

TRANSCRIPT

"CENTRAL-AMERICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS AND THE CASE OF ASTRADOMES"

A Discussion With Beatriz Slooten

Moderator: Carolina Jimenez

ANNOUNCER:

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CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

Hi, my name is Carolina Jimenez. I work for the Latin American Program and for the Latin American-- and for the-- International Migration Initiative. The idea today is to have a discussion on the issue of domestic work-- most specifically on-- Central America and-- and the movement around-- domestic workers' rights in the region.

Early this year the Latin American Program and I.M.I. commissioned a report-- to understand not just the-- problems faced by domestic workers in (UNINTEL) America but also to look-- one specific organization, a current L.A.P./I.M.I. grantee that has been successful at-- advancing strategies in favor of the domestic workers rights.

And here we have today-- Beatriz Slooten, our guest speaker-- who researched and composed-- the report-- that we will be discussing and-- well, Beatriz is an expert policy analyst-- on labor rights, employment strategies, and labor migration. She's a national of Costa Rica but currently works and-- lives in Washington D.C. Her work includes skilled labor gap (CRUNCHING PAPERS) analysis, institutional design, (LAUGH) design (UNINTEL), and research on transnational migration and labor market.

She's worked with different international organizations including the Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization of American States, and international labor organizations as well with think tanks as-- such as the Inter-American Dialogue. It's a pleasure to have you here, Beatriz. Thank you very much for accepting our invitation and-- Beatriz will initiate a discuss with-- some ideas about-- the recently approved convention-- the-- Convention 189 on Domestic Workers.

But she will go-- beyond just analysis of the convention and describe some of the-- main problems-- regarding domestic work from its roots to the current situa-- situation in Central America. We will first hear Beatriz-- give us some ideas of context, et cetera, and then of course we will open the floor for-- questions and answers. So-- okay, so I give the floor to Beatriz. Thank you.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Okay. well, thank you very much everybody in New York and-- the people here in D.C. Thanks for having me. I was going to start with the I.L.O. definition in the Convention 189, but it might be a little too technical, so let's-- let's go first with the question where does it come from? Where does the domestic work come from?

And-- well, the answer is from slavery. And-- and servants in payment for debt. So, for example, in Costa Rica, in 1858, the employer had the right to go with the police to look for the domestic worker if she wouldn't show up-- at work. This is 1858. I mean, it's not that-- it's not that far though. There-- this relation will end when the employer's life ends.

And sometimes as a payment for debt then it will be a payment with any limitation of time. So it would be, like, forever. There are a lot of issues that we have to always consider when we talk about this topic and is-- are social issues. Like, for example-- that women are naturally caregivers because that is something that will trap the domestic workers, I mean, in the mind of-- of the employer and actually in the mind of the s-- society, right?

Because they're supposed to be very gentle, they're supposed to give out care, they're supposed to take care of the elders, take care of the children, so there is not a very clear boundary between that that you're supposed to do and a job. Sometimes, for example-- the employers will say, "They're part of our family, we are protecting them," and as the leader of one organization once told me, if we are part of their family how come we don't lead the life as they do.

Which is true. They're not part of a family, they're employers. So now-- how it has developed. Well, it's good, it's been developing around the world. One of the big changes was that in-- a year ago-- well, actually two years ago in June in the I.L.O. there was-- a big convention around this topic and-- they had the Domestic Workers- Convention, the 189, which is a really huge advance 'cause that's recognizing that they are-- one of the most vulnerable people, workers, in the world.

So that's a big change to start. And there's a lot of-- a lot of changes in the-- due to

this. Some of them are ahead, some of them are-- are as a c-- a cons-- a consequence of the I.L.O. convention in the countries and local laws. But-- and we can say for example in Brazil there is-- which is the biggest amount of domestic workers in the world in a country, at 6.5 million domestic workers, that's what the I.L.O. says, the number of maids shrunk from 7.2 in 2009 to 6.7 in 2011.

Now what is the definition says? It says-- it's a convention of recommendations and they're founded on the fundamental premise that domestic workers are neither servants nor members of the family nor second-class workers. One of the most common problems that we have in labor laws-- in local labor laws are that they are a different category or workers. So that by law won't allow them to have the same rights as the rest of the workers.

They'll have different-- schedules, different salaries, different benefits. The main rights given, this is the I.L.O. convention, to domestic workers are decent work, are daily and weekly at least 24 hours, rest hours, entitlement to minimum wage, and to choose the place where they live and spend-- their-- their life or their leave. Ratifying states' parties should also take protect-- protective measures against violence and should enforce or furthermore have a right to a clear, preferably written, communication of employment conditions which should, in cases of international recruitment, be communicated prior to immigration.

They are furthermore not required to reside at the house where they work or to stay in the house during their leave. One of the main problems in domestic workers is-- and for the states is to enforce-- is to enforce and measure their protective activities for them. I mean, why? Because how do you get-- Department of Labor inspector to go into all the houses in a country? Just imagine Brazil.

You don't have enough inspectors and-- that's the problem about-- that's the invisibility of this-- of these workers. They can-- I mean, they can go through a lot of things and nobody will ever notice. So how is-- how is it nowadays? Like, in Latin America. L-- how is-- the current Latin American situation? Well, first we have to consider that Latin America and the Caribbean is a region with extraordinary levels of income equal-- inequality.

