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# Asia-Pacific High-level Meeting on International Migration and Development

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22-23 September 2008  
Bangkok, Thailand

## Chairman's Summary

### Format and Participation

1. The Asia-Pacific High-level Meeting on International Migration and Development was held on 22 and 23 September 2008 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok. It was organized jointly by the Royal Thai Government, International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Population Division, and United Nations Economic and Social Commission (ESCAP).
2. The Meeting was opened with a statement by the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Mr. Shigaru Mochida. His statement was followed by three statements from the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Thailand, Mr. Pensak Chalarak; the Assistant Director of the United Nations Population Division of Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Philip Guest; and the Regional Representative for Southeast Asia of the International Organization of Migration, Ms. Irena Vojackova-Sollorano.
3. Representatives from 22 member States attended the Meeting. These were: Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
4. The Meeting was also attended by representatives of the following United Nations offices and intergovernmental organizations: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United

Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific, World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

5. The Meeting elected the following Bureau Members: Mr. A.K. Nazmuzzaman Zaman, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, as Chairperson, Mr. Chi Dung Duong, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Viet Nam, as Vice-Chair, and Ms. Hasanthi H. Dissanayake, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka, as Rapporteur.
6. The Meeting comprised two segments: The plenary session and four thematic round tables. Expert presentations on each of the above-mentioned themes were made to inform and stimulate the ensuing discussion and exchange of views in respect of the concerns related to migration.

#### Plenary Session:

#### Key Trends and Challenges on International Migration and Development

7. The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Philip Martin of the University of California, USA under the title "Another Miracle? Migration and Development in Asia". He discussed whether economic success of Asia could lead to the success in managing labour migration. He drew attention to the fact that there is a more diversity in labour migration policies than in economic policies. Countries in Asia may be challenged by the settlement of migrant workers in the foreseeable future. There appears to be convergence in labour-sending country policies, with some governments announcing plans to promote labour out-migration, protect migrants, and ensure that migration accelerates development. However, these governments often assume that development is a natural or inevitable outgrowth of more labour migration.
8. The participating Governments deliberated on the critical issues and challenges that their countries face. The following 13 countries delivered a country statement: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, Russia and Viet Nam. Among the points commonly addressed by country statements were as follows:
  - It was noted that international migration is an intrinsic part of development, resulting from economic and demographic disparities between countries. International migration is a growing phenomenon and has become a structural element of societies and economies in Asia and the Pacific.
  - It was recognized there is a need to better ensure that the rights and welfare of migrants be protected. Respect for migrants' human rights is one of the basic determinants of their well-being, and thus could lead to achieving greater social and economic development. There is a need to increase efficiency of regulatory mechanisms so as to prevent abusive practices.

- Concern has been expressed about the increase in irregular migration in Asia and the Pacific region. In some countries, this has been linked to the high cost of regular migration.
- Human trafficking has become entrenched in the region and requires effective counter-trafficking policies and programmes which address critical aspects in both areas of origin and destination.
- It was also noted that, because of its multidisciplinary nature, addressing the challenges of international migration requires policy coherence. Migration policies need to be internally consistent and integrated into the socio-economic development agenda, including poverty reduction strategies.
- Participants reaffirmed that management of international migration should aim at maximizing the positive effect and minimizing risks for both country of origin and destination, and the migrants themselves. Effective management is possible only through constructive cooperation and dialogue among the states.

### Roundtable 1:

#### Remittances for Development

9. The roundtable was chaired by Mr. Bishnu Prasad Lamsal, Ministry of Labour and Transportation Management, Nepal, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Prof. Richard Brown from the University of Queensland, Australia, to make an introductory presentation.
10. Prof. Brown addressed the linkages between remittances and development pointing out the need to be clear as to what is meant by 'development'. If what is meant is economic growth, then it becomes necessary to assess the impact of remittances in terms of their effect on increased savings and investment; if what is of concern is human development, then there comes the need to focus more specifically on the effects of remittances on social protection, poverty alleviation, and improvements in health or increased education. He reported that numerous studies had found that remittances had been linked to reduction in poverty and increased family-based social protection, while at the same time, contributing positively to savings, wealth and investment. The welfare of the migrants themselves, especially women, should receive due attention.
11. He pointed out that in order to better understand the linkages between remittances and development as well as to formulate policies; better data were needed, preferably through customized household surveys. Data from administrative sources and household surveys are both needed to provide a comprehensive picture of the levels and impacts of remittances.
12. Participants noted that some countries experienced both inflows and outflows of remittances simultaneously. Migrants tended to remit less once they had settled in countries of destination. Participants pointed out that linkages between remittances and development were not always automatic and direct. In fact, although remittances were unlikely to initiate growth and development, they could accelerate ongoing development. Remittances not only benefited migrant households but also non-migrant households and communities, through multiplier effects and directly through transfers from migrant to non-migrant households.

