

## **Christian Communities for Open Work Permits for Migrant Workers/Communautés chrétiennes pour des permis de travail ouverts aux travailleurs migrants**

Open Letter to the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada Regarding the Unjust Closed Work Permit System Allowing Exploitation of Migrant Workers in Canada. We invite all Christian communities- organizations, congregations, churches- to sign on by December 18 by filling out the form below. This letter with the signatures will be delivered to the Minister, with copy to the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other relevant MPs.

This letter was prepared by the Open Work Permit Now Campaign. Led by the Canadian Council for Refugees, this campaign is supported by settlement organizations, Unions, and other non-profit organizations across Canada. For more information visit [www.openworknow.ca](http://www.openworknow.ca). Questions can be directed to [mjespejo@ccrweb.ca](mailto:mjespejo@ccrweb.ca)

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The Honourable Marc Miller, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

As leaders of Christian charities, churches, and local congregations, our faith compels us to uphold the dignity of workers. That is why we are calling for urgent action to immediately abolish the closed work permit system for migrant workers.

Migrant workers coming through the low-wage Temporary Foreign Worker Program perform essential work in many industries and are important members of our communities. At the height of the COVID pandemic, they sustained our economy and ensured Canadians had food on their plates. Yet many experience verbal abuse, sexual harassment, workplace injuries, inhumane living conditions, and exploitation.

These injustices are a direct result of the closed work permit system and a lack of accessible pathways to permanent residency. This has been well documented by research, reports, and even Canadian Parliamentary Committees. Closed work permits embed unequal power structures in which workers are beholden to the decisions of their employer, whom they cannot disobey for fear of losing their jobs and being deported home. The most recent criticism comes from the UN Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. In his final report, the Rapporteur condemns the use of the closed work permit system because it “makes migrant workers vulnerable to contemporary forms of slavery, as they cannot report abuses without fear of deportation.”

The Canadian government has taken some piecemeal measures to address the well documented violations of migrant workers' rights, such as increased inspections of employers, an anonymous tip line, and the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers Program (OWPVW). None of these has changed the fundamental vulnerability of migrant workers to systemic abuse by employers in a closed work permit system.

Transformative and lasting solutions are needed. Sectoral or region-restricted work permits are unacceptable alternatives, as any work permit system that makes the right to earn a living dependent on maintaining a relationship with a specific employer or group of employers places a worker in a condition of servitude. Restrictive permits would continue to have a negative impact on job opportunities, wages, and working conditions both for migrant workers and non-unionized Canadian workers.

Migrant workers are an essential part of our communities. Until they can freely change employers and access permanent residency, they will be forced to endure exploitative and unsafe working conditions.

We respectfully call on this government to:

- 1. Replace closed work permits with unconditional open work permits.**
- 2. Open barrier-free pathways to permanent residency for all low-skilled migrant workers.**