Latin America, for example-- in Latin America domestic workers will represent 11.9% of all paid employers (SIC), followed by the Middle East with 8%. In Latin America the laws tend to be special for domestic workers as I said with special categories. And-- and the I.L.O. established when preparing their report for the 99th meeting that they are one of the most vulnerable groups of workers in the world regarding legislation.

For example, in Brazil a law implemented in April that is designed to modestly improve the lot of-- the lot of domestic workers in causing a fury. Everybody's really mad about it. It caps their workload at 44 hours a week and it grants them 1.5 pay for overtime and a month of vacation per year. Yet it is being described as the end of civilization and economic revolution on a par with the abolition of slavery.

Domestic workers in Brazil, which are 60% black and 90% female-- where there's a

lot of articles in media about this change, which doesn't mean-- doesn't seem to be a huge change. (PAGES RUSTLING) About the ratification of Convention 189, it's really important to know that the first and to ratify the convention was a Latin American country. It's Uruguay. And-- there are 11 ratifiers including the recent ratification of Costa Rica, which is also important because it's a receiver country.

We have Bolivia as a ratifier, we have Guinea, Nicaragua, and Paraguay as Latin American-- Latin American countries to ratify the 189 Convention. Now what is the issue with migrations and domestic workers for example in Latin America? It's very distinctive in Latin America domestic workers sector that they migrate in-- within Latin America. The north-- the no north to north migration. Because there are a lot of differences-- with-- between economies and-- and the change in the country will benefit salaries and the remittances for their families.

For example Costa Rica and Nicaragua is one of those important examples. But it makes them-- as migrants they are more vulnerable due to the lack of regularity. The working permits are employer dependable most of the times or-- actually I don't know any case where it's independent, so you depend on the employer. You migrate-- if you are regular your status will depend on your employer. The salaries tend to be lower-- the migration system is not always related with labor inspections and migrants don't feel very comfortable filing complaints in foreign countries so they're not as protected as they could be in their own environment.

Institutions sometimes do not react how they should be-- how they should react-- with this migrant. For example, health institutions or educational institutions with-- we have a lot of cases where educational institutions won't accept the children of the domestic workers because they're migrants-- which is a personal decision because it's not in any law that you shouldn't-- not accept them. And in the health system too because of xenophobic countries.

In some cases in Latin America race is another issue that migrants have to go through. For example, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. I mean, you have all these-- all these situations that would make domestic workers vulnerable and in Dominican Republic you can actually see a difference just in the way they look, so discrimination is-- it's really fast, it's really immediate because of race.

Now I would like to go and make an analysis of the situation of domestic workers, especially in Costa Rica, and then finish with the analysis of the organization that we were-- that we were researching of. So in Costa Rica the labor code will define domestic workers as-- servers-- domestic servers are those persons who dedicated in a continuous ways to work in cleaning, working, helping, and any other activities related to a household, (UNINTEL), or particular residence without representing any business or profit for the employer.

That's the Department of Labor, the Ministry of Labor. What's the local situation of domestic workers in Costa Rica? Well, U.N.I.F.E.M. in 2010 establishes that a population of migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica is approximately 22,000 representing 17% of the total population of migrants, which is 130,000. We believe it

could be a little more because-- this is-- this is an official number. We believe it could be a little around 30,000.

We made-- a research in 2011-- to profile the domestic workers in Costa Rica. And these are some of the is-- some of-- of the characteristics that we found out about this. Mostly women, their average age is 36 years, 50% of them finish school, 30% of them finish high school, 50% of them have children in Nicaragua-- 20% have children in Costa Rica, 70% of them are mothers, 21% of them are not regular, 60% do not have health insurance.

Now consider this, 60% do not have health-- health insurance and 70% are mothers, 48% take care of children has part of their duties, 23% take care of elder people as part of their duties, 34% of them washes the car as part of their duties, and 41% didn't get the Christmas bonus, which is an obligation by law, and 46% haven't received any vacation. (BANGING) Now, were gonna go-- I'm gonna change to-- the topic and talk about this organization in Costa Rica that-- has been working in advocacy of domestic workers law and domestic workers rights since-- 13 years now.

Their na-- the name is ASTRADOMES, it's Asociación de Trabajadoras Domesticas, is-- Domestic Workers Association. So last year we started this research and the-- the objective was to write a story of this organization and to learn some-- lessons so we could use them-- or someone could use them to-- to strengthen all organizations around the world, domestic workers organizations.

They have been very successful in their job. They changed the law in the constitutional level and they changed the law in the local level and-- well, they didn't change it exactly but they made a lot of-- a lot of advocacy in the process and-- they're very related to all the changes. They also worked for the ratification of the Convention 189 which was recently ratified less than a month ago in Costa Rica.

So let's go through this story. They started as a union (COUGH) in 1990 and-- and they started very small, just with one person. She was very empowered to work in this-- in this union and-- as soon as she started-- as soon as they started, they tried to change the constitution, which was not successful at the time but they did it five years after. Right now it's an organization of 500 affiliated women and it has an assembly of 35 people and a board of five people.

The presidency is held by their leader, which is called Rosita since 2002. Now, why were they successful? Why were this organization so successful and-- and why-- I mean, it's a very know organization. Everybody is talking about the organization. None-- there is-- there is not an organization like this one, so strong with so many-- with so many-- members and with so many m-- changes in the law like this one.

I mean, it's a big thing that Costa Rica accepted the I.L.O.-- and ratified the I.L.O. convention because it's-- it's-- because it's a receiver of migrants and migrants, they-- they tend to get in jobs like domestic work and-- well, agriculture and security most of the time. Well, the population is not very open to these type of changes. It's-- it's very xenophobic.

