

# DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

December 1988

(INTERCEDE)

## Human Rights Commissioner Addresses Domestic Workers

Raj Anand, Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) was the guest speaker at the Intercede December monthly meeting.

Addressing close to 400 people, Commissioner Anand underscored the role of the Commission and its relevance to the thousands of domestic workers in the province of Ontario.

"It is important that domestic workers be reassured that they have rights and are protected under provincial and federal legislation," said Cornelia Soberano, Intercede president.

Commissioner Anand emphasized the grounds of discrimination including race, sex, religion and national origin. "The Ontario Human Rights Code protects all individuals from being discriminated against on any of these grounds in important areas such as seeking employment and obtaining housing," said Commissioner Anand.

He also reiterated that as part of the Commission's mandate, OHRC is committed to modelling good employment practices to the broader public and private sectors. The Commissioner later met with some members of Intercede.

### *December meeting - a time of sharing*

There were balloons and gifts for the children. There was food - roast pork (*lechon*), three or four kinds of noodle dishes, pork, beef, chicken dishes, various types of desserts, fruits, drinks. There were door prizes.

It was literally an afternoon of sharing and giving. The women themselves generously donated their money and gave their time. Members of the various communities who own small businesses also contributed.

The audience participated in a celebration of talents. There were songs, poetry, dancing

and music.

**We thank our emcees - Effie Henry and Tessie Olayta - for their vim, vigor and vitality in ensuring the smooth flow of the program. Special thanks to all the performers and participants of the program, members of the various committees, staff of Cecil Community Centre and to those who donated the food, toys, balloons and gifts. Everybody, especially the children had a great time. Indeed Christmas is sharing!**

The January 8 monthly meeting will feature a guest speaker, Akua Benjamin. Ms. Benjamin, a well-known community activist is a member of the Congress of Black Women, Toronto Chapter and the Coalition of Visible Minority Women.

**We'll see you all on Sunday, January 8, 1989, 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.**

**at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil St.**

# KNOW YOUR ORGANIZATION

What is the **Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights**?

The **Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights (Intercede)** is an advocacy and lobby group for domestic workers. It was formed in 1979 as a coalition of community, women's and immigrant organizations.

It is incorporated as a non-profit organization in the Province of Ontario and its work is coordinated by a board of directors elected by the membership at the annual general meeting.

## Service Unit

Intercede has a Service Unit to work in cooperation with the community and immigration officials in ensuring that all foreign domestic workers benefit fully from the landed status program.

At present, there are two counsellors, Coco Diaz and Joan Ann Gravesande. They:

- \* provide in-depth counselling on how to meet landing criteria;

- \* liaise with immigration officials; provide escort services to government offices;
- \* provide counselling on employment-related problems;
- \* liaise with Canada Employment Centres; do advocacy work with the Ministry of Labour and the Human Rights Commission;
- \* provide information and referral on health, social services and emergencies;
- \* provide workshops, forums, seminars on domestic workers' rights.

Other activities of the organization include lobbying for legislative change, speaking at conferences and community events, publishing a monthly newsletter, organizing social, recreational and other events.

**Monthly meetings** take place on the first Sunday of each month (second Sunday in case of a holiday weekend), and are presently held at Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, from 3 to 5 p.m. A free legal clinic and an informal social hour are part of the afternoon's activities.

## *A Note About Our Funders*

by Yola Grant, Treasurer

Intercede has a budget of over \$100,000 to operate a counselling service and conduct public advocacy and outreach activities for foreign domestic workers. We have a staff of three and rely considerably on volunteer support, and receive funding from the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

Our primary funders for 1988/89 are Employment and Immigration Canada - (ISAP) Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (53%); the Secretary of State - Multiculturalism and Women's Program (32%); Metropolitan Toronto's Community and Social Services and the City of Toronto (12%). In the past, we have received funding on a project by project basis from the Ontario

Women's Directorate and the Ministry of Citizenship. We also receive funds from membership dues, donations from private donors and our members themselves.

The next few weeks will be a busy period for Intercede's staff and Finance Committee as we prepare next year's budget and apply for funds from old and new sources. In the coming year, the Finance Committee hopes to:

- \* obtain a charitable number in order to attract more private donations
- \* approach other governmental and non-governmental sources for funds to meet our growing challenges in the next two years.

## BREAKING THE SILENCE: Ottawa Women Show Interest in Immigrant Women's Struggle for Equality Rights

Over 50 women from the Ottawa area attended a forum organized by the feminist collective which publishes a quarterly journal called "*Breaking the Silence*". This feminist collective strives to make public the many forms of oppression of women in Canada. The forum on November 23, 1988 focussed on the struggle of immigrant women for equality and included representatives from the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (L.E.A.F.), the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights (Intercede) and the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant (Women's Counselling) Services Organization (O.C.I.S.O.)

Christie Jefferson of L.E.A.F. discussed the Charter Challenge to the federal language training program by non-English and non-French speaking immigrant women. Under this federal program, new immigrants are paid for a short period while studying English or French to prepare them for work in Canada. The program, unfortunately, is geared to "*heads of households*" and to the family member who arrives first in Canada. In practice, the vast majority of new immigrants who qualify under these criteria are men, and women are forced to take low-paying dead-end jobs because they are unable to enter this program and receive a living allowance while they learn the new language.

