

## MIGRANT FORUM IN ASIA

### GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY & REGULAR MIGRATION 2<sup>ND</sup> INFORMAL THEMATIC SESSION

*“Addressing drivers of migration, including adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters and human-made crises, through protection and assistance, sustainable development, poverty eradication, conflict prevention and resolution”*

22-23 May 2017, United Nations Headquarters, ECOSOC Chamber, New York

#### PANEL 1: Sustainable Development, Poverty Eradication & Economic Drivers

#### KEY POINTS (ORAL STATEMENT AND OTHER POINTS NOT ORALLY PRESENTED)

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Thank you Mr. Chair, Your Excellencies.

First of all we'd like to thank you that at least for the second round of the informal thematic session, we have a civil society representative from Asia because we are quite concerned that if we want to jointly understand the phenomenon of mixed, large flows of migrants, we hope that our part of the world is properly included in the discussions because some of the biggest corridors of mixed migration flows are now in Asia, e.g. between several countries of south and southeast Asia, south Asia and west Asia, etc. So it is really important that we discourse this matter together.

For now I'd like to raise four or five issues pertaining to drivers of migration, focusing on the economic drivers, sustainable development and poverty eradication.

1. When we speak about “drivers” of migration, the first key message is that we acknowledge that migration is a vectored reality – it has magnitude, speed and direction. Therefore, it is not the drivers as such that is the problem; it is our attitude towards the drivers.

Is it our attitude, that certain migration flows are beneficial, and therefore are to be encouraged? Or certain flows are not beneficial and therefore we want them to stop or to slow down.

My proposition today is that there is actually quite a substantial, even if incomplete, and continuously evolving, understanding of migration issues, particularly the economic dimensions, because this is not the first forum on the economic drivers of migration. Indeed, there is a 10 year forum – the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) – that exactly speaks about these matters. And all of you are sitting in that forum already.

I'd like to say that it is not for us to repeat the discourse that is happening there, but perhaps more to pick up on the key points, analysis, consensus that have been built up in over a decade of those discussions, and feed them into this process.

2. In the same way that we challenge the current framework of mass migration in engaging GFMD, we would like to interrogate our framework of migration in the process of framing the Global Compact.

For example, in Asia, mass migration is based on a different framework than in the Americas or Europe. Migration evolved in Europe and the Americas in a process in that had been family-related and integration-oriented, with migrants ultimately able to have job mobility, social mobility, reunite and settle with their families in the destination country. In contrast, in the past 30-40 years in Asia, we have developed a model of mass labor migration that is temporary, labor-only, and forever exclusionary of elementary jobs (domestic workers, laborers, construction workers) – where you don't have options to integrate, settle and bring in your family; some countries even deny job or social mobility, where you cannot change employer, transfer to other types of jobs, could not become a permanent resident, etc. In a way, a dualistic policy where skilled professionals are encouraged, but the so-called 'non skilled' are marginalized.

Therefore if you say 'address poverty reduction', 'address the drivers' of mass labor migration, the first thing that we have to address is that framework of discriminatory, dualistic, labor-only, temporary-only migration that is now current in Asia.

Because our experience in the past 30-40 years is: the more than 30 million -- that are mostly laboring -- migrants in Asia, until today, are very mobile and form the base of mixed, mass, vicarious flows; they are mostly workers with lower-paying jobs, with no or little social protection, and little labor rights protection. They have not gained rights to integrate in the destination countries -- domestic workers are forever domestic workers in countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. – and hardly any channels for planned, productive reintegration in their places of origin. Many are victimized by extortionate recruitment practices, exploitative employers, and end up in illegal recruitment, trafficked, or forced labor situations. Therefore, if you want to direct or discourage or stop those kinds of migration flows that are vulnerable and risk-related, we have to stop that kind of discriminatory, labor-only, temporary-only, exploitative migration framework.

The discursive matter here is: if we want to move forward the agenda of 'how do we make sure that people don't think first-off of going abroad in order to work (like in my country, the Philippines, where 10% of our population is abroad), what must be done? A very straightforward solution is ensuring secure and decent jobs in the home countries. All of us are already committed to the ILO standards on decent, sustainable jobs.

We must stop the trade and economic processes and regimes that informalize jobs (.e.g labor-only contracting), withdraw or cut social services (health, education, etc.), cut or reverse labor protection (collective bargaining, wages, decent work conditions). All these create such situations of non-secure, non-decent jobs in the home countries that are key push factors (driver) in the outflow of workers.

So if we are looking for a solution on how to stop mass labor migration, the straightforward answer is for us to think hard and put resources to adhere to, or implement our commitments – both in the home and host countries -- to decent work, sustainable jobs,

portable social security, and also the rights of the migrants to integrate (in the host country) or reintegrate (in their home country).

The introductory issue brief said that at least 70% of migration today is labor migration. If we do the above, we will already be addressing at least 70% of the problem.

3. If we have a global compact, we will welcome that very much. The question is: how will that Compact be more effective, more binding, more commitment-related in relation to all the other standing commitments of countries, e.g. on sustainable development, climate change, decent work agenda, etc.?