So one of the things that make ASTRADOMES a very successful group was the

leadership. The leadership of Rosita was very strong, she n-- she's a woman that was formed with the social party in 1970s and-- well, she had her-- her own struggle-- her own fighting. And she was also a domestic worker who was-- abused in her rights, human and labor rights. She got very empowered by this party and by specific organization and she started this union in 1990.

Now the-- with the story is very interesting that they started as a union and-- my personal opinion would be that they should be a union, and they stopped being a union because they-- they-- because of a recommendation-- like, an under-the-table recommendation of the Department of Labor because they just couldn't achieve anything. So they told 'em, "Listen, I mean, it's really complicated to get a union and to get all the paperwork for a union. Why don't you just become an association? That's easier."

And they actually changed from union to association and right now they don't wanna become a union because they don't wanna be part of-- of the federal unions. But is-- but is-- it's really interesting that it was actually the system who convinced-- who convinced them to stop being a union, which as a group they're more likely to be a union than an association. So-- the leadership of Rosita is-- as I was saying is-- she's a very committed person.

She is very strong the way she speaks and-- the way she addresses to the people. She's a very-- she's a natural leader and-- well, she's not comfortable with the situation of domestic work. She's been a victim, she's been there, she's been empowering people, and she's been-- phasing political-- political-- people to this change. Just to tell you a story so you can-- figure out how she is. She once went to the ombudsman office. She wanted to have-- an appointment with her and the ombudsman of course wouldn't give her an appointment.

It was-- it was-- a woman. So she went to the-- she-- she talked to the guard-- security guard of the garage and the security guard told her which was the car of the ombudsman person. She waited there, like, for six hours straight until the ombudsman-- chief went out to her car. And she addressed her right there, and she got the appointment, and she got the whole support of the whole ombudsman office. And-- well, that's the way she did things and that's the way it-- it worked for her.

I mean, I know this is-- this is something we-- that we should consider in different-- in different countries because-- it might be something in the context of-- of Costa Rica that you can do that. Some other countries the security would be a little stronger. (LAUGHTER) But-- I mean, wh-- she had-- in another-- in another situation she got close to the president, Laura Chinchilla, and she actually grabbed her from the arm and sh-- and she shook her and she told her, "You have to approve the I.L.O. convention."

Well, the security was there immediately but she got her point across. As-- as I'm saying, I mean, this is not, like, something that it has to be-- has to be done, but that's the-- that's the leadership that she-- she develops. Alliances were another important thing of this organization-- of the evolution of the organization. The alliances are--

were very important for the organization to have a lot of success. (COUGH) They were very good at creating alliances and-- they would try to ally with everybody that would commit to their-- to their goal. And this will include international cooperation, like the I.L.O., like the I.O.M., and-- it would also include people in the government, like this, the ombudsman office and the woman rights office, too.

And they will-- they will look for allies in different topics. One would be in woman rights, in labor rights, and in mi-- in migrant rights. So they were-- they were very smart in that way, looking for alliances. They have a strong organizational capacity. They represent a lot of domestic workers. When they speak it's not only one person speaking. They know there's a lot of people backing them up. So-- they let the workers be part of the association without paying anything or without attending.

I mean, they just leave it really open to any domestic worker to-- to come. I mean, they can just come one day to-- to an English class and they-- they don't come back or they just kinda come for a workshop in labor rights or they could just really be involved and they would be very free in that sense. So it seems that for this-- for this women (SIC), that is very important 'cause they don't feel-- they don't feel trapped.

FEMALE VOICE:

Can I ask a--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Sure.

FEMALE VOICE:

--clarification question there? You said that they can come to these-- e-- events without paying any fee, but is it not true that they have a membership fee--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

They do have--

FEMALE VOICE:

Can you talk about that--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

--a membership fee--

FEMALE VOICE:

--'cause I think--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

--yes, they do have-- but they don't-- like, most of the time they don't pay the membership fee. They just--

FEMALE VOICE:

So many people have no paid the membership--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yes.

FEMALE VOICE:

--fee?

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

I mean, sometimes for example they can-- they-- actually most of the times-- well, right now they're a little more popular but before they would have four people working in there voluntarily, completely voluntarily, and their costs-- their operational costs would be as much as \$100 a month. And they will have their husband coming and-- come-- come in and help and those \$100 a month will be from memberships but-- I mean, but from few people that will help them in that particular moment.

But they don't have-- and that's something that we're gonna look into it. I mean, they-- they're not very financially strong in that sense. They're not good business administrators. They're also always waiting by the phone to answer and help other domestic workers. They're very-- they're trained in labor rights and they're trained specifically in this type of labor rights. They know all the-- they know all the situations that domestic workers go through so they have this-- this open line, this open phone line, we-- where domestic workers will call and ask for advice.

And recently, like, five years ago, they have a lot of questions from employers that wants to do-- I mean, now that they're very popular they just wants to do things right and, well, they're very smart to call this group so they call-- they call the group and ask them, "Listen, how do I do the vacation part? How much do I have to pay them? Do you have-- do you have a contract that I could use to hire the domestic workers?"

