

DECLARATION OF SITI AISAH

Petition Alleging Violations by the United States of America of the Human Rights of Domestic Workers Employed by Diplomats

I, SITI AISAH, declare as follows:

1. I am a petitioner in the case of *Petition Alleging Violations by the United States of America of the Human Rights of Domestic Workers Employed by Diplomats* before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.
2. I am a national of Indonesia. My native language is Bahasa Indonesia and I am fluent in English.
3. From October 1998 until March 2000, I worked as a domestic worker in the Manhattan apartment of Mr. Ali Fahad Al-Hajri, the Ambassador to the Qatar Mission of the United Nations, his wife and six children. During the course of my employment, my employers treated me as less than human. I felt like a slave in their household.

Background

4. I attended school in Indonesia only until the 6th grade, because my parents could not afford to continue to send me to school. I helped my parents on their farm instead. When I was 14 years old, I migrated to the city of Bakasi, Indonesia to find work. I worked in a factory until I was 18 years old.
5. At the age of 18, I learned about the possibility of working as a domestic servant in Saudi Arabia. My friends told me that in this job I could earn and save money for a good future. In Jakarta, I paid a recruitment agency to find me a domestic servant job. I did not know where they would send me.
6. The recruitment agency required me to remain on the premises of the agency until my visa came through. I lived at the recruitment agency for three months until I received my visa, during which time I was not allowed to leave or to work. I finally received a visa for travel to Qatar. The agency sent me to Doha, Qatar.
7. Upon arrival in Qatar, the agency informed me that I would actually be sent to work for a family in the United States. The agency had me sign a two-year employment contract with my employer that stated I would be paid 550 Qatar Riyals or \$150 U.S. per month. The agency gave me a copy of my employment contract. The agency told me that I would need to wait in Qatar for my visa to travel to the United States. For one month, I worked in the home of a relative of my U.S. employers until I received my G-5 visa so that I could go to the United States.

8. The son of my employers took me to the U.S. Embassy in Doha, Qatar to get my visa. The officer at the Embassy spoke with the son, but not with me directly. The officer never asked for my employment contract nor did the officer ask me any questions.

Working Conditions

9. In October 1998, I traveled to the United States. When I arrived at the home of my employers, the Ambassador's wife told me to call her "Madam" and confiscated my passport.
10. I was responsible for cooking and cleaning the house, doing the laundry and ironing, taking the children to school, and shopping for the household every day. On a normal day, I worked fifteen or sixteen hours a day, from 6 a.m. until 9 or 10 p.m. When my employers threw a party, I was required to work until as late as 3 a.m. I was not allowed a single day of rest.
11. My employers only paid me \$150 per month.
12. I did not speak Arabic or English at the time, although my employers taught me some basic Arabic words to describe my chores. My employers forbid me to speak to anyone, including their children. They told me never to talk to anyone outside their apartment because there were many bad people.
13. My employers only permitted me to leave the apartment to buy groceries, but for the first year they would not permit me to leave unaccompanied. After one year had passed, my employers began to let me leave the house by myself to buy groceries.
14. I was not allowed to use the telephone and was only permitted to communicate with my family in Indonesia by letters. My employers required me to pay for the postage myself. They also required me to buy my own soap, shampoo and toothpaste out of my small salary. I could not afford these items. My employers also required me to pay them a fee every time I sent money home to my family.
15. My employers required me to wear a uniform at all times in the apartment. My employers only gave me four uniforms for the year, but only two fit me. They gave me two sets of pajamas to sleep in. My employers would not allow me to be seen in the apartment wearing anything other than my uniform and a hijab.
16. My employers never allowed me to use the washing machine; I had to wash my uniforms and clothes by hand.

My Escape

17. After a year and a half, I resolved to run away because I was treated so poorly. I was terrified about what would happen to me if I ran away. I was afraid for my safety and

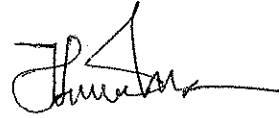
feared I might be sent back to Indonesia. I did not have my passport because my employers had confiscated it. I was completely alone.

18. About six months before I ran away, I met a woman in the supermarket who was concerned about the way my employers treated me. She gave me her telephone number and told me to call her if I escaped. This woman helped me begin to see that there were people who could help me and that I could be safe if I managed to escape.
19. Then, another employee who was concerned about my treatment began to encourage me to escape. This employee arranged for me to stay with his friends after I escaped. I was terrified of what might happen to me if I escaped. But this employee helped give me the courage to leave.
20. When I ran away from my employers, I left everything behind except I took with me the copy of my employment contract.
21. About two weeks after I escaped, I called a woman I met once in the supermarket, who was a member of Andolan, an organization that helps domestic workers. The woman gave me comfort that I would be safe and she introduced me to the Director of Andolan, Nahar Alam.
22. When I met Ms. Alam, she asked me if I wanted to take my employers to court. I told Ms. Alam that I was afraid. A friend had told me that if I brought a case against my employers I would lose because diplomats have so much power and a special legal protection called immunity. I was afraid of taking any risks and feared that if I brought a case against them, I could be sent back to Indonesia.
23. I told Ms. Alam that all I wanted was my passport back, but that I did not want to have anything more to do with my employers. Andolan helped me get my passport back.
24. I never sought the wages my employers owed me because I was so afraid and I was convinced I would have no chance against my employers because of their diplomatic status. I never consulted with a lawyer as a result.
25. I still live in New York. I have since made a life for myself here. I am married and I have a small child. I am a legal permanent resident in the United States. Since escaping from my employers, I have also become fluent in English.
26. My story is just a small part of the experience of domestic workers employed by diplomats in the United States. I hope that by sharing my story I can help to make a difference for other domestic workers in similar situations.
27. I believe that just because someone is a diplomat, it does not mean that they can do whatever they want. There should be punishment for those diplomats who cause physical and mental suffering on their domestic workers. We are human too, and we deserve to work with dignity and respect.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Dated: 10.25.2007

Executed in Queens



Siti Aisah