

RI told to intensify negotiations with M'sia to protect workers

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JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

Indonesia should intensify its bilateral negotiations to protect its migrant workers, especially in countries where cases of abuse and violations occur frequently, rights activists have said.

Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) executive director Muhammad Hafiz said there should be an agreement to allow the Indonesian government to better protect migrant workers, such as those in Malaysia.

"But so far it has never shown positive results for Indonesia. Indonesia is always losing in the negotiation and bargaining process," he said.

Speaking on the sidelines of a regional civil society organizations (CSO) consultation in Jakarta on Tuesday, Hafiz said abused Indonesian migrant workers had little access to legal assistance.

The only access they have is through the Foreign Ministry's directorate for the protection of Indonesian nationals and entities abroad "which also needs to be strengthened", he said.

The Malaysian Ambassador to Jakarta Zahrain Mohamed Hashim was scheduled to meet Manpower Minister Hanif Dhakiri on Tuesday afternoon to discuss migrant worker protection efforts.

The meeting, however, was cancelled as Hanif had to attend a meeting at the Presidential Palace.

A future meeting is scheduled on the matter between Hanif and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, while Zahrain is scheduled to hold a press conference on Wednesday at the embassy.

One of Indonesia's solutions was to intensify labor market information sharing, the Manpower Ministry's labor market development director Roostiawati said.

She said the ministry would share the existing blueprint with other sectors in the government, as well as conduct discussions with civil societies so that Indonesia would have a strong position.

"It is still in progress, but the issues we want to focus on include

how to establish labor market information sharing, skill information sharing, [...] and labor inspector networking," she said.

In regard to protection of Indonesia's migrant workers in Malaysia, she said labor cases should be solved in a labor court.

"All ASEAN countries are members of ILO, which means they have labor courts, so they should focus on utilizing this," she said.

She said a moratorium on sending Indonesian maids to Malaysia, as proposed by Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia Rusdi Kirana last week, required further study from her ministry.

Separately, a lawyer from Malaysia, who has been heavily involved in representing Indonesian maids subjected to domestic abuse in Malaysia, said there was systematic abuse toward Indonesian workers involving agents and law enforcement agencies in Malaysia.

"If Indonesian maids report their employers, it rarely makes it to court because most likely the police would settle the case with their employers," the lawyer, who requested to remain anonymous, told *The Jakarta Post*.

Meanwhile, the government was also urged to lead ongoing negotiations over the protection of migrant worker rights as the current ASEAN chair does not list it as a priority.

HRWG ASEAN program manager Daniel Awigra said the CSOs were concerned as Singapore "seemed like it was not concerned about migrant worker issues".

"Indonesia should be the one pushing this issue," he said.

He added that the CSOs were also disappointed over the non-legally binding ASEAN Consensus on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers, a follow-up document to the 2007 Cebu Declaration.

"Singapore should continue the negotiation from the ASEAN Consensus in Manila with a concrete action plan and show their seriousness about the multilateral negotiations," he said.

The Philippines prioritized the issue when it was ASEAN chair in 2017.