



Migrant farmworkers travel 1500km to demand Permanent Residency in Canada on 50th anniversary of Farmworker Program

'Justice is 50 years overdue', declare migrant farmworkers after travelling across Ontario for one month.

OTTAWA, Oct 3rd, 2016/ - Migrant farmworker group Justice for Migrant Workers and their caravan 'Harvesting Freedom' arrives in Ottawa after a month-long, 1500km trek through Ontario. Marking the the 50th anniversary of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), the campaign calls on the Trudeau government to grant permanent immigration status upon arrival for migrant farmworkers . Launching in Leamington, Ontario on September 4th, the Harvesting Freedom Caravan has stopped in over 20 communities and included more than 1000 migrant agricultural workers from Mexico, the Caribbean, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Guatemala and Peru.

"We come here with closed work permits that tie us to a farmer. What happens when we speak out? We get deported. It's a recipe for exploitation, it's 18th Century conditions" says Gabriel Allahdua, a migrant farmworker from St Lucia and an organizer with Justice for Migrant Workers. Gabriel has been with the Caravan since it started.

In a 2014 open letter published by the Toronto Star, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledged that in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, "Abuse is not rare. It is far too common, and it must end immediately." He underscored Canada's historical commitment to providing a path to citizenship for all those who come to Canada to work and emphasized that Canada should not "follow the path of other countries who exploit large numbers of guest workers". For 50 years, seasonal agricultural workers have been the bulwark of agricultural food production, and yet they have no access to secure, permanent immigration status. Justice for Migrant Workers is holding Prime Minister Trudeau to account and is demanding an end to this unjust and discriminatory policy.

"Throughout all of the communities we've reached in the 1500-km caravan, we've been blown away by the willingness of everyday Canadians to listen to migrant workers' experiences and support their calls for dignity, justice and status upon arrival," said Alyse Weiler, a volunteer with the campaign. "It's time for politicians to do the same, and to align Canada's labour-migration system with 21st century values of basic human decency."

A media briefing by migrant farmworkers will be held on Monday October 3rd at 9:30 am, in the Charles Lynch Room of Parliament Hill to send a strong message to the federal government: Justice is 50 years overdue. Justice For Migrant Workers will also be staging a demonstration outside of the offices of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada at 365 Laurier Avenue West at 12pm on Monday October 3rd as a closing event for the campaign. For half a century migrant farmworkers have grown and packaged food that feeds Canadians, but have been denied the right to be united with their families while they labour in the fields for months on end and the right to establish roots and live in this country.

WHAT: Media Briefing to conclude historic 1500km 'Harvesting Freedom' caravan to Ottawa

WHEN: 9:30 am, Monday, Oct 3rd, 2016.

WHERE: Charles Lynch Room, Centre Block of Parliament

WHO: Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW) is a grassroots advocacy group based in Toronto, Vancouver, and Mexico City. Composed of migrant workers and allies, we fight for improved rights and protections for workers in Canada's various labour-migration programs including the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program.

BACKGROUND

The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is a labour-migration program that brings tens of thousands of Caribbean and Mexican workers annually to toil in fields across Canada. Migrant workers who arrive under this program face many challenges and hardships as a result of having work permits tied to a single employer; being under constant threat of deportation by employers, and being ineligible for permanent residency regardless of the years they have worked in Canada.

For more information on the campaign and its stops throughout Ontario, see www.harvestingfreedom.org

The call for permanent immigration status on landing for migrant workers is the joint position of all major migrant worker groups in Canada. See www.migrantrights.ca

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