

# Abuse of maids worsens as plight ignored

**I**N an editorial which appeared in this newspaper on 24 June 1990, we said: "The treatment of foreign domestic workers by many employers and by the Hongkong Government is little short of disgraceful."

Sadly, the situation has not improved. If anything, it is worse.

As reported in yesterday's *Standard*, there has been an alarming surge in the reported ill-treatment of thousands of domestic helpers.

Many are faced with long working hours, low pay, abuse, harassment and even

## WE SAY

### The Standard

sexual assault by their employers. Some bosses force their domestics to work outside the home, in factories or restaurants.

By doing so, the women are breaching the terms of their contracts and are liable to be returned home.

If they refuse to work in other jobs for their employers, they are very likely to be sacked and, without jobs, are obliged to leave the territory within two weeks.

We have suggested that the two-week rule is unfair because it deprives a maid of the chance to present her side of the story.

The women are allowed to stay on a visitor's visa, which costs \$115 each time they apply. This has led to maids surviving on handouts from charitable organisations while waiting for labour tribunals to decide if their employers should pay them money owed.

Most of these women were born in impoverished countries where jobs are rare. Philippine domestic workers

in Hongkong, for example, send annual remittances of \$1.02 billion back to their families.

They also make a much-needed contribution to this community.

The presence of 94,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hongkong has not only helped ease a chronic labour shortage by allowing women the freedom to move out of the home and into the workplace but has helped also to raise the incomes of thousands of Hongkong families.

We have all heard horror stories about foreign domestic

helpers being forced in their home countries to pay exorbitant agency fees in order to land a job here. Some have fallen heavily into debt.

Knowing they have only two weeks to find alternative employment, many therefore feel they have no option but to remain in misery and abominable working conditions rather than walk out.

We can only repeat what we have said before: The treatment faced by domestic workers in Hongkong is appalling and demands an immediate review by the Government.