13. Participants reported that in some cases remittances had been used to establish small-scale businesses and entrepreneurial activities. Some participants, however, drew attention to the potentially negative consequences of remittances, including the culture of dependency that they might foster at both the household and national levels.
14. Participants noted that in recent years considerable progress had been made in channelling more remittances through formal financial institutions. However, there is still concern that these transfers can be costly and that more effort is needed to reduce these costs. Through technological advances in electronic banking, including money transfers through short message services (SMS) or mobile automatic teller machines (ATMs), the transaction costs of remittances are being reduced. Improved access to and use of formal channels of remittances have also helped to better capture the flows of remittances.
15. Further, participants pointed out that financial literacy was crucial for increasing savings and for facilitating productive use of remittances. Financial institutions were educating clients in this regard, especially in rural areas.
16. It was also noted that remittances had been linked in some countries such as Bangladesh to microfinance projects, involving NGOs. Participants recognized that migrant communities often contributed to the development of their home communities and that a number of countries had taken measures to strengthen ties with their nationals in countries of destination.

## Roundtable 2:

### International migration in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states

17. The roundtable was chaired by Mr Viliame Naupoto, Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration, Fiji, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Prof. Rallu from INED, France, to make an introductory presentation.
18. The region hosts a number of these countries with special needs, including 14 least developed countries (LDCs), 12 land locked developing countries (LLDCs) and 17 small island developing states (SIDS). Prof. Rallu highlighted the demographic impact of migration on population growth and the dependency ratio. The depletion of adult cohorts through migration had led to higher dependency ratios in some LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. Migration could lead to the emigration of skilled workers. The potential positive effects of return migrants in the labour markets of their country of origin were also recognised. He examined both the positive and negative impacts of remittances at the household and community levels.
19. Participants acknowledged that LDCs, LLCs and SIDS have specific challenges to address when it comes to development, including those associated with their geography and, in some cases, limited opportunities for development.
20. Participants noted that small countries should strengthen their linkages with their migration communities abroad in order to attract their skills and investment at home. Retention of skilled nationals was a common issue. In some cases, the

skilled labour force in countries of origin migrated to higher-wage economies, requiring the replacement by migrant workers from other countries with less favourable wages or currencies.

21. Some participants shared examples of schemes to provide greater incentives for their overseas-based population to return to their country of origin, such as by providing privileges relating to residence and investment in economic activity even if they had taken up citizenship of another country. Other examples included the granting of honorary citizenship, long-term returning resident visas and tax and investment concessions.
22. Further, participants recognized the importance of the social costs of migration, in particular its impact on children, women and the health of migrants, and stressed the need to advance the benefits of migration to foster the development of more inclusive and integrated societies.
23. Whilst acknowledging the role of remittances in poverty reduction, participants also highlighted that they were not a substitute for development.
24. Some participants noted that the priorities of LDCs, LLCs and SIDs should receive much closer attention by aid donors and international agencies to ensure more sustainable development outcomes and that migration becomes a matter of choice than a necessity. In this regard, participants pointed out that more innovative agreements between countries of origin and destination concerning labour migration would help to ensure a positive impact of migration in the countries of origin.
25. The objective of development assistance should be to help developing countries to create conditions where migration is a choice rather than a necessity.

### Roundtable 3:

#### Social dimensions of migration

26. The roundtable was chaired by Mr. Alexander Pankin, Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Prof. Siddiqui from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, to make an introductory presentation.
27. Prof. Siddiqui opened the session by noting that migrants, as human beings, had not only an economic, but also a social identity, which evolved throughout their migration experience. She noted that at all stages of the migration process, there were costs involved for the migrants. She drew attention to the challenges encountered by the increasing number of female migrants, in particular their restricted bargaining power, and the vulnerabilities of irregular migrants.
28. Participants noted that the demand for migration often led to higher transaction costs, despite official policies to limit such fees. The high costs and burdensome bureaucratic requirements involved in the migration process could lead to migrants resorting to informal channels of migration. Labour sending and receiving countries may work together to reduce the costs and requirements involved in the migration process.

