

Press Release
December 16, 2016

TFWs and advocates mount campaign against unjust recruitment fees

Vancouver – A group of Temporary Foreign Workers and their advocates held a press conference today to launch a new campaign that will address the widespread problem of illegal recruitment fees being charged to TFWs for jobs in BC.

The campaign, “Rising Up Against Recruitment”, aims to protect and promote the rights of TFWs by raising awareness about the problem and offering recommendations to the BC government.

“TFWs provide care for families and they help the economy grow. Yet many are routinely charged exorbitant fees for jobs in BC that sometimes do not exist. The fees violate the Employment Standards Act and to pay them, TFWs and their families often incur debts with high interest rates from money lenders,” says the West Coast Domestic Workers Association’s Resochita Arma.

She added that despite laws prohibiting these fees, inadequate oversight and enforcement along with a 6 month limitation period to file a complaint with the Employment Standards Branch (ESB) means that many TFWs are unable to recover the fees they paid.

In response, the Rising Up Against Recruitment campaign calls on the provincial government to: enact new legislation to protect foreign workers; implement a pro-active enforcement regime; and provide access to information and advocacy.

A lawyer working with TFWs who has filed a class-action suit against their recruitment agencies and Mac’s Convenience Stores says the “changes advocated by the campaign are urgently needed.”

Kirby Smith says that the ESB’s “current complaint-driven model does not empower active investigation of suspect recruiters and employers” and that “without increased penalties and shared liability between employer and recruiters, exploitative employer and recruiter behaviour is unlikely to change.”

MLA Mable Elmore, the Opposition Spokesperson for TFWs and Immigration agrees that more has to be done provincially to help protect TFWs and all workers.

“For too long, Premier Christy Clark and the BC Liberal government have failed to take action on this issue. And their inaction has allowed for the continuation of this unjust practice. TFWs are often bound to their employers and are vulnerable to exploitation. Most provinces have already enacted legislation to address this issue,” she said.

More information about the campaign, including their petition, is at risingup.ca.