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World

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Culture & Edu

Sports

Entertainment

Sci & Tech

Health

Opinion

Voice of China

Odd News

Photos

Video

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Lawyers to laborers' help

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BEIJING, Feb. 6 -- A nationwide network of lawyers specializing in helping migrant workers has been set up with Beijing as its center to better protect their legitimate rights and interests.

The one-year project, which started on Saturday, is expected to draw more qualified lawyers to voluntarily help the laborers.

Local aid service centers in 15 provinces will train lawyers to help protect migrant workers' rights. Also, they will support the existing legal aid centers in seven provinces.

The 500,000 U.S. dollar project, is the joint effort of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the All China Lawyers' Association (ACLA) and the China International Center of Economic and Technical Exchange under the Ministry of Commerce.

"Protecting the rights of disadvantaged people is an indispensable aspect of human development," said Khalid Malik, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP's Resident Representative in China, at the launching ceremony on Saturday.

"Human poverty will not be eradicated without addressing inequalities and injustice." The project will not only help protect migrant workers' rights, but also make sure that employers are aware of the law, Malik said.

Tong Lihua, a lawyer who specializes in defending the rights of vulnerable groups, including children and migrant workers, said that "despite the government's tremendous efforts in helping migrant workers get their money from employers, many of them still haven't been paid".

In China, many employers don't follow the labor regulations. As a result, 120 million migrant workers have not received billions of yuan in salary arrears, or "back pay", and yet a majority of them cannot seek legal help.

Ministry of Justice figures show that the majority of the cases of the about 125,000 migrant workers who got legal aid last year have been settled.

In addition to the 120,000 lawyers, about 3,000 government-backed legal aid institutions are also helping the disadvantaged people protect their rights.

The project will develop on the lines of the Beijing Legal Aid Services for Migrant Workers, a civil society organization set up in September 2005.

"If the pilot project is successful, we will scale up the network to cover more provinces," said Yu Ning, chairman of the association.

(Source: China Daily)

Editor: Jiang Yuxia

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