



For immediate release

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Canadian Labour Congress to Ministers Solberg and Finley: Where are the Filipino 11? Temporary Foreign Worker Program Should Be Suspended

OTTAWA – The Canadian Labour Congress calls for an immediate moratorium of the government’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program until a comprehensive investigation of identified abuse and exploitation cases takes place. Full suspension of this program is necessary as the government officially acknowledges that it cannot “monitor the working conditions offered by the employer following entry into Canada” – that it cannot protect these workers.

Over two months ago, Canada’s poorly regulated Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) enabled a labour broker to lure 11 skilled trades’ people to Canada for non-existent jobs.

Those workers – known as the “Filipino 11” – became indentured labour after having to pay over \$10,000 each in so-called administrative fees to labour brokers and intermediaries that thrive within the unregulated margins of the TFWP.

Promised jobs in their field at up to C\$23 an hour, some sold their homes or took out loans to cover C\$10,000 or more in fees demanded by labour brokers. But once in Canada, they were “sold” to unscrupulous employers, kept in an isolated rural house, and forced to do menial jobs earning – if paid at all – a fraction of what they were promised.

As The Economist magazine (November 22) reported “They were economic slaves,” said a Barrie policeman who chanced upon them: “It turned my stomach.”

The Canadian Labour Congress first learned of the plight of these workers in early September, and filed a complaint with the Conservative government demanding an investigation into the case. In that complaint and in the September 11, 2007 news release, we asked three things:

- What investigative steps and findings will be taken by government’s departments and agencies with regard to this case?

- What steps are being taken to identify and pursue the labour brokers, contractors and employers implicated to retrieve wages and usurious processing and administrative fees paid by these workers?
- What steps will be taken to prosecute the individuals and employers involved in this case?

The government's official response, received just this past week, offers little more than the shameful excuse that the department that brings in guest workers is "not mandated to monitor the working conditions offered by the employer following entry into Canada".

Meanwhile, the Canadian Labour Congress has uncovered allegations that the workers were handed from an unscrupulous broker to various employers.

"Given all that is known - and how much is still NOT known - it would be unconscionable for the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, and the Minister of Immigration to carry on with this program or to announce any further expansion of this program before undertaking a serious investigation into the known cases of abuse and exploitation," says Hassan Yussuff, Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress.

The disturbing story of the Filipino 11 is not isolated. It is but one of many cases across the country being documented by the labour movement involving migrant workers in the construction, health care, service, and agricultural sectors.

The Canadian Labour Congress, the national voice of the labour movement, represents 3.2 million Canadian workers. The CLC brings together Canada's national and international unions along with the provincial and territorial federations of labour and 136 district labour councils. Web site: www.canadianlabour.ca

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