered temporary foreign workers, remain vulnerable to abuse as well.

In the callout for the actions organizers stated, "Join us to insist on our equality as human beings, join us to insist on our dignity and worth." The callout reiterated the demand for a regularization program that gives permanent residence to every single migrant in the country and an immediate end to deportations and detentions.



Montreal, June 23, 2023



Toronto, June 24, 2023



Windsor, June 25, 2023



Migrant Workers Intensify Their Campaign for Status for All

More than 300 people participated in a Regularization Assembly organized online by the Migrant Rights Network on June 14. The meeting was to mobilize and concentrate actions to demand parliament adopt a Status for All! regularization program before it breaks for the summer. People facing deportation, undocumented workers, refugees, international students, migrant rights advocates and others participated in the informative and lively event.

In his introduction, Executive Director of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, Syed Hussan, noted that in December 2021, Prime Minister Trudeau pledged to support a regularization program for all undocumented workers, migrants and refugees. Since that time, however, there has been little action.

Hussan noted that any concession the migrant rights movement has achieved has not come as a result of government largesse, but because migrant workers have been an organized force, defending their rights with one united voice, within the fight for the rights of all.

He stated that in the last three years more than 100 actions have been organized. These have included rallies, visits to cabinet ministers' offices, petitions, phone calls and even a face-to-face meeting between Immigration Minister Sean Fraser and 150 undocumented people demanding that he act to protect their rights.

These actions to demand full status, dignity and equality for all have kept the issue of migrant rights on the national agenda, gaining public support and putting pressure on the Liberal government to make good on Trudeau's pledge. "We know that they are discussing this matter in cabinet. We are demanding that Prime Minister Trudeau act now to keep his promise," said Hussan.

The Assembly was organized as two round tables. In the first, four migrant rights advocates spoke about their experience in the struggle for migrant rights in this country. These included Jane, a refugee claimant threatened with deportation; Daniel De Leon, chair of Migrante Canada -- a national defence organization of the Filipino community in Canada -- whose deportation order has been stayed for the moment; Hardy Anne, a long-time activist for migrant rights in the Montreal area; and Claudia, a Chinese migrant worker.

An intermission followed this round table, during which Assembly participants were urged to call, text, or email the Prime Minister, the Minister of Immigration, the Minister of Public Safety and Security, and other cabinet ministers to demand status for all without exception.

The second round table addressed how migrant workers are routinely financially exploited and abused because of their temporary status or lack of status. Of particular interest was a call from OJ, a worker in Jamaica. OJ was part of a group of courageous Jamaican workers who wrote a letter to the Jamaican government calling on it to intervene to help them stop the brutal exploitation and abuse of workers from Jamaica and others being brought in through Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program.

OJ spoke of coming to Canada during the Covid pandemic and being shocked at the deplorable housing, food and treatment at the farm where he worked. He pointed out that migrant farm workers face brutal conditions and abuse akin to slavery and have little protection under the law. He and other Jamaican workers expected some action as a result of their letter to the Jamaican Minister of Labour, but little has changed.

However, OJ pointed out, the letter created more awareness in Canada and Jamaica about the plight

of seasonal agricultural workers and brought to light the systemic problems that create the conditions migrant workers face in Canada. Assembly participants were informed that, as a result of his action, OJ has been punished by the Canadian government, which has deprived him of the possibility of working in Canada again.

A young worker, Divyansh Kamboj, reported being exploited at a gas station where he worked for more than two years and was paid less than \$10 an hour over that period. Now, thanks to support from the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, Div said he is fighting to recover the more than \$40,000 dollars he is owed by the gas station owner. Migrant workers are often isolated and afraid to fight, he said, but it is through joining with others and fighting collectively that it is possible to achieve justice and dignity.

The meeting also heard from a spokesperson for a group of fishery workers in New Brunswick who were deprived of their wages for three weeks last year because of a shortened lobster harvesting season. These workers, many of them women, fought back against their employer. By uniting, together they won their back pay and gained some concessions in their working conditions as well as a bonus, and contracts which guaranteed them work for the following season.

These victories all came as a result of organized resistance, a major theme running through the meeting.

Another speaker was Doris Gatawa, a live-in caregiver from the Philippines working in Vancouver, who is an active member of the Committee for Domestic Workers and Caregivers Rights (CDWCR). Gatawa pointed out that Canada's immigration policies affecting migrant workers have become more and more arbitrary, inhumane and racist over time. She noted that 100 years ago, when domestic workers were brought in from Britain and other northern European countries, they came as landed immigrants.

Today, when domestic workers come from the Philippines, Guatemala, Mexico, Indonesia and other countries, everything is done to keep their status temporary and to deprive them of the right to permanent residency in Canada, even after they have lived here for many years. This has to change, Gatawa pointed out, and it is through organizations like CDWCR that are fighting for the rights of domestic workers and caregivers that change will come.

The Regularization Assembly also heard from the frontlines, at the encampment of a group of international students from India, outside the Canadian Border Services Agency in Brampton. They had been holding an 18-day round-the-clock protest there to stop the deportation of some 100 students from the Punjab who have been victimized by an enrollment scam carried out by fraudulent "recruiters." They charged the students large amounts of money to be enrolled in Canadian colleges and universities, and provided them with bogus admission letters.