We do hope that we learn our lessons from GFMD (which is also non-binding, informal, voluntary), and the earlier climate change commitments under the Kyoto protocol (which were also voluntary, non-binding). Our lesson is that these did not change the realities very much. At the end of the day, the action was not there, or the action was not at par with the needs in addressing the realities.

So our appeal is: let us not continue to multiply the platforms; instead, let us frame the Global Compact on migration such that it interacts, relates with, enforces, strengthens the commitments made in the other related forums. I was in Bangkok last April for the 4<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and we were talking about similar things – how to merge, interact, link, relate these processes together.

4. We do a lot of work on remittances. Maximizing remittance per se will not necessarily bring local development; indeed, it may reinforce inequities, and ride on the back of a labor-export migration regime in order for origin countries to amass more remittance. Thus, adding to the ‘push’ driver of vulnerable labor migration.

I work in the Philippines in trying to integrate / link diaspora communities with local development efforts, as part of the multi-stakeholder (migrants/civil society, government, private sector, etc.) process of the Joint Migration & Development Initiative (JMDI). We see a lot of gaps in how national and local governments are providing effective reintegration and asset-building mechanisms to enable migrants to return, reintegrate, and become drivers in sustainable local and national development of their home communities.

Migration is a local-to-local phenomenon: I come from a certain home town, I will return to a certain home town. Therefore the critical role of local governments in engaging with the global compact and sustainable development processes, in order to provide such enabling conditions and processes.

The critical issue is how origin countries – at the national and particularly the local level -- provide policy, process, support, facilitation and linkages so that migrants and their families are able to channel their remittances (which are private financial flows) into: 1) ensuring first of all their social protection coverage (retirement, health, accident); 2) preparing for their reintegration (esp. building up their reintegration fund, almost like their retirement savings); 3) asset-building activities (provident savings, strategic assets, capital buildup for their business); and ultimately 4) their livelihoods, enterprises and income sources when

they reintegrate in their home communities. Unfortunately, current strategies on reintegration and ‘maximizing remittance’ are fixated on “financial literacy trainings”, which do not necessarily translate into savings, asset-building, reintegration preparation or livelihood initiatives.

5. Achieving ‘safe, orderly, regular’ migration will not necessarily lessen the economic drivers, particularly in the framework of managed, but exploitative, temporary, vicarious labor migration.

Our fear is: even if we do have a global compact on ‘safe, orderly, regular’ migration – if the Compact is for overseas work that are temporary, marginal, low paid, it will still not be sustainable; this will simply institutionalize the creation and maintenance of a pool (army) of temporary, vulnerable, exploitable, readily-available migrant workers. Such pool had also been used by employers to undercut or circumvent labor benefits, wages and protection in the destination countries.

If the Global Compact aims to only commit to the level of ‘eradicating extreme poverty’, this might actually drive more vulnerable migrants to seek work abroad. We are all aware of the “migration hump” – the poorest are usually not able to migrate; but when income/economic conditions provide more resources that enable the poorer sections of the population to pay for the cost of migration (recruitment, travel and similar costs), this will add to the out-flow of workers, thus a ‘hump’, instead of the continuous decline, in the outflow of migrants as economic conditions in the home country improves. Therefore, masses of people and workers will still be moving, perhaps in even greater numbers.

Thus, a half-hearted aim to simply address worst forms of poverty can become an engine of institutionalizing and perpetuating the ‘mass army’ of constantly mobile migrant workers – not lessening the migration drivers.

The way forward is really by raising the quality of our intervention, not only to eradicate extreme poverty, but really to put people and workers at the level of decent lives, sustainable jobs, portable social security so that migration becomes a last option, and workers can stay in their home countries.

Thank you very much.

#### **ADDITIONAL POINTS DURING THE OPEN FORUM:**

1. We appreciate the intervention from Algeria that one of the least ratified conventions is the UN migrant workers convention. In fact, that might be the litmus test: if the countries can actually accede or ratify those basic conventions; that really says a lot in terms of commitments.
2. I also want to highlight the intervention from the representative from Colombia who said that remittances can help in growth, but does not necessarily reduce poverty. So in effect, the interventions on financial literacy, etc. have to be raised at the level where

migrants are actually able to build assets. Because no matter how much you train them, if there are no channels to remit, to save and build it up, and then put [the assets and savings] into investments [in the home country], then there is nothing. That is what our experience [in Asia] has shown in the past 30 years. So if we really want to [economically] empower migrants [for local development], there have to be channels like these.

3. Using migrant resources – not only remittance, but also social assets/relations – for development is important, provided that they [migrants] don't become the milking cows for development; that they [migrants] don't finance development as such, because that [financing development] should be State function. Migrants should be partners [in the development of their home towns/countries]. That is where we always put the caution. Even the World Bank [see IMF study, 2003] said that remittances as such can be counter-developmental if it is not properly channeled. It can increase inequality, etc.
4. Unless the decent work and sustainability of livelihoods are done both at the local [home] and destination countries, then all this diaspora that is very mobile, temporary, and vulnerable will continue. Our intervention needs to be: when we integrate together the SDGs, climate change, Global Compact [processes], hopefully the Global Compact can expand, enhance, enrich or provide some kind of implementing or monitoring mechanisms so that all of these commitments can actually be implemented.

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