



MEDIA RELEASE

Stop Breaking our Hearts: Migrant workers urge Immigration minister this Family Day long weekend to end two tiered immigration system so that migrants can reunite with families.

Holding images of their families, migrant farmworkers ask that they be able to bring them to Canada as Permanent Residents

WHAT: Migrant farm workers bring images of their children on a large broken heart to Minister of Immigration John McCallum's Constituency Office and deliver demands.

WHEN: Friday February 12, 2016 at 10:15 AM

WHERE: John McCallum's constituency office 7750 Birchmount Road (Main Office), Unit 21-22, Markham, Ontario

WHO: Migrant farm workers and allies members of Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW) and the Harvesting Freedom Campaign.

MARKHAM, ONT. Feb. 12, 2016 – To kick-off this Family Day long weekend, migrant workers and members of Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) will be bringing a Broken Heart with images of their families to the office of the Minister of Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees John McCallum. As part of the Harvesting Freedom Campaign, they are asking that the Liberal government's stated commitment to family reunification include the reunification in Canada of migrant workers and their families.

This government ran on a platform that it "will make family reunification one of its core immigration priorities, because when families are able to stay together, their integration to Canada and ability to work and grow their communities all improve." Family Day was established so that communities can come together and share time with their loved ones. However, for the over 44,000 migrant agricultural workers across Canada, the day is another sad reminder of separation from partners, children, parents and siblings.

"What's the point of making good money, what's the point of life if you cannot spend those moments with your kids, with your family?" Says Ricky Joseph, a migrant farmworker from St Lucia and leader within the Harvesting Freedom Campaign. "A lot of the guys, a lot of my peers, for us family breakdown is a common thing because we are away from our families for so long".

The Harvesting Freedom Campaign was launched in Ottawa last month and calls on the Canadian government to provide access to permanent residency to migrant farm workers in Canada. The campaign will include a pilgrimage of workers and allies starting from Leamington, Ontario and ending in Ottawa, Ontario on October 2nd and 3rd, 2016.

Harvesting Freedom will send a clear message to the Federal Government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: Justice is 50 years overdue.

“For the last 50 years, the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) has brought tens of thousands of migrant workers from the Caribbean and Mexico annually to work in fields across Canada.” Says Harvesting Freedom Campaign organizer Jessica Ponting. She continues *“As families gather to share a meal this family day, it is these workers who risk life and limb in often unsafe work conditions to put food on the table.”*

Migrant workers who arrive under the SAWP program face many challenges working in Canada, including: having work permits tied to a single employer; being under constant threat of deportation by employers, and never being eligible for permanent residency regardless of how many years they have worked in Canada. And, since they can't apply for permanent residency, they have no ability or hope of bringing their families and growing the very communities that rely on their labour.

J4MW is a grassroots advocacy group based in Ontario composed of migrant workers and allies. We advocate and organize to improve rights and protections for workers in Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker program including migrant workers employed under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program.

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