They also have strong negotiating (SIC)-- negotiating s-- skills. And sometimes they had to negotiate rights, which is a really hard decision here, in order to achieve some benefits and they did. When you are negotiating with-- lawmakers, with congress people, (FOREIGN LANGUAGE), that's-- that's-- that's the way we call it in Costa Rica, sometimes they will tell you, "Okay, what you want-- I mean, you want to change-- on-- a daily schedule of 12 hours into eight hours because it's-- it's rightful, yes it is. It wouldn't-- it won't be done.

"It just-- it just can't be done. We have to go from 12 to ten and then wait a couple of years and go from ten to 12-- to eight." And they did accept it, they did accept it as-- and-- as-- I mean, as different as a union that in my experience I believe they won't-- they wouldn't accept it. So that's something that really helped them as a group. For example, in Nicaragua they have-- they have an-- another office in Nicaragua even though they don't have any political color, they don't have any political affiliation.

In Nicaragua they had to go through a certain type of affiliation because a lone official party is very strong and that was the-- that was the only way to get the convention approved. So they did go and-- and-- and talk to-- to the official party that-- the Sandinista party. There's another thing that is very interesting in the organization and is how clear they have the agenda. And I think this is something-- something that really got them very successful.

They always follow their goals and they didn't get-- they didn't get around with some other things. Even though they needed money, they would never compromise their agenda for-- for funds, for example. I mean, if someone will come-- because they had opportunities, for example, in the (UNINTEL) topic I-- I don't believe if it-- if it was the I.L.O. or the I.O.M. who approached them and told them, "Listen, we wanna work the-- the-- (UNINTEL) topic in domestic workers. We can fund a project."

And they said, "No. We're any organization that only work for labor rights and we are-- I mean, our goal right now is-- this and this and this and no, we won't do any project going aside of that goal." And they didn't. And their agenda is never compromised. Even though they have to go back to \$100 a month they do it. They know a lot of the local environment and they always took advantage or they to l-- to take advantage of political timing.

For example, when the government starts, when the politics are making (UNINTEL) because of electoral changes. Or when-- when-- there's a recess in congress or when everybody's looking at Costa Rica because of an international-- because of an international complaint. So they're always there around. They're very smart in that-- in that sense. They know who to approach and they learn it through time. And-- another thing that-- that is-- very important is how the people-- regarding human

resources and the f-- the resources that we actually went through that already.

It's how the people that work inside the group is so loyal and so committed to these-- to these issues. They can work for free. And-- I mean, they had problems, they lost their jobs. Some of them lost their jobs because of this-- because of this-- fighting advocacy process. Some of them-- or most of them have (SNEEZE) family-- family problems because of this and, I mean, husbands are not very-- not always very supportive about having-- a leader in the family. And-- well, they-- they really faced a lot of problems and they're still there.

And even though they're-- they don't get paid, I mean, they'll go and do-- and do the corr-- the (UNINTEL), like, education-- educational something and they just go around the neighborhood and knock on doors and-- neighborhoods where they know they have-- they have domestic workers and they will knock on doors and wait for the domestic workers to open and just try to-- try to-- to-- to get them involved in the group and-- and try to tell her about her rights.

They will choose special times, for example December, which is a t-- which is a time where labor rights are very-- very avoided because it's-- you have to give the Christmas bonus and-- and all the-- the migrant domestic workers would like to go back to Venez-- to Venezuela-- to Nicaragua so there's-- there are a lot of-- not rightful practices like-- paying them off and then rehiring them so they won't accumulate rights through time or if they don't come back or-- or, for example, they don't pay them in full, they pay them half, so they will make them come back from Nicaragua 'cause some them stay, which is of course not-- it's illegal.

So they will go in December and talk to all these people and work in workshops and send their-- their volunteers to the neighborhood to knock on doors and-- and tell everybody-- the employer or the domestic worker, how the rights are supposed to be. (UNINTEL) So to finish I would like to speak about some learned lessons that we have in this group and that's it's very important if we ever-- we, you, or whoever works again with another type of organization of domestic worker organization, especially if it's starting.

So the leadership building is key. You have to really identify the natural-- leader or-- or form a leader and-- th-- this leader should be familiar with the political environment. They should learn basic topics of labor rights, human rights, migrant rights, and the topics related to the specific context. At least in Costa Rica there's-- a big-- a big part of migrants-- it's-- it doesn't happen the same in Nicaragua for example, but there's a lot of domestic workers too. It's just that they're not migrant. Or at least they're not international migrant, transporter migrant.

The organizational capacity, it is recommended to have a structure in these organizations. For example, for the financial issue to assure them of highly-- a higher monthly income from the members or in the organizational capacity to try to make these organizations unions so they will have more access to training, they will have more access to international spaces where they can actually-- change laws for or-- or - or little-- or groups within the government where they can-- talk about salaries, talk

about-- about health.

Because as an association, I mean, they're no different as a neighbor association. They don't have anything related to labor rights if they're not a union. They cannot do any collective bargain, they cannot be part of-- the I.L.O. for example. I mean, they went to-- to Geneva when they were speaking about the I.L.O. convention, the 189, when it was approved, but they didn't have any voice because there was just an association.

And-- they have to explore and it has to be-- it has to-- to be explored ways to incorporate misrepresentative population. For example, in Costa Rica in the board of this organization-- because by law you cannot have any-- well, that's one of the reasons that they changed to association, by law you cannot have any migrant in a board-- in-- in a board in any organization in Costa Rica. So in this type of organizations it's very important to help migrants 'cause it will be-- I mean, you have to help them representing the population and-- what can be done. Actually in their board they have-- one migrant-- I-- two migrants that-- that became Costa Ricans.

