

Domestic worker bill gains momentum

Bill aims to improve migrant worker protections

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Domestic workers in Indonesia may see a light at the end of the tunnel as lawmakers move to advance a domestic worker protection bill that has been in limbo for over a decade.

Activist Lita Anggraini from the National Network on Domestic Worker Advocacy (Jala PRT) said she hoped all House of Representatives factions would approve the bill that the government would respond positively to the initiative.

"The law could change people's mindset, showing them that domestic workers are just as important as any other worker," she said on Wednesday.

The bill's passing will not only empower domestic workers but also strengthen the country's bargaining power when placing Indonesian migrant workers abroad, Lita said.

Lita's comments followed a House Legislation Body (Baleg) decision on Wednesday to endorse the bill in an upcoming plenary session. Baleg will later deliberate the bill itself — even though the body has yet to schedule the discussion — before the legislation can be passed into law by the House.

Domestic workers will have legal assurance of "humane" working hours, receive periodic leave and holiday bonuses as agreed upon by their employers and receive social and health benefits, according to the latest copy of the bill.

The bill includes provisions regarding the recruitment of domestic workers and ensures their legal rights, such as the right to education provided by their placement agencies and administered by the government. The bill also details criminal penalties in cases of dis-

crimination, exploitation, harassment and violence by employers and placement agencies.

"This shows that Indonesia will support communities that have not been getting [attention from the government] and the dynamics of the lives of domestic workers are quite complex," said Willy Aditya, the chairman of the bill's working committee and a member of the NasDem Party.

The initiative has remained untouched in the National Legislation Program (Prolegnas) since 2004. Lawmakers have yet to thoroughly discuss the bill even though it has been on the docket for more than a decade.

Indonesia has about 4.2 million domestic workers, according to Jala PRT. They are among the most vulnerable groups in Indonesia as they lack a legal framework to protect them, leaving them highly susceptible to being underpaid, overworked and subject to violence or human trafficking.

About one fourth of adult and child domestic workers, who are mostly female, are paid Rp 1 million (US\$69) per month, a 2017 International Labor Organization (ILO) analysis of Statistics Indonesia's 2008-2015 National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) showed, far lower than most provincial minimum wages.

The analysis also showed that most work 40 hours a week, or six hours a day, without a single day off, which is far shorter than the 2002 ILO estimate of 14 to 18 hours a day.

Domestic workers, a majority of whom move from their hometowns to cities to find work, have also fallen through the social safety net during the COVID-19 pandemic as they are neither registered as workers nor as residents of the cities they work in, said Lita.

The progress on the bill, there-

fore, showed the House's desire to protect domestic workers from such hardships, said National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) commissioner Theresia Sri Endras Iswarini, who expected the bill to be deliberated soon.

National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) deputy chairman Amiruddin Al Rahab lauded lawmakers for taking a step forward to protect domestic workers.

"Respecting human rights starts within the household," he said.

In 2002, the ILO estimated that 42 percent of Indonesia's 700,000 child domestic workers experienced gross physical, psychological and sexual abuse. The ILO has no new data on the matter.

To improve the bill, which includes domestic workers' right to benefit from social safety net programs but fails to detail how this will be upheld, Amiruddin suggested that the government or employers pay for medical care through the Health Care and Social Security Agency (BPJS Kesehatan).

ILO Indonesia national program officer Irham Saifuddin said the bill adhered to most of the minimum standards stipulated in ILO Convention 189 on creating proper working conditions for domestic workers.

He suggested that lawmakers add the convention's standards for vulnerable domestic workers, such as child workers, domestic workers who live with their employers and migrant domestic workers.

Irham also encouraged the government to ratify the convention, which would improve Indonesia's bargaining position to push receiving countries to protect Indonesian migrant workers abroad. (ggq)