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## NGOs campaign for day off for foreign maids

Three civil society groups have joined hands to campaign for foreign domestic workers here to be given a regular day off. -ST

Keith Lin

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THREE civil society groups have joined hands to campaign for foreign domestic workers here to be given a regular day off.

The National Committee for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (Unifem) Singapore, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) and the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (Home) on Tuesday launched a year-long publicity campaign, calling on employers to give their maids at least one day off a month.

Their efforts centre around a campaign website [www.dayoff.sg](http://www.dayoff.sg), which, when launched on May Day, will give advice on how employers can give their maids time off and a list of social activities that such workers can take up on their rest day.

Other activities which will commence later this year include talks with students and community groups, research work, and media advertising.

Speaking at the launch of the Day Off campaign, President of Unifem Singapore Saleemah Ismail said: 'Foreign domestic workers are productive individuals who make an extremely valuable contribution to Singapore society, and like any other person, they deserve a day off.'

Feedback from employers shows that some continue to worry about the potential negative consequences that come with giving maids time off, she said.

These include the possibility of such workers getting pregnant or them mixing with bad company.

'Through this campaign, we hope to allay these fears and burst the bubbles of myths...so that in time perhaps the campaign will encourage employers to give their domestic worker a day off a week,' Ms Saleemah said.

There are currently around 180,000 foreign domestic workers in Singapore. According to a poll conducted by The Straits Times in 2003, only around half receive a regular day off.

Commenting on the initiative, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) said in a statement on Tuesday that it is committed to ensuring that the interests and welfare of all foreign workers, including foreign domestic workers (FDWs), are safeguarded while working in Singapore.

'In this regard, the 'Day Off Campaign' to raise awareness among employers on the importance of a rest day for their FDWs is in line with MOM's effort to ensure that FDWs are accorded adequate rest,' said MOM.

The ministry said a standard employment contract for FDWs was introduced in 2006 by accredited maid agencies in Singapore.

The contract provides for rest days for FDWs, but with an option for the FDW to choose compensation in lieu of taking the day off.

Such contracts provide more flexibility to meet the needs of both parties, said MOM, which has, on its part, encouraged employers to grant FDWs rest days in accordance with the contract.

It added that over the years, many steps have been taken to enhance the protection and support for FDWs.

'As a result of our collective education and enforcement efforts, overall 90 per cent of FDWs are happy working in Singapore, and one in three FDWs choose to extend their two-year contract and continue to work under the same employer,' said MOM.

'The number of reports of abuse has remained very small, at around 0.04 per cent of the total FDW population.'

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