It's very important to strengthen the alliances with specific congress people-- because they're the ones who propose the law projects. With other organizations-- like the academia, media, international organizations, local organizations, and it's very important to have a basic knowledge of the environment. I mean-- there are some things that are really-- that are really p-- painful to learn at the end of this (UNINTEL), for example, that women would be-- they're passionate enemies. They are-- the woman-- the congresswomen would be the ones-- more strongly opposed to these type of-- of laws.

Not the-- not the gentlemen (SIC) but the ladies. So it's a myth to believe that they will-- that they will be s-- that they will have any type of solidarity with this topic. At least that's what the experience (UNINTEL) in-- in Costa Rica. Domestic workers are always scared, they are scared, because they can lose their job and they need their job. And-- and, well, political environments are very dynamic and momentum has to be identified to make law changes. But there are still a sense of ownership along with discrimination and-- and really weak legislation on this topic, so.

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

All right.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

Well, thank you very much. I think you have provided us with--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

A lot of information.

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

A lot of information-- from the macro side-- social and cultural patterns of discrimination to a very good-- study case, which is-- (UNINTEL) organization that has been able to change-- laws in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. So thank you for-- for the overview and for all the information you provided. I'd like to open the floor for questions, comments, et cetera. Maybe we should start in New York-- and then continue-- take some questions here in D.C. and give Beatriz an opportunity to answer them.

MALE VOICE:

So thank you so much for-- sharing all that with us. So I'm-- I'm curious, I know you said that-- that the organization was really good at developing-- coalitions to-- to build support for-- for d-- domestic workers' rights. But I'm curious for-- y-- I'm-- I'm sure there is still-- some pushback from employer groups or employers in general, I'm curious in those countries that have signed on-- to the-- the-- the new convention-- or to the ones who have not signed on-- what-- what have the circumstances been like in those countries that signed on-- that enabled them to be successful and in countries where they have no yet signed on-- what are the big obstacles there?

(BREAK IN TAPE)

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Maybe we can--

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

To give you-- here in D.C. have any questions? Max (PH)?

MAX:

I have many questions but I'll (LAUGHTER) ask two. It's always been a problem, I

have to many. So-- one question, if-- the church plays any role-- and is in any way passionate about-- migrant workers' rights or domestic workers' rights and to get--

MALE VOICE:

The church.

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

The church.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Oh.

MAX:

The church and particularly the women's' rights component of it that you mentioned. Did-- are they vocal, are they supportive, are they negative, et cetera? So that's one question. And another question (CLEARS THROAT) so you-- referred a few times to the budget of the organization being \$100 or \$100 a month operational costs, so what is the actual annual budget I guess is part of that question but also-- are you at all in any way afraid of organization losing real touch and being real grassroots with the funding increasing if that would be the case? I understand that it's big part of the legitimacy of the group some well the way you talked about the leadership style, et cetera, et cetera. Maybe I understood that wrong.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Can you repeat that last question?

MAX:

Yeah. So you said that they would benefit from more funding--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yes.

MAX:

--the group. At the same time the way you described the group with the (UNINTEL) efforts-- that they undertake and some of the leadership style, et cetera. So my question was are you not afraid or-- do you feel-- do you have any sense of caution around the group increasing funding and therefore maybe losing its grassroots identity?

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Okay. All right. Can I--

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

Yeah, maybe we should--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

--yeah, can I answer this--

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

--do--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

--yeah, 'cause I might forget--

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

--we should-- yeah, give her the chance to answer and then--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

So-- so they've been working ten years now about the funding. And they will be going on and off and every time they increase their fund they did a lot of really good things. I mean, (CLEARS THROAT) the good part that I was trying to say is that they would-- they wouldn't depend, like, 100% in funding. I mean, they can actually operate without any funding in really low cost, which give them a little flexibility. And so they won't disappear if the funding disappears. That's-- that's a good thing.

Most of the time the funding that they use is very well allocated and is-- is funding for-- they're-- they-- well, they have, like, a certain type of methodology and they will have, for example, this type of activities, lunches or breakfast with decision makers and they will really go after them and tell them, "This is what we want, this is what we should change," and that's what they do.

And they've been very successful about-- about that because-- as-- the person in New York was asking, it's very complicated that-- a place like Costa Rica actually approves and-- and ratifies this type of convention. And they had a big part in it. So-- so I would say-- I mean, I'm not talking about \$1 million, but I would say-- I wouldn't be cautious in that. I mean, they prove they have experience managing budget.

The church, that's a really interesting question. When we profile domestic workers in Costa Rica-- and I didn't mention that, but-- the biggest affiliation of all the migrants, domestic workers, is the church. I'm not sure which one specific-- which church specific, but yes, most-- most of the churches in Costa Rica-- will go through-- I mean, they will work on labor rights and they-- they will have a big part in it.

And-- the-- why they don't ratify-- why countries don't ratify definitely is-- it's-- it's a position of the employers regarding the question that he was asking. Most of the time the employers are against this type of-- of-- of regulation because-- it means that a lot of local laws has to-- had to be changed. Well, as you know, I mean, if you ratify an international convention then you'll have to align everything that you have on a local-- on a local level so the convention will be-- it will be accomplished.

And-- yes, in Costa Rica one of the biggest problems were the employers. The actual-- the National Employer Association was against it and it is against it in the rest of the countries, and that's why it's not being ratified. And-- in here I believe it was-- there was a lot of advocacy, a lot of pressure so it will be-- so it will be-- ratified. If that answers your question hopefully.