Lovepreet Singh, who was slated for deportation on June 12, addressed the meeting through a social media hook-up. He said it is not acceptable that he and his peers have been mistreated by these unscrupulous recruiters who fleeced them for tens of thousands of dollars, and then they have to face abuse again in Canada. It was announced to the Assembly that the federal government has put a hold on the deportation order and will investigate the situation.

The meeting ended on a high note with the Migrant Rights Network announcing plans to intensify actions over the coming days. They pledged to continue to organize and fight for the rights of the hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers, refugees and migrant workers who are victims of Canada's racist and arbitrary immigration and refugee policy. Assembly participants pledged to fight on beyond this session of parliament till status and justice for all is achieved.



Regularization Assembly – Who Said What

Jane, Member of Migrant Workers Alliance for Change

I came to Canada as a refugee expecting protection. At every level, my application for refugee status has been denied, including on humanitarian grounds. It has forced me to go underground and to live in fear. I decided to fight for regularization for all and join this movement. For me regularization means to have access to basic services, to have equal rights, to live without fear. To live with dignity.

Danilo de Leon, Chairperson, Migrante Canada

Regularization means that I will be able to see my daughter who I have not seen for more than 10 years. It would mean equality and dignity. This fight for regularization is important because human beings have rights. It is a violation of our rights to be uprooted from our homelands and it is unacceptable that we are deprived of our rights here in Canada as well. The fight for our rights is a fight for the rights of all workers in Canada.

Hardy Anne, Long-time Fighter for Regularization and Rights of Migrants

We took actions such as visiting MPs' offices. We held pickets and we phoned, and held vigils here in Montreal in freezing winter conditions to tell these politicians that we will not back down. This is a fight about human dignity and that they cannot play around with migrants' lives.

OJ, Former Agricultural Worker from Jamaica

The struggle is not easy. It is not easy for us to go for six or seven months to a foreign country to be abused, to live in cramped spaces with no privacy. They chartered a plane to bring us from Jamaica during the pandemic and when I got here everything was horrendous: the housing, the food, the treatment from the boss.

That letter we wrote, we wrote for all migrant workers, to all the bosses. The letter we wrote protesting our conditions and calling on the Jamaican and Canadian governments to act to protect us had a huge impact. It created an international outcry.

We have to continue to push – to fight. We want to tell the Canadian people when you go to your store to buy apples or peaches or your bottle of wine, think of us. We are fighting alone and we need you to investigate and find out what is happening to us migrant farm workers, all migrant workers and support us in our struggle.

Doris Gatawa, Caregiver in Vancouver

Canada has had caregivers come to help with childcare and the elderly for more than 100 years but has always changed the rules and regulations for entry. It makes it difficult for us to achieve permanent residency by putting a language requirement and obstacles in our way. Many people who have lived and worked here for decades helping Canadian families are deprived of the right to status and permanent residence. This is unfair. It is important to continue to fight together so that migrant workers have rights and dignity.



International Students Organize Successful 18-Day Protest



International students secured a significant win as a result of their 18-day *morcha* – 24-hour permanent protest – outside the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) headquarters in Mississauga when all their deportations were temporarily postponed on June 14.

The students' determined action gained the support of hundreds of community members, community and migrant rights organizations as well as local Gurdwaras, artists, public figures and small businesses. The *morcha* began May 28 and continued with a community gathering held each night with food, speeches, and performances.



More than 100 international students are facing possible deportation and at least eight have already been deported. Most of these students have spent more than half a decade in this country; they have completed their studies, and work and live here. The students have been "deemed inadmissible" or are facing inadmissibility hearings and several dozen are facing deportation due to fraudulent college admission letters provided to immigration on their behalf by recruiters when they first arrived in Canada. It is only recently that the government has started proceedings against them.

On June 14, Immigration Minister Sean Fraser announced that a task force of Immigration and CBSA officials will issue Temporary Resident Permits to those students who studied in colleges and can prove that they were not involved in fraud. These students will not face deportation or a five-year ban from re-entering Canada (i.e., inadmissibility). The eight students who were unfairly deported will have an opportunity to make their case and to return to Canada. Deportations have been halted until the investigation is completed. While the announcement provides temporary relief to all students, the details have yet to be released in writing.



A large number of questions the students posed to the government during their protest remain unanswered: Will the Canadian government take responsibility for failing to identify the fraudulent documents at the time of entry? What compensation do students receive who lost sleep, jobs, and thousands of dollars in legal fees due to the government's mistakes? What will be done to hold public and private colleges responsible for their complicity in widespread fraud, not just in this case but in others before it? What will the government do to ensure that students who have studied, worked hard, and built lives here have access to permanent residency?

Organizers of the *morcha* point out that a number of concerns remain and what the government is actually promising is far from clear. Once the investigation is completed the government may proceed with deportations of some students.

The *morcha* organizers have stated that if this happens the students and community will restart the *morcha* and maintain it until the deportations are permanently cancelled. They state, "Our eyes and ears remain open, our hearts remain committed to justice, and we remain prepared to take back 6900 Airport Road if necessary. We will not let our brothers and sisters be deported."





(Photos: Naujawan Support Network, Decent Work and Health, A. Kaur)



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