

# Deportation of migrant domestic worker who wrote about Hong Kong protests

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## Contents

- [Hong Kong deports writer \(...\)](#)
- [‘Solidarity with Yuli’: \(...\)](#)

## **Hong Kong deports writer and migrant worker Yuli Riswati Yuli’s story must not become a mere footnote in Hong Kong’s struggle for liberation.**

<https://lausan.hk/2019/hong-kong-deports-writer-and-migrant-worker-yuli-riswati/>

December 2, 2019 - by Nickolas Tang (Lausan)

Yuli Riswati, an award-winning Indonesian reporter and migrant domestic worker who has played a vital role in documenting Hong Kong’s ongoing political crisis, has been deported by Hong Kong immigration authorities this afternoon under the pretext of an unrenewed work visa, following an inhumane detention of 28 days.

Her circumstances are a reminder of the many forms of state violence faced by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong—and all Hongkongers should take notice.

Yuli—who has lived in Hong Kong for ten years—has paid close attention to the unfolding of this year’s movement from its very start.

Realizing that many workers were not well-informed about the protests, owing to a lack of coverage in Bahasa Indonesia, she took it upon herself to interview demonstrators, take pictures of actions, and translate local news into Bahasa Indonesia. Her work has been published in Migran Pos and Suara.

As she has explained, her goal was to inform her compatriots about the movement, so they could get around the unintended disturbances caused by protest actions, and would not be misled by biased or false reporting.

The circumstances under which Yuli was deported are highly unusual, and without a doubt politically motivated.

After signing a two-year employment contract earlier this year, Yuli renewed her passport but did not renew her visa. According to the Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU), this common situation is usually resolved when the employer confirms that the worker is still employed in a letter to the Immigration Department.

In almost all cases, workers are able to get their visas renewed without hassle so long as the migrant worker is under contract. Instead, Yuli was arrested at her workplace, intimidated by officers to cancel her work visa, and detained without medical attention despite her employer’s legal appeals—in a clear demonstration of the Immigration Department’s unregulated executive overreach.

Yuli has also faced harassment from the public for her work: she has been falsely accused of encouraging workers to “report” on employers who have participated in this year’s protests. One protester confronted her as she photographed a rally, saying: *“You’re an Indonesian worker, you’re not supposed to be doing this!”*

Despite this, Yuli has remained committed to informing Indonesians and showing solidarity with the movement through her reporting.

We must not let her efforts—or the cruel and unjust punishment she has received as a consequence—become a mere footnote in Hong Kong’s struggle for liberation. The use of executive and administrative instruments to suppress political dissent is exactly what our movement is fighting against, and standing with Yuli is part of that fight.

Many migrant domestic workers, whose crucial care work and reproductive labour is underpaid and underappreciated, face the violence of Hong Kong government’s border enforcement. This takes many forms, from the “live-in policy” and the “two-week rule” to the kind of political suppression directed at Yuli.

Migrant domestic workers share experiences of structural violence with protesters met with police brutality, children facing ostracization by their families, and contract cleaners forced to work under dangerous circumstances without safeguards.

The detention and deportation of Yuli—as well as the inhumane treatment she has faced inside Castle Peak Bay Immigration Centre—is not an isolated injustice. Rather, it is indicative of how the laws governing Hong Kong’s migrant workers are stacked against them, and how the Immigration Department abuses its power to serve the government’s political objectives.

It should prompt us to thoroughly consider what our city owes migrant domestic workers and how we must be vigilant in demanding accountability: from not only the police, but also the immigration system.

Yuli stood with Hongkongers’ fledgling struggle for liberation. It’s time for us to show our solidarity with her by fighting for a Hong Kong where all migrant workers are treated fairly and with dignity.

### **‘Solidarity with Yuli’: Hundreds rally against deportation of migrant worker who wrote about Hong Kong protests**

<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/12/08/solidarity-yuli-hundreds-rally-deportation-migrant-worker-wrote-hong-kong-protests/>

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Around 500 people gathered at Edinburgh Place in Central on Saturday afternoon. Demonstrators criticised the Immigration Department’s decision to deport Yuli Riswati, an award-winning writer and domestic worker in Hong Kong.