MALE VOICE:

I had a question about-- the different types of domestic model legislation that's based on the I.L.O. How relatable are they from one jurisdiction to another and are there cross-border-- coalitions-- that are advocating for similar types of legislation in different countries?

(BREAK IN TAPE)

FEMALE VOICE:

Thank you. I don't know if this was in your findings or not but-- domestic workers sometimes within a country-- have different economic situation than domestic workers that have been able to migrate. I mean, being able to migrate you already had certain support to be able to pay for the cost to go to Costa Rica, for example, or Nicaragua when domestic workers are-- are-- are at-- as far as you can go from how

sometimes-- what you have in your family income sometimes per-- permits you have to different social-economic strata.

So I was just wondering between the domestic workers that ASTRADOMICS (SIC)-- ASTRADOMES works with, they work with not only migration-- migrant workers, but also local, Costa Rican, or in the case of Nicaragua, Nicaraguan domestic workers, and if there's any differences that they see. You know, you talked about the women in women's rights' groups not necessarily always supporting them in their-- their causes, but wh-- do you see any differences between the domestic workers themselves? Between the migrant workers and the-- and the domestic workers that are more closely--

(FEMALE #3 VOICE: UNINTEL)

FEMALE VOICE:

Than national--

FEMALE VOICE:

The national domestic workers?

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

What type of differences?

FEMALE VOICE:

Like, do you see an-- do you see the same support, like, for example, ASTRADOMES is a domestic workers' association so they don't differentiate between whether you're a migrant domestic worker or a national domestic worker. And sometimes there can be different social-economic differences amongst your domestic worker population. And so I was just wondering if there was any differences between how those-- those members of the association related.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Okay.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Well-- there is an organization, it's a regional organization. It's called (FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Colac (PH)-- cone-- yeah. (LAUGH) Yeah, it's not easy, but yes, it's an association of domestic workers associations in the region. And there is a platform for Latin America too. But-- the most advanced is Costa Rica so it's-- is-- in-- in the advocacy and in law changing and-- and about the I.L.O.-- the-- about the I.L.O. laws if I remember your question, well, the convention is really wide. I mean, it's really-- it's not specific.

I mean, what it says basically is that any domestic worker should be a decent worker, which is the concept of the I.L.O. that implies a lot of-- a lot of things. So-- it actually doesn't go in any detail but it will set up a framework for all the countries to change different-- to change the laws. For example, what I was saying at the beginning about the-- the-- different category of-- of-- d-- domestic workers being part of a different category or workers.

If you ratify the convention-- if a country ratifies the convention, that has to be changed. You cannot have-- you cannot have them as a different category. You would have to have them as the regular workers with a regular salary, so-- so is-- for example, in terms of Costa Rica, that's the only thing that-- the convention will-- that and international recognition of course, but that's the only legal thing that the convention will make the country change, because the other ones were already changed.

But for other countries it will mean a lot of local changes. And-- differences between migrants and-- and local domestic workers, when-- well-- as you know migrants-- well, they migrate because of-- looking for better opportunities, so there is a lot of-- remittances. So economically they are more vulnerable than-- than Costa Ricans because they will send a lot of money back and they will keep less money. There's a lot of cultural-- of cultural appreciation differences. People will say that one is-- that-- works more than the other one.

And what they do is they do is they will exploit their-- will exploit her more than the other one, and-- that's related to migrants. And-- well, I-- yeah, I guess those are the-- yeah, those are the differences. I-- I don't-- I really don't know if--

(OVERTALK)

FEMALE VOICE:

Yeah, I don't know if there was any divisions between their--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Within the domestic workers--

FEMALE VOICE:

--membership-- yeah, within the association. That's what I was--

(OVERTALK)

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Oh, yes, definitely. Definitely they--

FEMALE VOICE:

Or any difference in strategy of how they're working with national groups versus migrant--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

No, they try--

FEMALE VOICE:

--groups--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

--they try always to work in the same strategy and they try to make them part of it. And even though they cannot be legal part of a board, they'll still make-- make them, like-- like-- illegally but very formal part of-- of decision making. And they're very inclusive in that sense.

For example-- migra-- Nicaraguans have a-- special holidays, religious holidays, that will only happen in Nicaragua and this association will have them in their-- in their local space. So-- so they will-- because, I mean, they've doing a transnational cultural thing so they will celebrate both. They're very inclusive that way. Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

Am I missing a question?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE VOICE:

It's not a burning question. It was just-- just-- you know, a longstanding question, especially for grassroots organizations that are based on membership-- which is how do you go about cultivating enough new leadership so that the organization is not--

(FEMALE VOICE: UNINTEL)

FEMALE VOICE:

--dependent on one leader? My understanding is that Rosita is-- has been there for a long time. I don't know how much longer we can expect for Rosita to be there. And what is the organization doing to try to develop-- those new levels of leadership? So it's one thing to do kind of trainings that people know what labor law is, know what migrants law is, know that-- these different things. That can happen at a number of levels.

But to actually kind of work on leadership development, what-- what is the state of that I guess I'm wondering and-- to what extent do-- does a lower level of leaders beneath Rosita speak in public-- serve as a spokesperson, lead a particular part of an advocacy campaign? That's-- that's my question.

