

## [Lebanon | Government should protect migrant rights defenders, not deport them](#)

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**In the lead-up to International Migrants Day, ISHR has joined with the Women Human Rights Defenders Middle Eastern and North African Coalition to call for prompt action to protect migrants' rights and those who defend them.**



Being a migrant worker is hard; being a migrant worker who seeks to protect the rights of other migrants is harder still. Defenders of migrants' rights face excessive legal restrictions - for example, in many jurisdictions, migrant workers have no right to freedom of association or assembly. In the Middle East and North African region, as the [WHRD MENA Coalition](#) and many other report, these excessive restrictions occur in an environment already often hostile to human rights defenders.

Take the case of Sujana and Rose.

Two migrant domestic workers from Nepal, Sujana Rana and Rose Limu Jee, were active in documenting and seeking accountability for human rights abuses of domestic workers. This included, for example, raising awareness about the fact that [in 2015, roughly one domestic worker per week died of unnatural causes](#) in Lebanon; [the employers are rarely sanctioned](#), and families at home see little or no compensation.

ISHR's Sarah M Brooks, who monitors the situation of defenders of migrants' rights, said their story was a familiar one.

'It is a global phenomenon, that defenders working to protect the rights of migrants are even more vulnerable than their colleagues working with other populations - they are often cast as traitors, and their work is criminalised.'

Sujana and Rose are active members of the Domestic Workers Union, founded in January 2015 and one of the few that exist in the region. In [an interview earlier this year, Rose shared her experiences](#). When she arrived from Nepal, her employer was afraid to allow her to leave the house. Rose was effectively imprisoned for four and a half years.

'At that time, I had fear inside. If I go outside, this is not my country... It was not me only. Most of the caregivers, most of the nannies and domestic workers, they are like that.'

[Sujana said of her work with the union](#) and her desire to prevent more tragic deaths of domestic workers:

'We keep hearing of "suicides". Every death is "suicide". Even if that were true, shouldn't we find out *why* these domestic workers are committing suicide?'

Rose was helped by a group of other workers, and now she does the same.

'Now we have a union and we raise our voice... it's very important for all the workers, [they] need freedom, good salary, and they have their social life.'

Unfortunately, this work resulted in both Sujana and Rose being arrested early in December on charges of encouraging workers to leave their employers. Neither had access to a lawyer. Sujana was deported by Beirut's General Security on 10 December - International Human Rights Day. Rose remains in detention.

Lebanon should protect migrant rights defenders, not deport them, says [@ISHRglobal](https://t.co/AuUc4n1BcJ)

— Phil Lynch (@PhilALynch) [December 13, 2016](#)

'It is appalling,' says Ms Brooks, 'that despite protection and recognition in a range of international legal instruments include the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the use of deportation to punish migrant workers who dare to defend human rights continues.'

Now, in the lead-up to International Migrants Day, ISHR has added its voice to the nearly two dozen other regional and international organisations who, through the leadership of the Coalition, call upon the Lebanese authorities to respect human rights of all persons in their territory by:

- living up to their obligations under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, in particular providing due process rights to Sujana and Rose
- suspending the kafala sponsorship system, which imposes *de facto* and *de jure* restrictions on fundamental freedoms of movement, expression, association and assembly
- releasing Rose Limu Jee from detention and dropping all charges against both defenders.

The full text of the letter can be found on [the WHRD MENA Coalition website](#).