

## ***WELCOME REMARKS***

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**Global Meeting of Chairs and Secretariats of  
Regional Consultative Processes on Migration (RCPs)**

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Your Excellency, Vice Minister Panich Vikitsreth;

Distinguished Officials;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is an immense honor and pleasure to join Vice Minister Panich Vikitsreth in welcoming you to this meeting.

IOM is honored to be one of the organizers of this important gathering in collaboration with our hosts, the Royal Thai Government, whom we thank for their kind and generous hospitality.

I would also like to express gratitude to the Governments of Australia and the United States of America, whose generous contributions made this meeting possible. I also want to thank a number of other key donors to RCPs who are present today and recognize the many in-kind contributions of participating States to the RCPs.

The impressive representation at this gathering -- from 13 of the 14 principal RCPs -- is, I believe, eloquent testimony to the important role of RCPs. Moreover, your presence is also recognition that States increasingly acknowledge that -- although migration management is a sovereign prerogative -- national efforts are insufficient alone to manage human mobility effectively for the benefit of all.

I wanted to make four points that struck me as particularly germane to our discussions.

## **I. Migration in Full Evolution**

It has been four years since the last global RCP meeting in 2005; in this period, much has happened in the world to affect global migration dynamics. In fact, one of the key changes over the past four years since we met is that we were 9 and now are 14. In addition, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) was created in 2007 and will hold its third meeting at Athens in November -- notably, each GFMD meeting has validated the RCP approach.

The forces of globalization affect much more than the movement of capital, goods, and services -- globalization is also having a major impact on people.

Today, migration is overwhelmingly about labor mobility in response to demographic, economic and labor market dynamics -- the growing labor demands and deficits in the North due to ageing populations and dramatically declining birth rates, combined with rapid population growth and surplus labor in the South.

New labor markets open and employment opportunities attract skilled and unskilled labor. Yet in many cases, economic growth has not been matched by the evolution of comprehensive migration policies and capacities that are able to facilitate and satisfy this demand.

While trade barriers fall to facilitate the freer movement of goods, services and capital, migration policies have not kept apace; indeed in a number of cases, migration policies have become more restrictive and rigid.

It is this tension between the intense demand for labor and services on the one hand coupled with too few legal migration channels on the other that creates opportunities for human traffickers and criminal organizations to step into the breach.

Other factors drive human mobility -- climate change, natural disasters, instability and crises. These elements coalesce to thwart orderly migration; stall human development; and spur the one way flow of human capital, the so called 'brain drain' from countries of the South.

The current global financial crisis adds further serious complications; these include the unregulated outflow of foreign workers and migrants affected by the recent slowdown in global economies.

We are concerned about loss of jobs; a decrease in migrant remittances; a reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); and most seriously of all, the stigmatization and scapegoating of migrants tending toward xenophobia.

The migration challenge we confront demands responsible policy decisions on the part of us all. Isolated positions and policies are not an option and unprecedented partnership will be necessary if human mobility is to be managed in a manner to produce maximum benefits for all.

## **II. RCPs: key assets in migration management**

This brings me to my second point: that State-developed, State-led RCPs have a major role to play in addressing these new, more intense migration challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

I say this for three reasons:

- First, the majority of countries in the world belong to at least one RCP, and several countries belong to more than one. States have chosen to come together at the regional level, reflecting the often intra-regional nature of migration and the migration dynamics and challenges unique to each region. RCP participation often brings together countries of origin and destination, and sometimes transit countries as well. The result is often a better appreciation of different priorities and perspectives; and new opportunities for intra-regional cooperation.

- Second, the flexible, informal and non-binding character of RCPs means that there is a better chance of bridging seemingly diverging interests among States.
- Third, the pragmatic focus of RCPs makes them dynamic fora for expert discussion, debate and development of action-oriented responses. RCPs from Bali to Puebla provide a framework for concrete capacity building, technical assistance, and collaborative networks. In this regard, I know that over the years, many of you have developed excellent relations with one another that benefit your work within and outside the context of RCP frameworks.

This final point reminds us that our gathering here is a rare opportunity to exchange views and to share lessons learned from all world regions. As such, our RCP meeting can be useful and timely preparation for the next Global Forum at Athens in November.

### **III. An opportunity for sharing knowledge**

Over the next two days, we will have the opportunity to engage in substantive discussions to improve our understanding of each other's work and reflect on good practices and lessons learned in migration management.

Together, we can tackle some of the common questions put before RCPs, such as:

- What concretely do RCPs achieve? And how can they be strengthened?
- What role do RCPs play in the governance of international migration?
- Where do RCPs best fit in relation to regional political and economic fora, and to global fora such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development?

There is a vast wealth of knowledge in this room to answer these questions -- and no doubt many others -- and I look forward to listening to your views.

#### **IV. IOM's Support to RCPs**

IOM has been an enthusiastic supporter of RCPs for almost 25 years -- since the establishment of the first RCP (IGC) in 1985. Our support takes various forms:

- Low-key secretariat assistance and substantive expert contributions, as requested and appropriate.
- Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on the activities and the 'value added' of RCPs, including through a dedicated section of the IOM website.
- At the request of governments, IOM has helped to strengthen capacities for better migration management through technical cooperation activities.
- In several processes, IOM has been asked to help implement Plans of Action put forward by the participating States.

At present, in line with our efforts to improve understanding of the RCPs and how best IOM can support them, IOM is carrying out a MacArthur Foundation funded study on the impact and output of RCPs. I would add that our intention is not in any way to measure RCPs against one another; or to provide a ranking; or to provide prescriptive guidelines. We look forward to telling you more about this study later today.

On a personal note, I wish to emphasize that I attach great significance to your work. In fact, some of the most important activities I have been engaged in have been at your invitation. These include my participation in a wide range of RCP activities and events:

- The Puebla Process in Managua in October 2007;
- The IGC Full Round in Stockholm in April 2008;
- The South American Conference on Migration in Montevideo in September 2008;
- The Bali Process Ministerial Conference in Bali in April 2009; and

- The IGC Full Round in Bern last month.

In addition, I intend to participate, if invited, in the Vice-Ministerial meeting of the Puebla Process in Guatemala in July, and the South American Conference on Migration in Quito in September.

IOM's support of RCPs helps us to learn how better to serve your national and regional interests. I am keen to strengthen IOM's assistance to RCPs discretely within our core work -- while fully respecting the State-driven character of the RCPs. I look forward to hearing your views on how we might do so.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me summarize my points.

First, the world of migration has undergone significant changes since you last met four years ago, creating intensified and in some instances new pressures on all governments to manage migration more effectively. The global financial crisis is playing a particularly complicating role in migration today.

Second, we have in the RCPs a powerful means to advance national, bilateral and regional cooperation on migration management -- as well as inform global cooperation -- in this new era of human mobility.

Third, we have a great opportunity over the next two days to deepen our understanding of the achievements and potential of the RCPs and how the existing and potential linkages between and among RCPs can contribute to maximizing the benefits of migration for participating States and migrants themselves.

Fourth, IOM is at your disposal for all appropriate support to these valuable processes.

I am looking forward keenly to the discussions over the next two days in what promises to be a stimulating and successful event.