

Roundtable Discussion held on Human Rights issues for Ethiopian migrant workers in the Middle East.

By: Berhane Tadese

The Round Table Discussion on Ethiopians migrant human rights issues was held on December 6, 2014, of the State office building in New York City. The discussion was organized by the Humanitarian Organization for Ethiopians in Need of NY & NJ and the Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association of New York (ECMAA). The Humanitarian Organization for Ethiopian in Need has been doing an advocacy for the migrant workers' rights of Ethiopians in Middle East countries. On the other hand, ECMAA is serving Ethiopian residents living in metro NY, NJ, and CT who need help in the area of Education/Information, Emergency, out reaches services, networking / partnering etc.



The discussion was moderated by Ms. Makda Amare the Chairperson of Humanitarian Organization for Ethiopians in Need of NY & NJ. She highlighted the importance of the discussion and set the scene for rest of the event, at which a diverse range of participants were introduced to audience. The Presenters were: Selamawit Tesfaye from Center for Women's Global Leadership, Daniel Bekele from Africa Human Rights Watch, Dr. Girma Abebe a New York resident, and other migrant workers' rights advocates' organization, such as Mona Kareem from Migrants Rights, Roula Hamati from INSAN, Maria Moreno from International Organization for Migration representatives also joined by Skype.

In general all the Presenters recounted the unfortunate steady stream of stories of the Ethiopia migrant workers in the Middle East countries from the start to present time. They provided their analysis and explanation as to the root cause of the migration and the human rights abuse and violence act that was perpetrated against them. The Presenters shared some of the progress made so far and the task ahead. They also discussed the effort made by International Labor Organization (ILO) and other human right organization to protect migrant rights. Most of the labor laws of the migrant workers receiving Gulf States do not apply to migrant workers. The ILO and other human right advocacy organizations are putting pressure on these states to amend their labor laws so as to guarantee equal rights and suitable working condition to migrant workers as their own nationals.

The discussion included discussants experience as to why the problem of the abuse of the migrant workers in the Middle East is not resolved so far. In regard to Ethiopia Migrant workers case, the Presenters stated that the government has announced a temporary ban of travel abroad for migrant workers until the negotiation and signing of memorandum of understanding with the workers receiving country is completed. The discussants indicated that there is negotiation between the Ethiopian Government and some of Gulf States to have a Memorandum of Understanding that will address some of these problems. Some of the attendees commented that the lack of job and economic opportunities, political repression and abuses of human rights by Ethiopian governments, as the causes of the migration and unless, these issues are address properly the problem will continue. There were no disagreement with the Presenters analysis and thoughts. The question becomes what is the role of the Ethiopia diaspora? Of course, the answer is never a smooth or simple.

The aim of the foregoing remark is based on what I observed from the discussion as to what we can do to advocate the plights of Ethiopian migrant worker by exposing the abuse to the international organization of human right. We witnessed last year 2013 the Ethiopia migrant workers human rights were openly violated in the Middle East. They were ill-treated, beaten, gang raped, in some case their property confiscated. These inhumane acts had touched everyone. As a group or as individual let's send a firm and resolute message that we cannot sit down and watch the human right violation of Ethiopian migrant workers continue unchallenged. We should continue to issue formal statements condemning the violation to appropriate officials and organization. We should also continue to rally and petition the UN and other agencies that conduct independent investigation on these crimes. We should demand that the Ethiopian government provide training for migrant workers and assign a labor attaché in the embassies that provide assistance to the migrant workers when they face abuse by their employers.

In conclusion, the discussion improved our understanding of the problems and hopefully helps us in strengthening to continue the advocacy, and prepare us to deal with these circumstances in organized and effective way. Let's be a voice for the voiceless brothers and sisters working as a migrant workers in the Middle East.