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## **The Breaking News English.com Resource Book**

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## **Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore**

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## **Contents**

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
Listening Gap Fill	6
After Reading	7
Discussion	8
Speaking	9
Homework	10
Answers	11

**7 December, 2005**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore**

A report from Human Rights Watch details "grave abuses" happening to foreign maids in Singapore. The 124-page study from the international watchdog outlines stories of physical and sexual violence, food deprivation and confinement in the workplace. The 150,000 or so women, largely from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, who work in Singapore as domestic workers fall outside the labor laws that protect Singaporeans. Kenneth Roth, executive director of the organization said: "Singapore's refusal to extend ordinary labor protections to domestic workers is leaving them open to abuse." Singapore's government retaliated by saying the report "grossly exaggerates" the situation and that 80 percent of maids were happy.

The report is based on over 100 in-depth interviews with domestic workers, government officials, and employment agents. It reports that: "At least 147 migrant domestic workers have died from workplace accidents or suicide since 1999, most by jumping or falling from residential buildings." The report also says that: "Migrant domestic workers earn half the wages of Singaporean workers in similar occupations [and] unpaid wages is a growing complaint." The workers have little or no bargaining power and are not even legally entitled to a day off during their tenure. Many workers have to toil for up to ten months without a salary just to pay their employment agency fee. One worker said her life was tantamount to slave labor: "I felt like I was in jail. It was truly imprisonment."

## WARM-UPS

**1. SINGAPORE SEARCH:** Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about Singapore. After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. Would you like to live in Singapore?

**2. SERVANTS:** Would you like a maid, home help, chauffeur or butler? Are you too busy to do the things in your life that need doing? In pairs / groups, imagine you have the following people working for you. How is life with such help?

Maid	Gardener
Secretary	Babysitter
Chauffeur	Computer engineer
Cook	Personal English teacher
Physical trainer	Other _____

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Human rights / maids / Singapore / watchdogs / violence / confinement / labor laws / abuse / interviews / suicide / wages / complaints / days off / slavery / being in jail*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. I'M A MAID:** You are a maid. Talk to the other "maids" in the class. Who do you work for? Are they good employers? What are the good and bad things about your job? What kinds of things do you have to do every day?

**5. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES:** The following abuses were reported in a newly published Human Rights Watch report about maids in Singapore. Rank them in order of most appalling.

- The maid has no legal right to a day off.
- Maids are deprived of food for a day as punishment.
- The maid is slapped every time she is slow to finish a chore.
- The maid's country is constantly derided.
- The maid is not allowed to leave her workplace (the employer's apartment).
- The maid is sexually abused by the "husband of the house".
- The maid is forbidden to have a boyfriend.
- The maid must work for 10 months without wages just to repay her employment agency fee.

**6. MAIDS:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with maids. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. A human rights study has found grave abuses of maids in Singapore.  | T / F |
| b. The report says employers' dogs keep a careful watch on the maids.  | T / F |
| c. Singapore's labor laws do not protect foreign domestic workers.     | T / F |
| d. Singapore's government said the majority of maids are happy.        | T / F |
| e. The report found 147 maid deaths from accidents at work or suicide. | T / F |
| f. Domestic workers earn a quarter the wages of Singaporeans.          | T / F |
| g. Some workers toil for 3 months just to pay employment agency fees.  | T / F |
| h. One worker said her life was tantamount to slave labor.             | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| a. grave       | hugely      |
| b. watchdog    | thorough    |
| c. deprivation | make        |
| d. open        | overseer    |
| e. grossly     | slave       |
| f. in-depth    | vulnerable  |
| g. earn        | identical   |
| h. tenure      | withholding |
| i. toil        | serious     |
| j. tantamount  | term        |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. A report from Human Rights Watch    | stories of physical and sexual violence |
| b. the international watchdog outlines | protections to domestic workers         |
| c. domestic workers fall outside the   | for up to ten months                    |
| d. refusal to extend ordinary labor    | tantamount to slave labor               |
| e. the report grossly                  | details grave abuses                    |
| f. The report is based on over         | bargaining power                        |
| g. domestic workers earn half the      | exaggerates the situation               |
| h. workers have little or no           | wages of Singaporean workers            |
| i. Many workers have to toil           | 100 in-depth interviews                 |
| j. One worker said her life was        | labor laws that protect Singaporeans    |

## **WHILE READING / LISTENING**

**WORD ORDER:** Put the underlined words back into the correct order.

### **Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore**

A report from Human Rights Watch abuses happening to grave details foreign maids in Singapore. The 124-page study from the international physical stories of watchdog outlines and sexual violence, food deprivation and confinement in the workplace. The women so 150,000 or, largely from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, who work in Singapore as domestic workers laws fall outside the labor that protect Singaporeans. Kenneth Roth, executive director of the organization said: "Singapore's labor refusal to ordinary extend protections to domestic workers is leaving them open to abuse." Singapore's government saying the retaliated report by "grossly exaggerates" the situation and that 80 percent of maids were happy.

The report is over 100 on in-depth based interviews with domestic workers, government officials, and employment agents. It reports that: "least 147 workers At domestic migrant have died from workplace accidents or suicide since 1999, most by jumping or falling from residential buildings." The report also says that: "Migrant domestic workers the wages of half earn Singaporean workers in similar occupations [and] unpaid wages is a growing complaint." The workers have little or no bargaining power and are not off entitled a day even legally to during their tenure. Many workers have to toil for up to ten months without a salary just to pay their employment agency fee. One worker said her labor life slave was to tantamount: "I felt like I was in jail. It was truly imprisonment," she said.

## LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore

A report from Human Rights Watch details "\_\_\_\_\_ abuses" happening to foreign maids in Singapore. The 124-page study from the international watchdog \_\_\_\_\_ stories of physical and sexual violence, food deprivation and confinement in the workplace. The 150,000 or so women, \_\_\_\_\_ from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, who work in Singapore as domestic workers \_\_\_\_\_ outside the labor laws that protect Singaporeans. Kenneth Roth, executive director of the organization said: "Singapore's refusal to \_\_\_\_\_ ordinary labor protections to domestic workers is leaving them \_\_\_\_\_ abuse." Singapore's government \_\_\_\_\_ by saying the report "\_\_\_\_\_ exaggerates" the situation and that 80 percent of maids were happy.

The report is based on over 100 \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_ interviews with domestic workers, government officials, and employment agents. It reports that: "At least 147 \_\_\_\_\_ domestic workers have died from workplace accidents or \_\_\_\_\_ since 1999, most by jumping or falling from residential buildings." The report also says that: "Migrant domestic workers \_\_\_\_\_ half the wages of Singaporean workers in similar occupations [and] unpaid wages is a \_\_\_\_\_ complaint." The workers have little or no bargaining power and are not even legally \_\_\_\_\_ to a day off during their \_\_\_\_\_. Many workers have to \_\_\_\_\_ for up to ten months without a salary just to pay their employment agency fee. One worker said her life was tantamount to \_\_\_\_\_ labor: "I felt like I was in jail. It was truly imprisonment."

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**domestic**' and '**worker**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. WORD ORDER:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers.

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "DOMESTIC WORKER" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about domestic work, maids and their working conditions.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |            |              |
|------------|--------------|
| • grave    | • based      |
| • watchdog | • 147        |
| • or so    | • earn       |
| • fall     | • growing    |
| • open     | • bargaining |
| • grossly  | • tantamount |

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Is Singapore a country you would normally associate with human rights abuses?
- c. What is your image of Singapore?
- d. Would you like a maid?
- e. Why do you think Singapore welcomes foreign domestic workers but then affords them few legal rights?
- f. What can be done to stop employers from confining maids, depriving them of food and sexually abusing them?
- g. What do you think of the Singapore government's retaliation saying the claims are grossly exaggerated?
- h. Why do you think employers confine maids to the workplace?
- i. Some maids must work from 6am to 10pm. What do you think needs doing in an apartment that takes 16 hours a day?
- j. Do you think a 124-page report into human rights abuses is substantial or insubstantial?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What do you think the Indonesian, Philippine and Sri Lankan governments should do about the alleged mistreatment of their citizens?
- d. How are the foreign workers treated in your country?
- e. Would you like to live and work overseas?
- f. How do you think the Singapore government would explain foreign domestic workers' salaries being half those of Singaporeans?
- g. Do you think forcing maids to work for ten months to pay employment agency fees is illegal?
- h. How do you think Singapore's government should address the issue of so many foreign domestic workers falling or jumping from buildings?
- i. Do you think employers who confine maids to their apartments should be punished?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## SPEAKING

**MAID ABUSES:** You have the power to make new rules and punishments in Singapore regarding foreign domestic workers. In pairs / groups, discuss and make the rules for the points in the left hand column. Decide on the punishments for employers for breaking the rules.

POINTS	RULES	PUNISHMENTS
Working hours		
Holidays and days off		
References to the maid's country		
Social life		
Salary		
Payment of employment agency fee		
Freedom to change employer		
Boyfriends		

- Change partners often and compare and share your ideas. Discuss which rules and punishments are best.
- With your original partner(s), discuss which of the rules you thought were best.

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on the story of the abuses of foreign maids in Singapore. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. MAID CHARTER:** Make a charter outlining the rights that should be given to all maids around the world. Include the working conditions of maids and the kinds of things they should not be expected to do. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**4. MAID:** You are a maid. Write your diary / journal entry for a day in your working life. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. F      c. T      d. T      e. T      f. F      g. F      h. T

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| a. grave       | serious     |
| b. watchdog    | overseer    |
| c. deprivation | withholding |
| d. open        | vulnerable  |
| e. grossly     | hugely      |
| f. in-depth    | thorough    |
| g. earn        | make        |
| h. tenure      | term        |
| i. toil        | slave       |
| j. tantamount  | identical   |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. A report from Human Rights Watch    | details grave abuses                    |
| b. the international watchdog outlines | stories of physical and sexual violence |
| c. domestic workers fall outside the   | labor laws that protect Singaporeans    |
| d. refusal to extend ordinary labor    | protections to domestic workers         |
| e. the report grossly                  | exaggerates the situation               |
| f. The report is based on over         | 100 in-depth interviews                 |
| g. domestic workers earn half the      | wages of Singaporean workers            |
| h. workers have little or no           | bargaining power                        |
| i. Many workers have to toil           | for up to ten months                    |
| j. One worker said her life was        | tantamount to slave labor               |

### WORD ORDER:

#### Report highlights maid abuse in Singapore

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