

UNFPA Opening Speech

Brief Remarks

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Your Excellencies Mrs. Aisha Abd Elhady and Dr. Sima Bahous, Mr. Shahidul Haque, Ambassador Yannis Alexis Zepoes, honored guests, distinguished experts, ladies and gentlemen, good morning

It is a pleasure to be here with all of you on behalf of UNFPA's Regional Director for the Arab Region, Dr. Hafeedh Chekir who unfortunately cannot join us in during this event. UNFPA is very pleased to be among you today, not only as a co-sponsor of this event, along with the League of Arab States and the International Organization on Migration, but as one of the UN agencies with special interest in the issue of migration and development. It is evident that the topic of this expert group meeting is highly relevant to this region.

I am sure you would agree with me that the face of migration has become global, and one that represents a diversity of cultures and origins. During a recent mission to Doha, I was amazed by the number of migrant workers in the country. From the airport, I was driven to the hotel by a South Asian driver. At the hotel, I was received by a receptionist with African origin. I was pleasantly led to my room by a Filipino concierge, and at the restaurant, I was served by Indonesians, with meals prepared by a Malaysian Chef. In the course of my mission, I met a number of various nationalities that make up a huge majority of Qatar's migrant population. When I arrived in Cairo about two months ago, and in the course of my visits to other countries of the region, I had the chance to meet several of my own compatriots, many of them working as care givers, domestic helpers, construction workers, and language teachers. Almost all have come to this region to seek economic opportunities. In informal chats with some of them, it became obvious that some of them have legal status, or have entered with necessary authorization papers, but many have also continued working with inadequate supporting papers.

As a development practitioner, I wish this was not the case for many of our countries, including my own, the Philippines. But today's reality is proof that every country in the world is affected by migration and migrants themselves who come from a broad spectrum of cultural, ethnic, economic and social background. Today's world has been described as a World on the Move. The magnitude and complexity of migration (both international and internal), including the issue of brain drain and forced migrations due to conflict, have made this issue one of the most important forces in national and regional development efforts, and a high priority issue for both developing and developed countries. The fact that about half of all migrants are women, most of reproductive age, is another reason why migration has become a pressing issue for UNFPA.

The movement of people from rural to urban areas has contributed to the explosive growth of cities around the globe. Also, in many parts of the world, including many of them in the Middle East and North Africa, a significant percentage of migrants are refugees fleeing armed conflict, natural disaster, famine or persecution. Globalization has increased the mobility of labour and a decline in fertility and working age populations in many developed countries is leading to a rising demand for workers from abroad to sustain national economies. Undocumented migrants often face dangerous journeys, exploitation by criminal smuggling networks and difficult working and living conditions when they arrive on foreign soil. Their irregular status often leaves them afraid to seek help when their rights are violated.

One of the most significant changes in migration patterns in the last half century is that more women are migrating than ever before. Women now constitute half the international migrant population, and in some countries, as much as 70 to 80 percent of total outmigration. As women migrants frequently end up in low status, low wage production and service jobs and often work in unregulated sectors of the economy, such as domestic work, they are exposed to a much higher risk of exploitation, violence and abuse. Women migrants are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, and often exposed to sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and yet, these same people have little access to medical or legal services.

In many countries, financial transfers from both formal and informal remittances of migrant workers constitute a significant revenue for the country, and often times, this is larger than either development assistance or foreign direct investment. It is interesting to note that according to available data, women send home a higher

proportion of their earnings than do men. These contributions feed and educate children and generally improve the living standards of loved ones left behind.

UNFPA promotes the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development in the area of migration by promoting policy dialogues and enhancing governments ability to respond to these issues. Over the years, we have supported research and policy oriented studies, meetings and conferences, and also assisted governments in their capacity to collect migration statistics, including gender-specific data. UNFPA advocates for addressing the special concerns of women and youth migrants, including the elimination of discrimination, abuse and trafficking. UNFPA also works with governments and other UN agencies and NGOs to meet the emergency reproductive health needs of refugees and internally displaced women.

In our efforts, we try to ensure that migration strategies become a part of poverty reduction strategies and broader planning policies in support of the millennium development goals.

The search for greener pastures, so to speak, is a natural tendency. With the exception of displaced populations, normal migration is often a reflection of the human spirit to aspire for something better. Migration is bound to happen in any country where there is a lack of opportunities in general. Therefore, the more this issue is managed and addressed, the better is the outcome for both the sending and receiving countries. In this area, progress can only be assured if there are policies and laws that promote mutual understanding and respect for human rights of migrants.

In conclusion, let me reiterate UNFPA's keen interest to collaborate with relevant partners in developing and promoting migration policies and strategies that work. It is our hope that through technical discussions like this one, experts can come up with the evidence, the data, success stories and the lessons learned to guide policy and decision makers on the best options and strategies to deal with migration and development issues.

Thank you for your attention.