MALE VOICE:

Yeah. Well, I have two questions and the first one is exactly that. (LAUGH) So-- how-- I mean, you-- you were clear that-- they could survive without-- I mean, new funding, but-- less clear on-- if they could survive without new leadership. How-- how dependent they are on this specific leadership. This is always a risk when we know the-- the-- the advantage of-- (UNINTEL)-- charismatic-- leadership, but-- there is-- this risk is also-- an (UNINTEL)-- the person-- so there any more for any reason-- could lose the strength of the-- the organization.

So th-- this was the first question. And the other one was I think-- there is-- I mean, I've followed quite closely the Brazilian debate about-- this issue and-- of course the counterargument that always appeared was-- that if we increase the rights we would-- lose employments. This is always--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

They would lose what?

FEMALE VOICE:

Employment.

MALE VOICE:

Employments. I mean, it's-- caused it to be more experience and th-- this is the kind of-- and-- of course this is not-- a reason to stop-- including the rights, but there are-- there is something-- behind this that is the fact that maybe those are employments that we wanna lose because we want to get a society-- I mean, the fact that Brazil, for example, have-- these amount of domestic workers, it's something-- there's something wrong with the way that domestic workers (UNINTEL) because it's so cheap, it's-- people are not-- I mean, they-- they only-- they assume that this is something that is completely needed in-- in the house because it is something that it's not well-paid, it's not-- there is no value-- social value that is (UNINTEL).

And-- and when you begin to-- to do it, when you begin to recognize when the-- the-- the weight begin to-- to-- to-- to increase, there is something about-- of course, and-- and that's why maybe Brazil decreasing the numbers of-- and-- and I think this is a good thing that's--

FEMALE VOICE:

It is.

MALE VOICE:

--employment-- unemployment rate in Brazil is really low (UNINTEL PHRASE). So there is something about this strategy that is-- how-- I mean, how-- thinking more big picture about it, how to deal with this idea that yes, I mean, we want to increase the rights because in a way we want these jobs to disappear-- because we want (UNINTEL PHRASE). And of course this cannot be part of their-- their speech because they're not saying-- but how to deal with this tension-- when it's-- appears-- in-- in this-- in the fight on-- on domestic work.

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

Thank you. Tasha?

TASHA:

So thank you, Beatriz-- for your presentation. It was very nice. And I wanted to ask,

you had mentioned-- obviously that domestic workers are the m-- some of the most vulnerable populations of-- of workers that are. But within that realm it seems that-- I mean-- that domestic workers that work for certain types of peoples are even more vulnerable.

So particularly diplomats or international actors because they're not necessarily held-- they can't be held to national law. So is-- is ASTRADOMES working on (BACKGROUND VOICES) targeting perhaps those type of workers in a different fashion or trying to tie in-- their advocacy to a more international level? 'Cause time and time again, you know, these workers are the most vulnerable and it seems-- you know, it's very difficult to approach. So if ASTRADOMES is doing anything at that level or if you know of other organizations that are als-- that are trying to?

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Well-- can I answer?

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

Of course. (LAUGHTER)

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Well-- no, ASTRADOMES is not doing-- anything in that matter. There is not-- well, that case it's not very-- well, I've never heard of any in Costa Rica. I mean, I heard in Geneva and people from Dominican republic actually inside the I.L.O., so-- but no-- ASTRADOMES is-- it just doesn't have any type of-- those types of-- of cases. Not that I-- not that I know of right now.

And-- that-- that big question, right, about-- about wanting these jobs to disappear or not. Because that's-- that's a question that I actually bit myself when I was doing the research because sometimes this-- sometimes ASTRADOMES would like to teach the domestic workers-- to speak English and-- to use computers, so you would ask them why would you do that? Because you want them to get a different job so you're actually aiming to-- to-- to change this or-- or-- I mean, what are you aiming for?

And-- and that's a question that is-- it's not clearly answered definitely. My opinion would be that-- the jobs-- the-- I believe this type of job would never disappear. I mean, it's a job that we need. It's-- it's a base of-- of-- of the pyramid. People should-- or-- or-- I mean, we need people who-- that take cares of-- of-- kids and-- and services of-- this type of services. But we would definitely-- would be aiming to disappear-- the low payments, the (UNINTEL) payments, the not right access. And if that will make them more expensive and that would reduce-- the capability of families to have one or two or three, let's-- well, then-- let's-- it has to be it.

Like, it happened in Brazil. I mean, it ch-- the population shrunk, like, around two million people because of that. And leadership, that's a big-- that's a big question to actually-- r-- raised and-- and the research and-- I guess I skip it. I had it in here. There is-- there is a strong leadership in this woman but she and the organization also is building the ord-- they already build another leader which is ready to take over. The thing is that the leader-- the other leader is--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

And-- there is another one, but it's-- it just-- she just works a different leadership. Her name is Carmen (PH) and she's not as noisy, as loud, and-- and does-- as Rosita is. She's different, she uses a lot of me-- social media and-- and-- well, she just manages a different leadership. But yes, it was hard to get there. I mean, it had to be Rosita that went that-- that said, "Okay, I'm-- I'm too old, I'm sick, I need to pass my power to someone else." I-- it shouldn't be like that. It sounds like-- I don't know, like, a dictator story I guess.

FEMALE VOICE:

I was just wondering, I'm-- I'm dissecting a bit the-- the women's groups and their relationship with ASTRADOMES. I mean, it makes sense to a certain extent if you're not able to hire a domestic worker, you as a woman are doing more work in your household. So-- that's kind of how cultures have laid it out and that's how gender balances in-- in a lot of these (UNINTEL).

