

## **Speech of Secretary Mariano D. Roque**

Launching of the Plenary Debate

Global Forum on Migration and Development

Philippine International Convention Center, Manila

29 October 2008

*[Amenities]*

*Your Excellencies,*

*Distinguished delegates,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*Good morning:*

### ***“Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development”***

We are gathered here today to dialogue on the global phenomenon of migration. We all have heard the statistics – some 250 million migrants and more than 90 million migrant workers around the world, and with women migrants at the forefront. Indeed, migration is an increasingly relevant feature in the political, economic, and cultural landscape of most nations today.

It is therefore with great pride and pleasure that I welcome you, the distinguished delegates to Manila and to the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development. The theme for this year’s Forum, “Protecting and Empowering Migrant for Development”, built from the gains of the Brussels Forum, reflects the common understanding among us of the benefits and potential risks of migration.

The appearance of new migration patterns, the rapid expansion in the demand for professional and skilled workers in certain occupational categories, and the rise of sub-regional labour markets are all manifestations of the scale and diversity of current migratory movements, particularly in this part of the globe.

### ***Cooperating to Promote the Workers’ Welfare***

Distinguished delegates,

I share your concern on the potential challenges on the welfare of migrants, who are sometimes vulnerable to human rights violations and labor exploitation, particularly the lower skilled workers.

Today's Forum is an opportunity for most of us, if not all of us, to reaffirm our commitment to protect the rights of workers, particularly those under irregular circumstances. There is a need for bilateral and regional mechanisms that would address their vulnerabilities, and ensure minimum standards of pay and decent working conditions of workers.

I believe that managing migration is a shared responsibility -- of governments, and its partners, such as the civil society, and guided by the universal principle of human rights and other international human rights instruments.

I believe that it is high time for the international community to put a human face to labor migration. We need to protect every single worker in every phase of the whole cycle of migration. To achieve this, we need the cooperation of sending, transient and receiving countries.

I therefore call on the states who have yet to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, to do so at the earliest possibility.

We also need to redouble our efforts -- at the national, regional, and international level to combat trafficking in all its forms, particularly in the trafficking of women and children.

In Southeast Asia, for example, within the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN, we have forged the ASEAN Declaration against Trafficking in Persons, particularly Women and Children, and the ASEAN Plan of Action for Cooperation in Immigration Matters.

Whether bilaterally, or multilaterally, we need to cooperate on mutual legal assistance treaties or agreements, particularly on deportation procedures for migrants to ensure humane treatment of workers and their families.

### *Empowering Workers for Development*

The empowerment of workers begin with their possession of the right skills and education, that is at par if not superior to the needs of specific labor market in the

destination countries. Thus, the need to agree on bilateral and international levels for benchmarking, comparability and mutual recognition of professional skills and qualifications, through licensing or certification measures.

To maximize opportunities for skilled workers, we need better systems to recognize the professional, education and technical achievements of migrants, and to ensure their equality of treatment and compensation.

I therefore call on other countries to encourage Mutual Recognition Arrangements, and other means of determining equivalencies at the bilateral and regional levels. Fair equivalency methods can certainly expand opportunities for sending countries, while at the same time, meet the needs of the receiving countries.

Mutual cooperation that would provide opportunities for additional skills upgrading, either through on-the-job training or before they leave their home countries can be both beneficial to the country of origin, and destination country.

Toward this end, the establishment of training centers through partnerships specific for migrant worker will address the needs both of the sending and receiving countries. For example, the Philippines has a very good partnership with Norway and Japan in the merchant marine training sector.

Indeed, migrants can achieve greater representation in their host communities, develop their investor potential in development projects in their home countries, and afford holistic integration in their receiving countries. Migrants can also share their expertise in their countries of origin, through the commercial activities of host countries in the migrant's country of origin.

If I may cite James Tobin, one of the leading economists of the second half of the twentieth century who summed up economics in one word: incentives. In some ways, migration is about incentives. I speak of incentives that would improve the quality of life of the migrants and that of their families. I speak of incentives to the workers, and to the economies of both the sending and receiving countries. I speak of alternative migration schemes that would provide opportunities for greater labor mobility, but equally afford protection to the workers.

In this regard, receiving countries may wish to consider incentives for migrants to pursue development projects in their respective sending countries, through social entrepreneurship, technical exchanges and outreach missions. For example, migrant

workers can be tapped in official development cooperation programs, in diaspora and corporate philanthropy activities, and in private trade and investment opportunities.

Governments can also consider partnerships in the area of developing savings and investment instruments, particularly for migrant workers. Technical training from governments, or migrant organizations can help the diasporas in making various direct contributions for homeland development, post-return integration, and assistance for migrant families left behind.

Such measures would further strengthen the migration-development nexus, by empowering migrants to further contribute more to development outcomes, particularly in their reintegration and in assisting families left behind.

Meanwhile, we all recognize the importance of credible information and research to support policy decisions. In this regard, we need to build partnerships and cooperation in research activities and data collection, relating to migration and development.

In particular, we need harmonized means of data collection, particularly in stock of migrant flows, remittance flows, and the outflow of migrants workers. We, in the Forum, can work together in establishing mechanisms that would harmonize our migration data, and the impact of migration on many levels.

While we are among the world's best in the management of workers, we also seek to learn from the experience of other countries and regions, particularly in harmonizing migrant and development needs. In the Philippines, we look at making co-development, a part of our framework agreements in bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.

We are also exploring the establishment of a Council for Migration and Development that would establish greater coherence in addressing the social costs of migrations, and interconnections between migration and development, and other related phenomena.

Indeed, there is a greater need among sending countries like the Philippines, to minimize brain drain, build on brain gain, and develop economic and financial modalities to maximize the gains of migration.

There is also the further need to develop and strengthen the capacity of migrants for social entrepreneurship and humanitarian action in their countries of origin.

Distinguished delegates,

While we work as individual nations, we should also look at collective efforts to address the challenges of migration. We need to maximize regional and inter-regional cooperation between sending and receiving countries, particularly in the field of labor migration. The regional initiatives, such as the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a step towards the right direction. The sharing of information and insights among GFMD members on these initiatives and others will lead to adoption of best practices that hopefully, will benefit us all.

Finally, looking forward to the future of the forum, I believe the need for continued avenue for candid discussions of issues and exchange of novel ideas. The GFMD's effectivity as a global process will be measured by how it responds to the multi-dimensional aspects of migration and development.

In this regard, while we affirm that the GFMD is a voluntary, intergovernmental, non-binding and informal consultative process, I join the urgent call for a Light Support Structure and pursue closer ties with the United Nations in the future. This would allow the GFMD to effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities arising from migration.

### *Conclusion*

On this note, I look forward to the frank exchange of ideas within the GFMD, to dialogue with open minds, and trust that we will provide a safer and brighter future for all our migrants to embrace. As we echo in the Philippines, a protected and empowered worker is a productive worker.

The open exchange of views in this Forum will not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the government's key role in the migrant's life, but will also broaden the public understanding of the role of the GFMD as a platform to share innovative ideas, good practices, and policies regarding migration and development.

It is my hope that as we embark on our tasks in the next two days, we can focus on the human face of migration, and on how migration can spur development in the countries of origin, as it bring benefits to the countries of destination. I also draw your attention to the need to balance your perspectives, to share the responsibility of protecting the rights of workers, and to devise ways to spread the gains of migration.

I thank you for your kind attention. *Mabuhay!*