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டாபிந்து கூட்டு ஒன்றியம்  
DABINDU COLLECTIVE UNION

**Protect Women Workers' Rights in the Face of an Industrial Crisis –**

**International Labour Day 2025 - Kilinochchi**

**Dabindu Collective Union - International Labour Day Statement**

For forty years, the Dabindu Collective fought alongside women workers employed in garment factories in and outside the Free Trade Zones. For the past four years, we have been unionizing workers in the garment sector. As an extension of these processes, the 2025 May Day is held in the Kilinochchi District because of the determination of the workers.

This May Day we reiterate the profound vulnerability faced by workers – especially women – who have been drawn into Sri Lanka's export garment industries under neoliberal policies since the late 1970s. Amid a debt crisis, the garment industry, one of Sri Lanka's largest sources of foreign exchange, largely run by women, remains acutely vulnerable. Global supply chains are designed to ensure countries like Sri Lanka dependent on the needs of the wealthy, powerful Global North. Instead, we are committed to fighting for an economy that produces, reproduces, and cares for our communities and the earth.

When global economic crises are driven by powerful economies, the working class, including workers, farmers, and fishermen, in countries like Sri Lanka, bear the brunt of the crisis. After the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, Sri Lankan employers introduced a 5-day work week and normalized a 9-hour workday without amending labour laws. During the COVID-19 pandemic, employers designated garment factories as essential services, offering workers half-pay without reducing working hours. After the 2022 Economic Crisis, employers attempted to introduce flexible working to weaken labour protections through labour law reforms. In April 2025, US President Trump's tariffs exacerbates the instability in the global garment supply chain, as it risks cuts workers' jobs and rights. The government paved and paves the way for such policies.

From crisis to crisis, the power imbalance intensifies; Employers are rewarded concessions. Workers' rights are curtailed. This year, we demand the unconditional strengthening of the 8-hour workday, a living wage, workers' rights, health and safety standards, and job security amidst an industry in crisis.

When workers' collective power should amplify, union busting is gradually becoming more severe through harassment, discrimination, and termination of unionized workers, in direct violation of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of association. This situation has forced us to organize a May Day that protects the anonymity of workers in the North. Despite laws protecting trade union rights, there is a lack of government action to implement these laws.



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Sexual and gender-based violence and harassment are part and parcel of the production processes in garment factories, for women and LGBTQ+ people. This violence extends beyond the workplace, and is also experienced on the way to work and in boarding houses.

Unpaid care work in the home disproportionately burdens women, pushing them into precarious and informal employment. Proposed labour laws that promote flexible work aim to further exploit women's time and labour, not to reduce their burden.

This International Labour Day, let us unite to recognize and fight against the inequalities that exist among us due to all forms of identity, including gender, ethnicity, race, and caste. We are determined to fight against the Neoliberal Global Hegemony and State that has abandoned working women of the Global South, and we demand the following:

1. Protect the job security and rights of workers affected by the global garment supply chain crisis;
2. Develop a government policy to protect workers against Trump's tariffs;
3. Protect the 8-hour workday;
4. Ensure a living wage for the 8-hour workday;
5. Ensure a wage that is commensurate with production targets and labour;
6. Implement government audits of production targets and production methods that have adverse health effects and implement measures to reduce or prevent them;
7. Ensure workers get hourly breaks to use washrooms and drink water to prevent sexual and reproductive health problems;
8. International brands must take responsibility for labour exploitation in factories of the Global South;
9. Provide nutritious meals at a fair price in the workplace;
10. Provide sick leave and emergency leave for workers;
11. End sexual and gender-based harassment and violence in the world of work;
12. Unconditionally protect workers' freedom of association, speech and expression, and collective bargaining;
13. Provide support structures for women's care labour, such as day care facilities in factories and workplaces, and long-term paid maternity and paternity leave;
14. Revoke actions to allow labour law reforms that allow exploitation and slavery;
15. Establish a 24-hour women's police desk;
16. Require factories to provide one day for workers to visit for clinics run by the Medical Office of Health;
17. Provide better protection for women and LGBTQ+ people through government-run safe houses and medical clinics;
18. Abolish taxes on sanitary napkins and make sanitary napkins available at subsidized prices;



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19. Immediately halt the IMF austerity program, tax and electricity price hikes, and the privatization;
20. End the debt burden for working people and force international private bondholders to take larger cuts;
21. End the restructuring and taxation of the Employee Provident Fund;
22. Increase resource allocation to the education system and improve human development by providing essential subsidies and free health services;
23. Improve land, housing, education and health facilities for Malayagam workers;
24. Protect the livelihood sovereignty of small-scale farmers and fisherfolk;

We have decided to celebrate Labor Day with the Kilinochchi workers who produce garments for the United States in order to protect those produce garments for the United States amid the threat of tariffs and instability in the garment sector. We also reiterate the importance of women's labour, that extends the limits of formal workplaces, factories, plantations, farmlands and seas. As we celebrate International Workers' Day, we celebrate the multifaceted nature of women's labour, persisting day and night, running our economies as we know them.

**Power to the Working People!**

**Power to the Working Women!**