Yuli was deported from Hong Kong on Monday 2 following her month-long detention at the Castle Peak Bay Immigration Centre (CIC). Despite her employer’s protests and willingness to extend her contract, Yuli was accused of overstaying her visa.

Yuli’s ordeal began when she failed to renew her visa, which expired on July 27. On September 23, she was arrested at her residence for overstaying, though the Immigration Department later decided not to present evidence against her in court, according to a support group working on Yuli’s case. In November, she was detained on the grounds that she had nowhere to stay – a claim denied by the support group and her employer.

Phobsuk Gasing (Dang), chairperson of Hong Kong Federation of Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU), said earlier that she was surprised that the immigration authorities took a heavy-handed approach.

*"I have never seen a case where Immigration will go to the homes and arrest workers based on this," she said.*

During Saturday 7's rally, Yuli addressed the crowd in Cantonese during a long-distance phone call, saying that she was undergoing medical treatment but had felt better after seeing the amount of support from Hong Kong people.

Describing her experience at the CIC, Yuli said: *"They treated us as if we were criminals, as if we had murdered someone... But many of the people there were just waiting for their visa renewal or other immigration-related matters, yet they were being treated inhumanely."*

Yuli, a Muslim, appeared to be shaken as she described the medical checkups at the CIC, where she was ordered to take off her clothes and was attended to by male doctors.

*"I was shocked because I didn't do anything wrong. Why must I be treated like this?" she said. "I talked to others [detained at the CIC] and they said they had the same experience. Why must we be seen and touched by men? I was terrified."*

Demonstrators chanted *"Yuli, fight on"* as she broke down and was unable to continue with her speech. She responded: *"Fight on, Hongkongers!"* Yuli called on Hong Kong people to seek justice, not just for her, but also for others detained at the CIC.

Dennis Cheung, newly-elected Kwai Ching district councillor, said Yuli's case showed the importance of a democratic government where officials are held to account and cannot wield their powers however they wish.

*"We need to be able to truly monitor those who abuse their authority," he said. "I hope that justice will be given to Yuli, and I hope that asylum seekers at the CIC will no longer be treated inhumanely."*

Yuli worked in Hong Kong for 10 years, during which time she wrote for Hong Kong-based Indonesian newspaper Suara, as well as online media outlet Migran Pos. Last year, she was selected as a finalist at the Taiwan Literature Award for Migrants for her reporting on sexual violence and trauma experienced by Indonesian migrant workers.

Representatives from artist group "v-artist" relayed a message from the organisers of the Taiwan Literature Award for Migrants: *"We have long supported the efforts of migrant workers to make their voices heard through writing. Writing is not just an outlet for migrant workers to express their feelings, but it is also a weapon for denouncing the system and seeking justice."*

Organisers criticised Hong Kong's migrant worker policies, including the two-week rule and the requirement they live with their employers. Other speakers also condemned pro-Beijing politicians and newspapers as stoking prejudice and racial discrimination.

During the rally, organisers displayed a makeshift exhibition of Yuli's photography.

Demonstrators also wrote messages of support to Yuli. Some held signs that said *"Thank you Yuli, you are my hero"* and *"Solidarity with Yuli."*

United Social Press cited rallygoers as saying that some migrant workers who gathered nearby for social purposes refused to take their flyers on the grounds that the Philippine and Indonesian consulates had told them not to participate in political activities in Hong Kong.

An Indonesian migrant worker, who has been working in Hong Kong for two years, told RTHK that she had learned that some migrant workers had been warned by their employers of the risks of being arrested and losing their work status in Hong Kong if they take part in protests.

HKFP has reached out to the Immigration Department for comment.

**Eye injury**

Meanwhile, another Indonesian journalist, Veby Indah, took out proceedings on Friday for a court order, demanding that the Commissioner of Police disclose the identity of the officer who blinded her by a projectile shot in the right eye in October.

Monday 9 marks the six-month anniversary of Hong Kong's largest protest movement since the million-strong march that took place on June 9.

The protests were triggered by a now-withdrawn extradition bill which would have enabled fugitive transfers to mainland China.

The movement has since morphed into calls for democratic reform and accountability for the police handling of the crisis.