



Historic 1500km caravan demanding status upon arrival for migrant farm workers concludes with demonstration at Ottawa immigration offices

'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 (J4MW) and their caravan 'Harvesting Freedom' has arrived in Ottawa after a month-long, 1500km trek through Ontario. Marking 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. Launched 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 are not machines who pick and package your food. We are human beings: fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters," says Carlos, a farmworker in Leamington. "Some of the guys on my farm have spent most of their lives in Canada – 8 months out of every year for decades – but have no rights. When we ask for better and safer conditions, we get sent home."

"People have told us throughout the caravan that they did not know that this happens in Canada," continues Gabriel, another farmworker. "Why don't they know? Because we are kept hidden. And the government depends on this to maintain the status quo."

In 2014, Justin Trudeau acknowledged that abuse is "far too common" in temporary foreign worker programs, and understood that exploitation is linked to precarious immigration status. He warned against Canada following "the path of other countries who exploit large numbers of guest workers." Farmworkers participating in the J4MW caravan between Leamington and Ottawa repeatedly confirmed that Canada is already far along this path. As prime minister, Trudeau now has the power and responsibility to make history by transforming a labour-migration system that rips apart families and invites abuse into one that affirms human dignity and the opportunity for a livable life.

Farmworkers and allies will be demonstrating outside of the offices of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada at 365 Laurier Avenue West at 12pm on Monday October 3rd, to conclude the caravan and hold Prime Minister Trudeau to account. For half a century migrant farmworkers have grown and packaged food that feeds Canadians. They have been kept in the shadows, facing the constant threat of deportation, and have had to endure prolonged, painful familial separation while they labour in Canada. Farmworkers who have been coming to Canada every season for decades do not have the option of becoming permanent residents and establishing roots with their families in Canada. It is time for this discrimination and injustice to end.

WHAT: Caravan finale demonstration at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

WHEN: 12:00pm – 1:30pm, Monday, Oct 3rd, 2016.

WHERE: 365 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0C8, Canada

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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