29. Participants highlighted the importance of information seminars and pre- and post-departure trainings for migrants. In addition there was a need for public information campaigns to dispel unrealistic expectations of migration. Families and children left behind should also receive due attention.
30. Countries of origin were requested to ensure that their policies to protect the rights of migrants did not increase the incentive of migrants to migrate through informal channels. Banning categories of citizens from migrating, such as mothers with young children, were not an effective solution to mitigate the social impacts from migration.
31. Countries of destination needed to share the responsibility for the protection of migrants with countries of origin. It was desirable that regional benchmarks be developed in order to ensure the application of basic labour standards for migrant workers. All relevant stakeholders needed to be included in this process.
32. Some participants noted that negative campaigns against regular and irregular migrants may lead to xenophobia. In order to reduce the scope of such negative campaigns, the contribution of migrants to the economy and society of host and home countries should be highlighted.
33. Regional agreements were needed to develop standards for the protection of the rights of migrants. Bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination could also play a role in regulating labour migration flows. Some participants noted that these two processes can be pursued in parallel.
34. Examples of processes and forums that addressed these issues included the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, the Bali Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process), and the Colombo Process on Management of Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin in Asia.

#### Roundtable 4: Data and research on migration

35. The roundtable “Migration Data and Research” was chaired by Mr. Abdul Rahman, Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia, who welcomed participants and gave the floor to Mr. Hovy from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, to make an introductory presentation.
36. Mr. Hovy emphasized that in order to address migration and development, reliable, consistent and comparable data on international migration were needed. This information was crucial to develop policies which would benefit countries and migrants alike.
37. Data from census counts and regularization campaigns provided information on migrant stocks whereas data from administrative records, such as border statistics provided data on migrant flows. While census enumerations used a standard set of questions, data from administrative records were more difficult to harmonize.

38. There were important gaps in the data on migrant stocks and migration flows in Asia and the Pacific. It would take limited efforts to collect such data on a regular basis. In order to take advantage of the upcoming 2010 census round, delegates were urged to ensure that data on the foreign-born and foreign citizen population by age, sex and skill level be collected and processed. Once collected, the data could easily be made available through the internet.
39. Most delegates agreed that data disaggregated by sex and age were essential in order to provide a basis for sound policy making. Delegates, in particular from small island developing states, expressed a special interest in data on foreigners in their countries as well as on their nationals living abroad. By providing detailed data on the foreign-born and foreign citizens, countries could obtain information on their nationals abroad from host countries. Data could also be collected through household surveys. Participants pointed out that they were interested in obtaining estimates and obtaining information on irregular migrants in their countries.
40. More research on the social and economic impacts of international migration was needed. Migration modules could be included in labour and household surveys in order to obtain more detailed data on the multidimensional aspects of migration, including remittances. Participants from small island developing states pointed out that the impact of migration on small economies was particularly large. Countries needed better information on the net effect of migration taking into account remittance and human capital flows.
41. National conferences could be convened in order to review to data availability in the field of international migration. One participant stressed the need to create a publicly-available database on recruitment agencies to ensure transparency of the recruitment process and protection of the migrants.

### Special presentation on the Global Forum on International Migration and Development

42. Mr. Esteban B. Conejos, Under-secretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, and Executive Director of the GFMD, reported on the status of preparation for the second meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). He explained about the nature, purpose and objective of the upcoming Forum. The central theme of the Forum will be "Protecting and empowering migrants for development". He extended the invitation to all participants of the Meeting.

### Closing Plenary

43. The outcome of each roundtable was orally reported by the following resource persons: Prof. Richard Brown, University of Queensland, Australia, on Roundtable 1; Prof. Richard Bedford, University of Waikato, New Zealand, on Roundtable 2; Ms. Marla Asis, Scalabrini Migration Center, Philippines, on Roundtable 3; and Prof. Ronald Skeldon, University of Sussex, United Kingdom, on Roundtable 4.
44. The Chair's summary was considered by participants for distribution and presentation, as appropriate, at the second meeting of GFMD.