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Mandatory Rest Day for Foreign Domestic Helpers

Singapore, 5 March 2011 - SCWO welcomes the announcement by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) that it will introduce a mandatory rest day for foreign domestic helpers. This has come as a welcome response to the calls by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee in 2007 and again in January 2012 in its Concluding Remarks for Singapore to review legal protection afforded to our foreign domestic helpers.

SCWO notes that to balance employer concerns, an option has been given to employers to pay compensation in lieu of the off-day, but is concerned this may dilute the purpose of having an off-day as most foreign domestic helpers are often worried about earning as much as possible due to debts they may incurred back home when they venture out to work here, or to supplement family income back home as much as possible. SCWO would like to propose that a guideline or limitation of no more than 2 off-days a month be compensated by pay rather than time off.

We also note that the new regulation is to apply to new contracts post 1 January 2013 or contracts up for renewal after 1 Jan 2013, but we would urge employers under existing contracts to do the right thing and live up to the spirit of the new regulation which is to recognize that a physical, mental and emotional break from work of an off day is beneficial to the well-being of our foreign domestic helpers.

We urge employers and employees to recall when 5-day work weeks were introduced in mainstream employment. It required adjustment but eventually everybody agreed that having an extra day or half day's rest improved productivity when we returned to work on Monday

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About SCWO

The Singapore Council of Women's Organisations is the National Coordinating body of women's organisations in Singapore. Our 52 Member Organisations represent more than 500,000 women in Singapore.

Incorporated in March 1980, the SCWO serves to unite the various women's organisations, clubs, committees, groups and women leaders together, working in accordance with its various aims and objectives. The SCWO also serves to coordinate these associations into a national movement and to act on their behalf in matters for which it is authorised by its members.

The SCWO is represented on various Government and inter-ministry committees where we contribute our views in the areas of family, women, and on children's issues. We are involved in government Feedback Sessions and other discussions on issues and policies

Our Services

Star Shelter—It is the only secular crisis shelter in Singapore, and is a safe temporary refuge for women and their children seeking refuge from a life of family violence. It is a place where they learn to re-build their lives, be independent, and prepare for a future free of violence.

Maintenance Support Central – The One-Stop Drop-In Centre that provides support and assistance for claimants who have difficulty recovering court-ordered maintenance from their spouse.

Legal Clinics – Experienced lawyers from the Singapore Association of Women Lawyers (SAWL) are available twice a month to give basic legal advice and information to assist women unable to afford private legal service.

IT Hub—A Training Centre run by volunteers for women and their family members to become IT connected and updated.

New2U Thrift Shop—sells pre-loved apparel, shoes, accessories and household items, with proceeds going to Star Shelter.

Function Rooms—The Bonny Hicks Education and Training Centre consists of six rooms ranging from 9 sqm to 88 sqm, equipped for training, seminars and meetings, available for rentals to member organisations and the public.

The Library—The Library is named after the late Justice F.A. Chua. It is an archival library for all women's organisations -local and international.

The Café – The café @ SCWO offers a range of tantalizing food, desserts and coffee.

Our Initiatives

WR—Women's Register is a platform for young women in Singapore between 18 to 35 years of age, to support them with mentors, provide internship opportunities, enhance community involvement and advice on building networks of their own.

BoardAgender – aims to provide a forum in Singapore to facilitate a greater awareness and understanding of the benefits of gender balanced business, and for the advancement of more women into senior leadership roles and boardrooms of public and private corporations.

Wall of Fame – In 2005, SCWO launched the Wall of Fame to honour the significant contributions of pioneering women activists who have helped shape the landscape of female advancement in Singapore.