

Keynote Speech of H.E. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
President of the Republic of the Philippines
Opening Session of the 2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development
Plenary Hall, PICC, Pasay City, October 29, 2008

Thank you very much, Secretary Romulo.

His Excellency, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, thank you for coming to the Philippines and showing how important this Global Forum on Migration and Development is for the United Nations and the peoples of the world; Vice President de Castro and the other officials of the Philippine government; Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished delegates:

Thank you all for coming together for a cause that is important to my country and to yours, namely, the nexus between migration and development.

This is a cause especially dear to the hearts of millions of Filipinos, here and overseas, who are interconnected through a vast diaspora of expatriate workers.

Migrant workers are honored by the government and the people for their sacrifice and dedication to their work, their family and the nation. We welcome their contribution.

But we long for the day when going abroad for a job is a career option, not the only choice, for a Filipino worker. Our economic plans are designed to allow the Philippines to break out of this cycle. That is why we remain so stubbornly focused on the economy. We need to create and spread the wealth and keep the people working here at home. We are working to create appealing employment opportunities by focusing on the development of certain priority sectors that give high-income jobs, for instance, Business Process Outsourcing which has created about 400,000 jobs in the last seven years.

All in all, we have created almost 7 million jobs in the last 7 years. By continuing down this path, we hope to increasingly be keeping our best and brightest right here in the Philippines, closer to friends and families, helping to build our communities and providing the next generation of leadership.

For the Philippines and for any country, for your countries, people are our biggest national asset at any time in the course of our economic, social and political development. Development cannot occur in the economy without human development -that is, without human beings who are healthy, educated, employed, and able to care for their families.

As both His Excellency, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, and Foreign Secretary Romulo have said, today some 200 million people live outside of their nations of birth, many of them working. This number rises every year, keeping pace with the advance of globalization. Indeed, migration is one of the dynamic forces behind the globalization that draws our world ever closer together.

We inhabit a world where people, countries, businesses, cultures and economies are so closely interconnected that we all catch cold if one of us sneezes hard enough. It is at one of those interconnections -- the interface between migration and development -- that we confront some of the most serious challenges to us to work together.

As people migrate, they draw more than one country into their lives. Their work, their family, the gains they make from migration, and their need for personal security and well-being become matters of import that cross national boundaries.

These movements occur in all directions, not just south-to-north, but also south-to south, north-to-north, and in every other conceivable direction. It is this ceaseless and restless movement of people that truly links our respective countries, not just the capital or goods that economists love to build their growth models on. It is people who stimulate the trade, business and economic exchanges that keep the global economy moving along.

But, unfortunately, countries are less equipped often to protect their people abroad in times of trouble than they are, their money or businesses. The global financial crisis currently taking place challenges us again to gather our forces, within government and in partnership with other countries, to better protect our people abroad against financial and economic shocks, and the side effects of such shocks -- exploitation, abuse, and other forms of ill treatment.

All eyes may be glued on the stock market, but we must never lose sight of the often-unseen impact of the global credit crunch on the long-term needs of the poor, including the migrant poor.

It is the duty of our governments, of the United Nations, and I thank His Excellency, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, for his attention to the world's poor, especially during this time of the financial crisis. It is the duty of all international organizations and global civil society to gather our collective will, our joint resources, and our common efforts to raise them up.

We can draw encouragement from the fact that governments, the United Nations, international organizations and civil society are now increasingly focused on all aspects of migration.

In the United Nations and throughout the international development community, growing attention is devoted to research, studies, projects and programs on migration and development. And we thank His Excellency, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, for recounting some of them. Of course, more remains to be done, but this is a good start.

The Philippines stands ready to champion the cause of migrant workers.

We have established what is considered one of the best-regulated expatriate worker programs in the world. On the basis of their contributions and of the nation's humanitarian responsibilities to its people wherever they are, our government works doubly hard to strengthen migrant workers' protection -- protection from the deprivations of domestic recruiters as well as of overseas employers, agents and officials, and protection from physical harm.

Our comprehensive and multi-dimensional "life-cycle" strategy covers all facets of the overseas employment process, from pre-departure orientation to post-return reintegration and retraining. The effectiveness of this approach in terms of protecting workers has been repeatedly acknowledged by international bodies.

However, the full protection and empowerment of migrants is a task that goes far beyond what individual countries of origin can do on their own.

During our ASEAN chairmanship in 2006, the Philippines led in formulating the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and commencing the establishment of an implementing committee.

We also hosted the International Conference on Gender, Migration and Development in Manila last month. There, the delegates discussed the gender dimension of the social costs and benefits of migration, the upholding of the rights of women migrant workers, and seizing opportunities for enhanced gender equality and benefits of migration for women and their families.

And now, we are honored to be the first developing nation and the first Asian country to host the GFMD.

For the Philippines, which is at the forefront of the global migration issue, hosting this meeting represents a high point in our efforts to assist migrants through intensified global dialogue and networks for consultation and cooperation.

It is good that the leaders of the nations of migrant origin and those nations hosting migrants have come together in our Global Forum to seek common ground on ways to coordinate assistance to our economies

and protection to our workers. We must do so in a way that puts the interests of the poor and dispossessed ahead of the rich and powerful. We must do this in a way that offers a global solution to a global challenge.

Indeed, we call for fundamental global reform. And to that end, we look upon the United Nations for leadership. And may I say, we are grateful we are getting that leadership in the person of Secretary General Ban Ki Moon.

We urge all countries, which have not yet done so, to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

We are having this global... Meanwhile, as we campaign for that, we are having this global forum because coordinated action among nations is the better path than going it alone.

It is essential that the major economies of the world, along with strong representation from emerging economies who are the source of migrant workers, be part of the global consultations to resolve challenges in the global financial system and its impact on migrant workers.

And as Secretary-General said, whether there's a financial crisis or not, instead of viewing migrants as depersonalized movable components of globalization, or worse, as inconvenient necessities, we must embrace them as human beings who contribute to our essential well-being in this age of vast movement and change. We must prepare them for and make them full partners in our world of developmental, demographic and democratic transformation.

This must be our commitment in the Global Forum for Migration and Development. We must work together for that transformation to a better world by ensuring that globalization is for everyone and not just for the strong and the fittest, by valuing the real contribution of all workers, migrants and non-migrants, a world where we're all equally and without discrimination part of a caring and sharing global community. We must work together to protect our migrant workers in times of financial and economic stress as the world is experiencing now. But, as Secretary-General said, even if it is not a time of financial stress.

Our Global Forum offers us a community space to explore those challenges together and to find the best policies, the best practices to meet the challenges of migration in mutually beneficial ways.

As Secretary Romulo said, many of your governments support and invest in this practical consultative approach. We are truly grateful for the contributions you have made and your engagement with the practical preparations of this meeting.

Without your belief in this Global Forum and in our decision this year to examine the migration-development complex from the human angle, we could never have nurtured this tender process thus far. You have helped the GFMD come of age.

In being here to discuss migration and development, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates, may you get the chance to taste the hospitality that we traditionally extend to friends and family that many of you may have already experienced with our expatriates abroad.

My best wishes to all of you on the proceedings of the Global Forum on Migration and Development!

Salamat.