

**Statement by Her Excellency Ms Patricia Santo Tomas
Secretary, Department of Labour and Employment, Philippines**

**at the Eighty-sixth Session of the IOM Council
18-21 November 2003**

Trends in Asian Migration

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The IOM estimates indicate that in Asia some 2.6 million workers leave their countries every year for contract employment abroad, particularly during the period 1995-1999. Of this flow, South Asian countries account for 4-6% with Southeast Asian countries contributing 50% of this movement. A large proportion of our workers leave not only for the Gulf States but also for other countries to perform all types of service, trade and construction work. New patterns and modalities of migration have emerged in the last five years. We have had significant movements among professionals and technical workers to North America and Europe, notably nurses and information technology professionals. And there has also been a rapid growth in interregional labour migration with flows from South-East Asia to the developed or emerging East-Asian economies. Female migration also increased tremendously in the recent years. By 2000, the number of female migrants in East and South-East Asia amounted to five million, passing the number of male migrants who remained below 4.9 million. Women, though, have remained in the more vulnerable occupations such as entertainment, domestic services and tertiary work. The recruitment of worker trainees in industrial factories, household helpers, such as au pairs or cultural exchange fellows, all this constitutes some of the flows that have moved from developing countries to developed countries.

There has also been, in the past five years, a strengthening of the manpower broker in the street networks between the sending and receiving countries, often adding cost layers to getting a job abroad. Recruitment has likewise occurred through cyberspace or the Internet, contributing to a new challenge both in legal recruitment and trafficking. Illegal migration continues to exist in a checkered pattern of tolerance and crackdown observed by many host governments, and persistent labour migrant restrictions is still prevalent among labour-short economies and have prevented the success of measures to address irregular migration. We have also had problems of modern day security and health concerns such as terrorism, HIV/AIDS, SARS, which have affected the mobility and safety of the migrant labour population and, at the worksites, the rates of runaway and overstaying workers has remained a major cause of concern for both host and sending country authorities.

Asian Migration Forum

Given this background, and considering that a lot of countries in Asia are labour-sending countries, the International Organization for Migration was approached early last year about a possible ministerial level forum for Asian labour-sending countries with the primary objective of working towards the setting up of regular multilateral consultations in South and South-East Asia, with a view to a sharing of experiences, good practices, and to strengthen dialogue on labour migration.

The first consultation was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka this year, 1-2 April. Main sending countries in Asia participated but it must be noted, that they are in different stages of labour migration management. For example, Thailand is in a state of labour migration transition as it both imports and exports labour; while an established labour-sending country like the Philippines and

other South Asian States also host labour from other countries. Regardless of these stages, these countries face common issues as countries of origin. To provide a forum for Asian labour-sending States, this first ministerial forum was, as I said, to share experiences, discuss issues and identify steps for follow-up in the form of recommendations and operational modalities. The Consultations took two days. The meeting of senior officials was held on the first day, the ministerial Consultations following on the second day.

The different States, there were ten of them, made twenty-two recommendations grouped into three semantic areas. The first is the protection of, and provision of, services to migrant workers; the second, optimizing benefits of organized labour migration and, three, capacity building, data collection and interstate cooperation.

Results of the Ministerial Consultations

The following specific measures were identified as being conducive to the effective management of labour migration programmes: (1) to ensure human rights of migrant workers whatever their legal status might be. (2) To promote the signing and ratification of the 1990 International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families. (3) To develop regulatory frameworks to prevent malpractice and abuses where private recruitment agencies are allowed to operate. (4) To advocate that host countries share responsibility in ensuring that foreign labour participation in the economy is authorized and protected. (5) To ensure that the economic and social rights of domestic workers are respected. (6) To guarantee the protection of female migrants, especially in low-skill and low-wage sectors. (7) To develop pre-departure orientation programmes. (8) To establish migrant advocacy and welfare centers in receiving countries, and (9) to create a standing committee or working group to work on overseas employment contracts.

Insofar as optimizing benefits of organized labour migration is concerned, the recommendations were to simplify procedures and regulations to deter irregular migration; to develop policies and incentives to encourage remittance flows; to develop strategies to tap newly acquired skills or expertise of returning migrants; to develop opportunities in sending countries for skills and technical training of prospective migrant workers in sending countries; to reduce recruitment and transfer fee costs for money transfers, particularly remittances; and to undertake information campaigns on remittance channels, risks of irregular migration and regular migration options and procedures.

Insofar as capacity building, data collection and interstate cooperation is concerned, the Ministerial consultations recommended that IOM and ILO develop training courses on labour migration administration for government officials, to facilitate the exchange of information and changes in policy and legislation in major destinations, on types of migrant workers and on bilateral agreements and establish regular multilateral consultations on labour migration. The fourth recommendation on capacity building is to pursue, through multilateral fora, the free movement of natural persons between States, strengthen interstate cooperation in migration management to forge greater cooperation among sending countries, to develop a common stance in addressing issues affecting migrant workers, and to establish a mechanism involving host and sending countries through enhanced dialogue.

The Ministerial Consultations in Colombo, I think, were particularly significant because they are a first step towards the forging of regional alliances in a continuing policy forum focused on the need to address protection of migrant workers. The alliance of labour-sending countries is seen as a representation of collective comparative advantage, particularly insofar as internationally shared human resources is concerned, and a manifestation of a desire to be heard, particularly by

countries that receive these workers. The Consultations are likewise significant in that they constitute now a continuing policy forum where the rights and interests of migrant labour can be discussed and where State Governments and civil societies can articulate various issues in the pursuit of human rights advocacies and human resource development programme. Insofar as challenges are concerned, what is seen is the need to sustain the regularity of the meeting, perhaps annually for the first two years, and then of course a need for funding commitments from international organizations supplemented by regional entities. We wish to let you know that a follow up meeting will be held in Manila in the first quarter of the year 2004 to follow up the Sri Lanka Conference. Our possible directions, insofar as Asia concerned, is to consider concluding an instrument embodying a common resolve to action and shared issues, to tackle the need for a regional approach to the new challenges in migration management, to the organization of experts in a particular part of the world, and to provide an occasion for the sharing of best practices and opportunity for foreign delegates to make the rounds in the case of the next step: Key Philippine institutions involved in migration management. So that is how the first regional Consultation for Ministers and senior officials went insofar as collaboration with IOM is concerned.

Thank you very much Mr. Chairman.