And so what you see in many countries with the domestic workers is that allows the woman of the household, the mother, to be able to do, you know, outside employment or other types of activities that kind of frees her up from those duties. So I was wondering if there was any more exploration on-- on what the dynamic is, I mean, to bring those groups together, to talk more about kind of the gender roles of women and gender-- and-- and how domestic work fits into that. Because your immediate response would be of course, "Don't take her down to, you know, eight hours a day. I need her 12 hours because"--

(BREAK IN TAPE)

FEMALE VOICE:

(IN PROGRESS)--I can't afford him.

FEMALE VOICE:

I can't afford to pay her more and that will mess up my whole, you know, kind of layout for my day and-- and what I'm trying to do professional or et cetera. So I don't know if they've entered into any-- like, they've found common ground at least on the gender issues and have maybe entered in to having the dialogue that way.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Well-- I guess not exactly in this level but it's a really interesting question and they should-- I-- I don't know if they enter in another level because in here-- you're talking about a grassroot-- very grassroot organization that-- it will hardly get into this type of-- of discussions.

I mean, they will just be very strong in their advocacy and then this type of discussions will be-- will be hold in another environments and-- (CAR ALARM) not that I heard of, not that this gender. I mean, maybe I.L.O. has some-- some talks about this, but not that ASTRADOMES promote or-- or became part of it. It-- it wasn't a target but I'm-- I'm pretty sure there has to be. (CAR ALARM) But not that I-- not that I know now--

FEMALE VOICE:

From wh-- many of the academics researching on domestic work--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

They will do it.

FEMALE VOICE:

--will in-- start these discussions without the domestic workers because part of the discussion because they don't think about it in those terms.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yes. And-- and yes, you're right, that's the reasoning. I mean, they had-- they had fights in calming-- Rosita was taken with security out of a congress meeting because she was so mad and-- and screaming at-- at-- at-- at a woman that told her that-- I don't know, all those ugly things that they could say about domestic workers. (LAUGH) So I don't think there's, like, a space where she actually sat down and-- and talked about it.

FEMALE VOICE:

Because, I mean, you peel back the layers and at the end they show a common--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yes, they do.

FEMALE VOICE:

--issue of--

FEMALE VOICE:

Gender imbalance, yeah.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yeah. yes.

FEMALE VOICE:

But it may be that there needs to be some kind of-- some kind of other convening actor to bring those groups together 'cause if-- if one of them reaches out to the other as-- directly, it's a little difficult--

(OVERTALK)

FEMALE VOICE:

--'cause the w-- for the women's groups they can be-- concerned after seeing the video of Rosita yelling at somebody on the wherever (LAUGH)--

FEMALE VOICE:

Exactly.

FEMALE VOICE:

--that-- but they're gonna be kind of put with their backs against the wall and required to make a decision that they're not prepared to do yet. If-- if-- if-- if

somebody else would convene them like-- like a church group or something, it would be--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yeah, I think there's a lot of things--

FEMALE VOICE:

--easier.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

--at the table, I mean, in that-- in that discussion. Like, for example, what about the state and what about providing childcare and-- and--

FEMALE VOICE:

The other policies--

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Exactly.

FEMALE VOICE:

--I mean, if you're going to hopefully have a society where you don't have somebody trapped in a small room in your house 24-7 to help with childcare that the state has some other options for-- for working families, I mean, that need that childcare.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yes, but they don't.

FEMALE VOICE:

Right.

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

So, yeah.

MALE VOICE:

One-- one thing-- just to-- to-- that I-- so you said that-- employers' association-- has an important role trying to stop and-- 'cause-- in the Brazi-- in the Brazilian case it-- it w-- it wasn't so much about employers' association. I mean, how high of a domestic employers' association that are strong, you know, to-- to make noise and (UNINTEL). It's much more of the fact that-- all the journalists, the politicians-- they have domestic--

FEMALE VOICE:

They do--

(OVERTALK)

MALE VOICE:

--workers so--

(OVERTALK)

MALE VOICE:

Yeah, it's-- it's more (UNINTEL) the way, you know, the pressure would come in the discussions and-- and not, you know, like the traditional lobby that you could-- know exactly who is putting pressure and so how to counterbalance-- counterbalance this pressure. I don't know-- I don't know in-- in-- in the (UNINTEL).

BEATRIZ SLOOTEN:

Yeah, it was-- it was exactly the same thing. I mean, and it's such a small country so everybody knows everybody and yes, ev-- I mean, all the people in-- in congress would have-- would have-- domestic workers and-- and even-- even when we made the research and we spoke with congresswomen that were in favor of this type of law, they were actually telling the story how they would-- they were raised by a domestic worker and-- all those-- all those sad stories.

And-- yes, I mean, they're the ones-- they're the ones against the laws, but against the convention since it has be-- (FOREIGN LANGUAGE), I mean, with the three of them, with the unions, the employers, and the-- and the state, in order to ratify a

convention, that's where the employers will come and stop it in that level. But in-- yeah, in congress-level, like, you'll find a lot of people stopping it.

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

Thank you. Is there any other pressing question or final comment? Well, if not I just wanted to thank you once again for coming and giving us this-- very useful and great presentation and thank everybody for coming. Thank you, New York, for--

VOICES:

Thank you. Thank you.

CAROLINA JIMENEZ:

--also joining us. And-- yeah, we look forward to continuing this discussion in the future.

VOICES:

All right, thank you. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *