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We started to organize our union in 1997. Due to Hong Kong’s economic transition, most electronics and garment factories moved north to mainland China, causing many middle-aged Hong Kong women to lose their jobs. In response, the government supported some community training courses to create job opportunities for some middle-aged women to work as part-time domestic workers. Some of the training courses were provided by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU).  After the training was completed, the instructor knew that participants would just go their separate ways and not contact each other again, and that when labor disputes occurred, there would be nowhere for them to go for help.  At the suggestion of HKCTU instructors and with the help and guidance of HKCTU organizing staff, we invited domestic worker sisters to get together and organize a union. By doing this we could unite to fight for reasonable labor protections as well as maintain friendship among our sisters. After lots of learning and preparation, more than 600 part-time domestic workers founded the Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union on July 8, 2001. The union is affiliated with the HKCTU. Because domestic workers’ work is mostly temporary and each person has multiple employers, when we formed our union, we received very little protection from the government. We organized our union to protect and improve our sisters’ rights.  Because many domestic workers live in different areas, the union is divided into five regional groups to make it convenient for our sisters to attend union meetings and share work experience and skills near where they live. We organize cooking and craft classes and potlucks, and we arrange to travel together every year. At the end of each year, we also have a year-end cleaning, mutual-aid job allocation plan  to help sisters find work as a way to connect with members. This is also the time when sisters renew their membership or join the union. I joined the union this way and have been with the union for eight years. During these years, experienced sisters have been sharing their skills and experience so that everyone can improve their skills.  Besides organizing gatherings, our major tasks have been to fight against discrimination against part-time workers, advocate for regulations to protect part-time and temporary workers, set up a central fund, protect against occupational disease for temporary workers, establish universal pension protection, provide employment assistance for domestic workers, and promote respect for domestic work.  Our biggest success was that we convinced the employers to purchase accident insurance for workers. That is a result of unity and solidarity of all our sisters. When there was a rally, all five groups would join together to fight for our rights.  Other employment opportunities, hardships faced by members, change of work due to work-related injuries, and fewer training classes provided by the training bureau are all factors that affect member recruitment. Therefore, in order to keep our fight, all sisters must learn to be patient and persistent and to make great efforts.  In order to strengthen our connections and lasting collaboration among all domestic workers in Hong Kong, we united with migrant domestic workers working in Hong Kong and formed the Federation of Asian Domestic Worker Unions to strengthen the power of solidarity, move our campaign, “Domestic Workers Are Workers,” forward, and fight for decent work for domestic workers. Last June, we successfully pushed for the adoption of ILO Convention 189. Now we are fighting to convince our own country to ratify this convention.  Thank you very much. | |  | | http://www.solidaritycenter.org/images/1px_spacer.gif | | |
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