



The Hague, November 30th 2009

Permits Foundation petitions Indian government to grant expatriate spouses easier access to work

- India is losing out on talent and hobbling global companies
- Poor visa norms don't support dual careers
- 17 Countries including UK, US, France, Australia allow spouses of corporate, global organizations and government expatriates an easy work regime

Permits Foundation, an international non-profit corporate initiative, has initiated a campaign directed at changing the existing laws on employment rights for expatriate spouses through an improved visa regime for those on intra-corporate transfers. The Foundation promotes access of spouses of expatriate employees to employment through an improvement of work permit regulations. The Foundation has made representations to the concerned ministries and has received the support of the Indian apex industry associations.

In India, the rules being applied by the Bureau of Immigration prevents spouses from taking up employment except through a fresh, home country based application for an employment visa. Such applications do not receive any benefit of having a family presence in the country and are treated at par with any employment visa application. The Bureau of Immigration states that "if the spouse wishes to take up any employment in India, then he or she will be required to return to the country of origin and obtain a requisite employment visa." This results in cost, complexity and stress for spouses who usually sacrifice their careers to support their partners abroad.

As a first step, the Permits Foundation has proposed to the Ministry of Home Affairs that spouses of employees on inter-company transfers be permitted to change their visa status by applying to the FRRO in India. Subsequently, the Permits Foundation has proposed the creation of a specific category for applicants who are transferred to India as a part of any intra-corporate transfer and an equivalent category for applicants who are spouse or dependents of this category of visa holders as is the case in many other countries.

According to Kathleen van der Wilk-Carlton, Board Member-Permits Foundation, "In view of the increasing number of dual careers in families, international employers find work permit difficulties for spouses to be a hurdle to mobility. A number of countries today offer access to work for spouses accompanying trans-national workers. Permits Foundation argues for change benefiting a small but significant population: those expatriates who are employed typically with global corporations or global organizations and governmental foreign services. The issue is of as much concern to Indian global companies as the Indian Foreign Services, and Permits Foundation is engaged globally in campaigning for a change to work regimes for spouses. Today, over two thirds of expatriates surveyed find India an unattractive destination due to the inability of their spouses to easily access work. With this initiative Permits Foundation seeks to make India a preferred destination for the global talent pool. Strengthening both Indian companies with global operations, and trans-national corporations with large commitments in India."

Currently Argentina, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Hong Kong, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States (e.g. L/E visa) allow spouses of expatriate employees of all countries, including India, access to an open work permit by which they can work for any employer or be self-employed. Further, countries like Belgium, Germany, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore allow spouses who have a job offer to work for a specified employer via a simple local process, which does not require a labour market test.

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About Permits Foundation:

Permits Foundation is an international non-profit corporate initiative to promote access of accompanying spouses and partners of international staff to employment through an improvement of work permit regulations. More than 40 major international companies like British Airways, Bosch, Ericsson, GlaxoSmithKline, Schlumberger, Shell, Unilever, AstraZeneca, BMW, TNT amongst other organisations worldwide support Permits Foundation. These organisations represent a growing and broad base of support from diverse businesses. Permits Foundation has been successful in contributing to change in the USA, France, The Netherlands, Hong Kong and Malaysia. It is currently promoting improvements throughout the European Union and several countries in Asia and is working to raise awareness worldwide.