



Dr. Khawla Matter, In Charge Of Labor Main Principles in International Labour Organization

Seizure of the worker's passport, violation to human rights

Interview: Nasser Al-Sha'li

Laws and regulations of the labor market are different from country to another and from sector to another. These laws and regulations are developed with the development of the market.

Dr. Khawla talks about some phenomena in Gulf labor market.

How the International Labour organization evaluate the Gulf labor regulations towards the foreign workers?

Labor laws in general in the Gulf countries vary from country to another. We can't say that all labor laws in the Gulf have dealt fairly with the foreign workers but some countries such as the Sultanate of Oman and Bahrain took advanced steps in reformulation of the labor laws and legislations as they emphasized the main labor rights for citizens and foreign workers. The Omani and Bahraini labor laws are in the leadership compared to other Gulf countries in the field of labor laws and legislations. We wish that all the Gulf countries would take the same path that Bahrain and Oman already started towards materializing essential amendments on the labor laws for nationals and expatriates.

Seizure of the passports, how do you see such act in the sight of laws and legislations?

Seizure of the passports is considered a clear violation to the main human rights because the passport or any identity documents are something owned only by the person himself, even the country that issues it has no right to confiscate it. There are some countries that confiscate the passports of the foreign workers and sometimes the citizens too. This is an apparent violation to those workers' rights. Imprisonment of the workers inside their work sites or inside the houses in case of servants is also another form of violation to the labor laws.

Sultanate Ministry of Manpower defined the basic salary of the Omani worker by RO 140 , is this a violation to the worker's rights under the expensive living ?

We can support the Ministry of Manpower by making a study to the markets in the Sultanate in order to specify the minimum salary. I can't say

whether RO 140 is suitable or not till we make such study.

Are there complaints received by the organization about treatment of foreign workers in Gulf countries ?

There is criticism regarding the way of dealing with the foreign workers in all AGCC countries. There is criticism to the system of sponsorship while there is another dangerous phenomenon that is called the loose manpower. That happened because every one can go to the Ministry Of Manpower and gets labor permissions to twenty workers for an imaginary enterprise. Those workers come to the labor market and this man takes part of their wages. All the world's organizations see such act as compulsory work or human trafficking. There is also criticism regarding the minimum salaries of the foreign workers or those who don't receive their salaries from their employers. There are court cases show that there are foreign workers who don't take their salaries for one or two years. There is another phenomenon, the increase of the working hours when the employer force the workers to work extra hours. The legal working hours are 8 hours per day, but the employer can ask the workers to work extra hours against additional payment.

Are there labor complaints in the Sultanate?

I would like to speak without compliments, the Ministry of Manpower work hard to improve the working conditions in the labor market, specially for the foreign workers and

Oman Labor Law, Amongst Most Advanced Laws in AGCC states

we think that the Sultanate always takes advanced steps compared to other Gulf countries. For example, the Sultanate took the initiative to issue the human trafficking law. We hope that other AGCC states would take the same steps towards issuing similar laws.

Can we consider the difference between the national worker's wage and the foreign worker's wage as violation to the labor rights?

The main agreements of International Labor Organization state that the salary taken by the workers who work the same work under the same circumstances and conditions has to be the same for the national workers and the foreign workers . The employer may give accommodation or housing allowance, medical assurance to the foreign workers.

What are the efforts exerted in developing the sponsorship system?

We are arranging a profound study about the sponsorship system in the Gulf region. We are working on a plan to put an end to this system through stages rather than a direct step in order to avoid chaos in the labor market.

How do you see the labor rights in the occupied countries ?

You mean Palestine, all the rights are violated. There are huge violations as per the annual reports of the organization. There are many violations related to the freedom of movement of the laborers. The Palestinian youth couldn't reach the targeted labor markets so they can't get the wage that secure the minimum requirement for their living. Another form of violation is the lack of foodstuff, essential materials and tools. The labor market is not stable while destruction is continuous against the economic enterprises and the main infrastructure of the country. All that resulted in forcing the women and children to enter the labor market because transporting them through the crossings as much easier than transporting the youth or the older people.