

Visa traffickers in Kuwait make \$860 million per year

Al Masri urged Kuwaitis to help put an end to the trafficking trade

- By Habib Toumi, Bahrain Bureau Chief
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Manama: Visa traffickers in Kuwait make about 250 million Kuwaiti Dinars (\$860 million) a year, a human rights consultant has said.

The alarming figure is part of an international trade that generates \$ 60 billion annually.

"This is sad and disgusting and should be stopped," Dr Nasser Al Masri, told a seminar on "Human Trafficking" organised in Kuwait by the Kuwait Centre for Expatriate Rights.

Al Masri urged Kuwaitis to help put an end to the trafficking trade and human rights abuses of expatriates, saying that five decades ago the country faced terrible times and as people were dying of hunger, thirst and disease, many Kuwaitis sought employment in India and other countries.

Kuwaitis should recall such hard times and respect the rights of other people, Kuwaiti daily Arab Times reported on Wednesday.

Waleed Al Tabtabai, a Kuwaiti lawmaker, told the participants that there was a need to establish an independent public authority for human rights and to have a law that criminalises human trafficking, in order to protect the rights of domestic workers in Kuwait.

He said that a proposal by Dr Obaid Al Wasmi, a legal expert at the University of Kuwait, to establish a criminal court for human rights should be supported.

"The Parliamentary Human Rights Committee is currently studying a Bill proposed by MP Saleh Ashour to protect the rights of about 700,000 domestic workers," he said.

Domestic helpers are not included in a recently-enacted labour law that, although did not fully abolish the controversial sponsorship law, has given employees more rights and better working conditions.

Mohammad Al Afassi, who is heading a drive to give foreign labourers more rights and eliminate abuses by visa traffickers, said that he would not be intimidated by people benefiting from the presence of marginalised labourers and bogus companies.

More than 1.2 million foreigners work in Kuwait and, with their families, make up around 2.2 million of a total population of 3.3 million.

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