

28<sup>th</sup> March 2013

## **Press Statement on the Migrant Chinese Workers who protested on top a crane**

We refer to the recent ST and TNP reports on the migrant Chinese Crane Protesters who were sentenced to 4 weeks imprisonment for 'criminal trespass. HOME wishes to express our dismay over the inaccuracies reported. We reiterate that HOME did not raise \$20,000 to bail out the accused persons. The reporters should have verified that the bail was put up by individuals not related to our charity. To attribute that bail to HOME, a public charity, could be seen as malicious and cast doubt on the use of our funds for our humanitarian services to migrant workers. In any case, the mainstream media should have known that only individual Singapore citizens are eligible to be bailers and not organizations.

The ST report seems to suggest that the PRC workers committed 'criminal trespass' mainly because of poor living conditions. This is not true. They were also protesting over pay related matters. However, their claims were not accepted because they were unable to prove that they were not paid. In a press release issued on 6 December 2012, MOM said

*"They claimed they had outstanding salaries owed to them, however, the workers did not have the necessary documents to support these claims. MOM officers asked them to return with the documents so that MOM could investigate"*

How does a worker show evidence of non-payment? When complaints are made by workers that they are not paid, surely the onus of proof lies with the employer who should produce evidence of payments made in accordance with the Employment Act.

Foreign workers pay huge sums of money to agents to get work in Singapore. When they are deceived by their employers they can only resort to assistance from the State, and when they are unable to resolve their claims satisfactorily, they may be pushed into acts of desperation. HOME does not condone acts of desperation or criminal acts that place lives in jeopardy but we hold the position that any punishment should take into account the difficult circumstances under which workers may feel compelled to undertake 'irrational' or dangerous actions.

Among other complaints by the workers were verbal threats by their employer and their deplorable living conditions. At the reporter's request we provided ST with pictures of one of the sites they were living at. HOME questions why no mention was made by ST of the pictures given and also of the fact that there were a total of 3 locations where these workers were housed? The article relied only on the report by MOM that their investigators checked on one site and found the living conditions there to be acceptable. However, there were two other sites that the workers lived in. Were those checked as well? It was also revealed in the article that the MOM investigation team conducted the checks one week after the protest. Why did MOM take one week, by which time the employer would have rectified any irregularities in their living conditions?

By relying on MOM's version of the events only, the workers have been wrongly accused of making false allegations. This has cast doubt on their integrity unjustly. Moreover, why did MOM only check on one site rather than all the housing sites of the workers? The report should in all fairness to the workers show up the tardiness of the MOM investigation team.

HOME expects our national newspaper to carry reports that are unbiased and responsible so that the public would be better informed of the reality. When we issue a press statement, the media would usually run our statement

through with the authorities. This appears to be a privilege only for the State and not for non-state actors. If the ST had done its due diligence to check MOM's statement with us, such irresponsible reporting would have been corrected prior to publication. A report that is insensitive to the plight of foreign workers in Singapore would only fan anti-foreigner sentiments in our community. We ask only that our mainstream media be fair and accurate to those who are voiceless and powerless in our global economy.

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