

Shrewsbury Amnesty International Group,  
C/o 18 Vane Road, Shrewsbury SY3 7HB

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2012

Rt. Hon. Teresa May, MP,  
Secretary of State for the Home Department,  
Home Office,  
2 Marsham Street,  
London SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you to ask you to reconsider your decision to remove the substantive protections in the Overseas Domestic Worker visa (ODW visa) which has come into effect from the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and to restore the protections that applied prior to these changes.

Overseas domestic workers, the vast majority of whom are women, are amongst the most vulnerable employees in the UK. Research by the charity Kalayaan revealed that in 2012, 56% of migrant domestic workers received a salary of £50 or less per week, with the majority being 'on call' 24 hours a day, working seven days a week. Furthermore, 54% of domestic workers reported being subjected to psychological abuse, and 67% were given no time off. A small but significant minority also experienced physical abuse (18%) and sexual abuse (3%).

Although these figures are shocking, the levels of labour and sexual exploitation are significantly lower than those reported before the ODW visa was introduced in 1998.

The prohibition on changing employer leaves migrant domestic workers open to exploitation. Without this vital protection, domestic workers whose employment rights have been violated would be unable to seek redress or leave their employer for fear of losing their livelihood and subsequently being deported. The new scheme ties the domestic worker to her employer whatever abuse, violence and exploitation they might be enduring. This will lead to increased occurrences of forced labour and slavery.

We know that you have expressed strong support for effective measures to challenge violence against women. We consider that the changes to the ODW visa will have the effect of exposing the most vulnerable and invisible women to serious exploitation.

Please ensure that all overseas domestic workers have the right to change employer, including those in diplomatic households. Please also ensure that all domestic workers, including migrants, are recognised in law as workers with full rights and can meaningfully enforce those rights.

We look forward to your response on this matter.

Yours sincerely,