**Migrant Justice: Ending Exploitation**

“Migration” is a global phenomenon. For various reasons people choose or are forced to leave their countries of origin and, in United Nations vernacular, “migrate” to other countries. More than 200 million people are living as migrants in the world today. Matthew 25:35 reads, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Historically, Canada has welcomed many strangers, or migrants, to its shores. Its per capita immigration rate is among the highest in the world. With the exception of Indigenous peoples, all people living in Canada are, in effect, migrants or are the direct descendants of migrants.

People migrate to Canada for various reasons, and some enjoy a high degree of freedom and privilege. Others are quite vulnerable. Migrants who are seasonal agricultural workers, live-in caregivers, or non-status persons often experience limited protection of their rights and endure precarious living conditions. According to United Church partner KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, “what these three groups all share is a common experience of wage exploitation, privacy violations, inferior housing conditions, limited access to services, and barriers to family reunification. Abuse and exploitation is linked in each case to temporary or uncertain status in Canada.”

Seasonal agricultural farm workers leave their home countries annually and travel to Canada. Many receive very low wages and work in substandard conditions. While they pay into Employment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan, they cannot access these benefits. Also, they can be deported or removed from the program at any time, particularly if they complain about working conditions. Furthermore, they can work in Canada for many years and never receive permanent residency.

Live-in caregivers, according to the Canadian government, are “individuals who are qualified to provide care for children, elderly persons or persons with disabilities in private homes without supervision.” Standards for their working conditions are the responsibility of the provinces. In some provinces domestic workers are excluded from minimum employment standards. Similar to seasonal agricultural workers, live-in caregivers are often reluctant to complain about their conditions, fearing dismissal or deportation.

Non-status migrants also are vulnerable. Once legally present, some can lose their status. KAIROS notes that “non-status persons legally present in Canada may include refugee claimants awaiting a decision on their claim and rejected refugee claimants who have not been asked to leave yet.” In biblical times, God reminds people how to be in community together: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens” (Exodus 22:21). In Canada, however, there are still many vulnerable migrants who often work for minimal pay in exploitative conditions. Also, the majority are racialized peoples from the global South. They can be subject to racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Without legal rights, advocating for themselves can bring repercussions.

***Questions You Can Ask***

1. Canada is not a party to the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. What will you and your party do to ensure Canada signs and ratifies this treaty?

2. The Government of Canada recently made changes to the live-in caregiver program to “create two new pathways to permanent residence that will reduce workplace vulnerability and result in greater opportunities and higher wages for caregivers.” Seasonal agricultural workers currently do not have such recourse. How will you and your party work to create a path to permanent residency for all eligible migrant workers?

3. Temporary migrant workers cannot adequately access community support agencies. What will you and your party do to ensure funding so they can gain full access to these agencies and the services they offer?