Yola Grant of Intercede informed the audience of the difficulties faced by domestic workers in achieving the same rights as all other Canadian workers. First,

domestic workers do not receive "landed status" on their arrival in Canada and are subject to much abuse and threats because of their fear that they will be deported if they do stand up for their rights. Until quite recently, domestic workers were excluded from coverage under the minimum wage provisions of the **Employment Standards Act** and the **Workers' Compensation Act**. Roughly a year ago, domestic workers won a qualified right to overtime pay (or lieu time at regular time with their consent) but in practice, the vast majority of domestic workers still do not receive even the basic wages that they are legally entitled to. In addition, domestic workers, many of whom are non-white, often face racial taunts and sexual harassment in their workplaces. Ms. Grant concluded by discussing Intercede's own Charter challenge to the **Employment Standards Act** on the basis that the current legislation discriminates against domestic workers on the basis of their gender, race and their country of national origin.

Lucya Spencer concluded the forum by discussing the many counselling services offered by O.C.I.S.O. to many immigrant women including battered women and domestic workers. She informed the audience of the on-going need to sensitize the police and others to the needs of immigrant women in the Ottawa area. The three speakers were well received by the many attentive and concerned women who attended the forum.

### COCO'S CALENDAR

\* December 3, 1988 - **Open House** Our guests included Fr. Michael Brosnan, Chaplain of York University; representatives from Metro Council, the Ministry of Labour, Ontario Women's Directorate, Department of Public Health, Multicultural Health Coalition, Chinese-Canadian National Council, Committee on Race Relations and Ethnocultural Equity, Catholic Immigration Bureau, Cross Cultural Communications Centre; and immigrant and visible minority women's organizations such as the Shirley Samaroo House, Coalition of Visible Minority Women, Congress of Black Women, Network of Filipino-Canadian Women, Domestic Workers in the Arts Rejecting Exploitation (DARE), Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre and Pax Christi Domestic Workers Association.

\* December 3, 1988 - **Christmas Dinner of the Toronto Chapter of the Congress of Black Women** held at the Wallace-Emer-

son Centre. Intercede President Cornelia Soberano attended the dinner. Board member Eva Smith is a member of the Congress.

\* December 6, 1988 - Staff counsellor Joan Ann Gravesande and board member Magda Aguada represented Intercede and had a display table at the **International Human Rights Day** celebration held at City Hall. The event was sponsored by the Municipality of Metro Toronto.

\* December 7, 1988 - **Information Session with ESL students at the Thornlea Secondary School**. Upon the invitation of Ms. Evelyn Dunn, ESL teacher, board members Dolores Alapide and Carmencita Hernandez, volunteer Sol Cinco and myself held a two hour information session on domestic workers' rights with 30 students, 90% of whom are domestic workers living in Thornhill.

## Intercede hires new coordinator/ part-time bookkeeper

The Board of Directors of Intercede is pleased to announce that Ms. Felicita Villasin, who led in the organizing for landed status for domestic workers in the early 1980s, has accepted the position of coordinator and will commence her duties on January 3, 1989. Ms. Rosalyn Woodcock also has been hired as part-time bookkeeper of Intercede. Ms. Woodcock has extensive book-keeping experience with various professions and organizations.

## Labour Council of Metro Toronto Receives Employment Equity Award

For the board members of Intercede present during the Employment Equity Awards dinner sponsored by the Ontario Women's Directorate, the evening was especially memorable. They not only met a cross-section of women, but also witnessed the award being given to representatives of the Labour Council of Metro Toronto, one of whom is Brenda Wall, a board member of Intercede.

Brenda Wall, Director of the Education and Skills Training Centre of the Labour Council, is working with Eugenia Yuen and other board members on career planning programs for domestic workers. She is also a member of Intercede's Personnel Committee, Holidays and Overtime Pay.

*We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*

### IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Canada Immigration Centre	973-4444
Unemployment Insurance	973-4727
Employment Standards Enforcement	965-5251
Ontario Human Rights Commission	965-6841
Revenue Canada (Taxation)	869-1500
OHIP	965-1000
Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre	656-8933
Immigrant Women's Health Centre	367-1388
Education & Skills Training Centre, Labour Council	971-5893
Emergency Housing	
Nellie's Hostel	461-1084
Evangeline's	762-9636

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

With Christmas fast approaching, now is a good time to familiarize yourself with the employment regulations on over-time pay and statutory holidays.

After three (3) months of employment with the same employer, all domestic workers are entitled to seven paid statutory holidays per year. These holidays include Christmas Day and New Year's Day. If you and your employer agree, a holiday could be substituted with another working day with pay, but this should take place not later than your next annual vacation.

As both forthcoming Christmas and New Year fall on a Sunday, the following Mondays will be considered holidays for which you must be paid.

You may be asked by your employers to work longer hours this holiday season. Do remember that all domestic workers in the province are entitled to receive the Ontario minimum wage which is \$4.75 per hour for the first 44 hours/week. If you work more than 44 hours a week, you are entitled to time-and-a-half for each additional hour you work. The minimum overtime rate is \$7.12 per hour.

Also keep in mind that if your employer goes away for Christmas and/or New Year and leaves you in charge of the house and asks that you are not to leave the house, you are not on holiday. When this happens, your employer will have to give you another paid day off or pay you double time for Christmas and/or New Year's day. In addition, your meals should be provided.

Joan Ann Gravesande

### Legal Services

Parkdale Community Legal Services	531-2411
CLASP (Osgoode Law School) Legal Clinic	736-5029
Kensington-Bellwoods Commty Legal Services	363-0304
Metro Toronto Chinese & SE Asian Legal Clinic	971-9674

### INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Place: 489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ontario

Time: Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Telephone: (416) 324-8751

Free and confidential counselling to all domestic workers on immigration, employment, human rights, etc.

(Produced by volunteer labour)

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS c/o INTERCEDE  
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FIRST CLASS