

Statement of Former Kawaguchi Workers

19th November 2025

From hardship to legal re-employment and historic compensation in Malaysia.

In August 2024, 300 migrant workers employed at Malaysia's Kawaguchi Manufacturing have been facing ongoing issues, including non-payment of wages, non-renewal of work permits, poor living and working conditions, and passport confiscation, which have restricted our legal movement. When recruited from Bangladesh, we each paid up to 600,000 BDT (US\$4,900) in recruitment fees, hoping to improve our lives. To gather this sum, we either sold our assets or took out high-interest loans.

Non-payment of wages and work permit renewal issues have been started since 2022 because of the negligence of Kawaguchi management. Many of our colleagues absconded with an illegal status, given the irregularity in salary and work permits.

After a Bangladeshi media outlet "Somoynews" covered our story on 31st Aug 2024, "*Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia remain unpaid for 5 months*", we were immediately contacted by Mr Andy Hall's Bangladeshi team to check about our status. Since our engagement with team Andy Hall, we are aware that he called for action for many different labour rights organisations, the UN Working Group, the international media, the government, customers of Kawaguchi and many more relevant stakeholders.

We raised three key issues that needed to be addressed: payment of pending wages, obtaining regularised work permits, and reimbursement of recruitment fees, along with improving working and living conditions at Kawaguchi. However, Kawaguchi management, their buyers, government authorities, and the Bangladeshi High Commission all proved unable to help. We submitted a written complaint to the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur on August 2, 2024, but received no support. Instead, after we brought the case to their attention following their statement, four workers were dismissed, and we were in more fear and insecurity.

On December 14, 2024, our workers' representatives attended a roundtable discussion hosted by Ms Pichamon Yeophantong, Chair of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights. We clearly presented our demands during the discussion, where Mr Andy Hall, Electronics Watch, RBA, IndustriALL, and Japanese brands Sony, Panasonic and Daikin were represented, and Migration Dristi participated as a worker assistance group. In the third week of December 2024, after the Roundtable, we were informed about the reimbursement of RM 20,000 as recruitment fees for each worker by Sony, Panasonic, and Daikin, with the process facilitated by RBA, Electronics Watch, and Migration Dristi.

Following our JTK complaint and ongoing external pressure, JTK organised a meeting between us and Kawaguchi management. During the meeting, Kawaguchi agreed to pay our pending wages by November 15, 2025, and JTK issued a consent order, which was signed by the workers, Kawaguchi, and JTK officials. However, Kawaguchi failed to comply with the consent order, making only a single instalment payment of 1,000 RM to each worker on January 15, 2025 and was unresponsive and shut down their operation. Our suffering continued at Kawaguchi provided unsafe accommodation without food and legal status.

Since Kawaguchi failed to comply with the JTK consent order in February 2025, we took three subsequent steps with the valuable assistance of Mr. Andy Hall, Migration Dristi (MD), International Rights Advocates (IRA), and Electronics Watch (EW): 1. Continued to follow up with JTK on the consent order, resulting in them prosecuting Kawaguchi in court; 2. Negotiation with Kawaguchi's main customers for additional compensation; and 3. Sought legal avenues for either reemployment in Malaysia or repatriation to home countries.

During our struggle, we faced many challenges. We protested outside the Kawaguchi factory to demand compensation from Sony, Panasonic, and Daikin. Often, we did not have enough food, but Daikin and RBA helped arrange some food for us, coordinated by Andy Hall and his team. Our story was reported by some international and local media. We also refused a forced re-employment offer from JTK. When we tried to get our 20,000 RM recruitment fee reimbursed through RBA, banking problems caused delays, and we needed to open E-wallet accounts in Malaysia. We sought legal help from the Malaysian Bar Council but did not receive any assistance. One of our fellow workers, Ebrahim Miah, was in a road accident, suffered a head injury resulted in some mental disorder, and got some support from IOM later. The RTK workers also struggled to return home. These are just some of the many difficulties we experienced throughout our journey.

As of the 3rd of November 2025, we are pleased to inform you that 308 former Kawaguchi workers received reimbursement for recruitment fees, amounting to RM 20,000 per worker. This group includes 306 Bangladeshi and 2 Nepalese workers. Additionally, 283 workers who experienced severe exploitation and were present at the Kawaguchi facility until September 2024 received further compensation from Sony, Panasonic, and Daikin.

While we appreciate the RBA's assistance in securing a 20,000 RM reimbursement per worker for recruitment fees, we would like to point out an issue with their current criteria: only workers who have left within the past six months from the fee explored date are eligible. This criterion excluded more than twenty equally affected workers. It would be good to remove such strict timelines and adopt an open negotiation period to allow more affected workers to receive reimbursement in future.

Despite a JTK consent order issued to Kawaguchi, they failed to comply with Malaysian authorities and have since officially closed without settling. Our claim remains unresolved, highlighting the failure of the Malaysian system to protect forced labour victims.

In total, RM 15 million has been distributed as recruitment fee reimbursement and additional compensation to us. However, approximately RM 3 million in pending wages is still owed, and we have recently appointed a lawyer to pursue further legal action against the Kawaguchi owner. Of the former workers, 198 have found new employment in Malaysia with responsible re-employment processes, while the remainder have returned home or found work independently.

We thank all relevant stakeholders equally, both those who directly and indirectly helped us and continue to stand with migrants. We know there are thousands of migrants suffering similarly to us, and your ongoing effort and support are very important.

The statement preparation process was led by five worker leaders (former Kawaguchi workers), with assistance from the Migration Dristi team for translation and guidance. All workers had the opportunity to review, comment, and approve.

Best regards,

The Former Kawaguchi Workers