

Saudi panel refuses to fix minimum wage for foreign maids

Khaleej Times - 29 October, 2007

The National Recruitment Committee, a non-governmental organisation of labour recruiters, has rejected any move to declare a minimum wage for maids until problems concerning the status of maids are resolved.

Saad Al-Baddah, chairman of the committee, said it would not take any decision on minimum salaries until the problems of maids running away after signing their contracts to work illegally (often for higher salaries) and of maids being sent back as they lack adequate skills to fulfill their duties, are resolved.

Baddah said that the committee's stand applies to maids of all nationalities.

Illegal maids often get paid higher salaries due to convenience of not having to go through the official channels to acquire domestic help legally.

Moreover, families can pay more for illegal maids because they don't pay charges incurred by acquiring domestic help through official channels.

"The refusal applies to the recruitment of other nationalities as long as the conditions the committee is stating are not met and the problems are not resolved," he said.

Earlier this year, the Philippines declared that maids would not be granted permission to work as overseas Filipino workers unless they were granted a minimum wage of \$ 400 a month.

In return the Filipino government pledged to increase training and skills of what it terms household service workers (HSWs) prior to their departure.

Baddah rejected the Philippine move and said recruiters should simply look elsewhere, adding that by abiding by the minimum-wage demands of foreign governments, recruiters are ignoring the National Recruitment Committee's recommendations about the needs to resolve the "problems" before any move to increase wages is tabled.

The Philippines and Indonesia supply a majority of Saudi Arabia's domestic help.

Baddah said that many families are now recruiting domestic help from Nepal, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.