

**NEPAL – ILO concerns on trafficking of migrant workers for forced labour a wake-up call for government.**

25 March 2013

The complicity of Nepalese government officials in the trafficking for forced labour of migrant workers, as highlighted in a new International Labour Organization report underlines the urgent need for politicians to tackle the widespread exploitation of migrant workers, Amnesty International said.

The International Labour Organization's Committee of Experts report published earlier this month called on those responsible to face just punishment, echoing Amnesty International's recommendations in its 2011 report, *False Promises*.

"It is long overdue for the government to act to end the corruption and exploitation migrant workers face. This shameful situation continues because of the failure to adequately investigate, prosecute and punish those found guilty for such abuses" said Rameshwar Nepal, Director of Amnesty International Nepal.

Corruption among government officials is a major issue highlighted in the Committee's review under the ILO Forced Labour Convention.

This is particularly timely given the on-going court case of Sita Rai. Trafficked to Saudi Arabia for labour exploitation, then robbed by Immigration officials at Tribuvan Airport on return – Ms Rai's case exemplifies not only the mistreatment of trafficking victims, but the need for the Government to take immediate action to address the systemic corruption within their ranks.

Ms. Rai's case also illustrates concerns raised in the ILO report on the involvement of recruitment agencies and brokers in the trafficking of Nepalese migrant workers for forced labour. Amnesty International has repeatedly highlighted that collusion between recruitment agents and government officials is a significant impediment to implementing the Foreign Employment Act.

Those wishing to migrate for work from Nepal face significant obstacles to having a safe and successful migration. The exaction of bribes from women migrants at TIA is just one example of the corruption faced by migrant workers before they even leave Nepal. Amnesty International has repeatedly called for better protection and equal treatment of women migrants, who are driven to use informal routes that increase their vulnerability due to restrictions and 'bans' imposed by the Government of Nepal.

The reason this shameful situation continues is the Government's continued failure to adequately investigate, prosecute and punish those found guilty of abuses. Although there have been some

welcome progressive reforms by the Department of Foreign Employment, there remains a conspicuous lack of prosecutions of recruitment agencies for trafficking of migrants given the scale of this problem.

“It is time that politicians in Nepal realised that the issue of migration is too important to ignore and that the protection of migrant workers starts at home. This requires not only practical and specific policies, but also the political will to implement them” said Rameshwar Nepal.

With political instability likely to continue, consensus on core safe migration policies is needed to ensure any progress made is not undone with changes in government or ministers.

Amnesty International urges political parties to incorporate safe migration policies in their manifesto for the coming general election, with a commitment to supporting existing policies that protect their citizens who migrate abroad for work.