

**Speech of Undersecretary Esteban B. Conejos, Jr. at the  
Closing Ceremonies of the International Conference on  
Gender, Migration and Development**

Thank you Madame Sylvia Lichauco for those kind words of introduction. I thought when I was coming here to receive the results of your conference, for a brief moment I would not be reminded of the 92 Filipino seamen now held hostage in Somalia. But you mentioned about it, so while we work for migration, we have to attend to our regular task of providing assistance and protection to our workers abroad.

When Madame Myrna Yao approached me and presented to me the results of your conference she said to me, “Mr. Undersecretary make sure you’re going to discuss this conference in the Global Forum.” I tell you my friends with an endorsement like that, you better just comply.

I would also like to greet Ms. Nileema Noble and Ms. Sumiati, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. First of all I’d like to thanks the organizers of this conference – the NCRFW and its partner agencies, UNICEF, ILO, UNIFEM, the Migrant Forum Asia, Women and Gender Action Institute and the Lola Grande Foundation. Incidentally, when Lola Grande was founded I was privileged to be invited to their opening meeting. Thank you very much Ms. Sylvia, for that.

I thank you for giving me the privilege of addressing you this afternoon. You know, in exactly a month from now, the Philippines will host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. There is an uncanny resemblance and similarities between the themes you have developed in the last two days and the center theme of the Global Forum which is “Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development.” While the gender perspective is sharper in your conference, the gender perspective is equally important in the deliberations of the Global Forum.

On my way to the conference, I met my friend Director Ciriaco Lagunzad of DOLE. He told me, “Sonny, you know our friends in the NGO community are saying that we don’t see the gender perspective in the working papers you have uploaded to the GFMD website. So you tell them that the DOLE, who’s going to be the leader, and to head the

Philippine delegation to the forum, will mainstream gender perspective.” Thank you very much Acong.

In the forum, we talk about protecting and empowering migrants for development. Protecting the rights of migrant is especially relevant for female migrants who predominate in some of the most critical areas of concern for us – nursing, domestic work and care giving. There is also a commonality in the method or approach we are using. In the forum we look at the issue of protecting the rights of migrants as a practical issue, a practical issue that requires practical solutions. We all know what the rights of migrants are; we know that international and domestic laws provide the general principles for the protection of the rights of migrants. But what is important was and of critical value to us are the policies and the programs on the ground that animate, that revitalize, that give meaning to the principles of the laws that had been enacted. That is why like what you have done, the Global Forum, will approach the issue of rights of migrants from the bottom-up, not the top-down normative approach, and we will do this by focusing on the best practices that protect the rights of migrants in each and every stage of the migration process. We will do this by strengthening the financial and other skills of our migrants. Best practices, is the approach.

I remember during the Brussels hosting, I had a meeting with the Secretary General and he asked me, “what do you intend to discuss in Manila?” And I said, “Mr. Secretary General, I am going to lose my head if in Manila I am going to discuss migration without mainstreaming protection of the rights of migrants because as a country of origin protection of migrants is visceral to us. It comes like a second nature to us.” So the Secretary General asked me, “are you sure you can handle this thing?” He reminded me of the carcasses, of the blood and gore that happens in the UN and other agencies that discuss human rights. And I said, “Mr. Secretary General, the key here is the approach. We are not going to discuss the principles. The people going to the forum are actual practitioners in the field of migration and development, they will not be reading speeches there, they will be able to think on their feet and we are going to focus on the best practices. We’re not even going to look for huge waves. We are going to start with little ripples in the pond in our effort to provide protection and promoting the rights of our migrant workers.

And it is for these reasons my friend, the similarities that I mentioned earlier in our themes and the commonality of our approach - why we will focus on gender and your passion for the protection of the rights of migrants. Your centering of development on the debate of gender, migration and development - these are the factors that make the outcome of this conference eagerly awaited by the 192 UN member states participating in the conference, in the GFMD in Manila next month.

Finally, my friends, I'd like congratulate all of you for the successful conference you just had the last two days. I had always liked the active tense versus the passive, nominative, normative tense and I see the words that you used to capture your theme. The words that capture the results of your deliberations for the last two days - words like Manila Call for Action, Seizing Opportunity, and Upholding Rights - are active words that suggest taking the initiative, a purposeful movement and reaching out to higher heights. Ladies and gentlemen, this is exactly what you did in the last two days. With your animated participation in the discussions, you have elevated the debate of gender, migration and development to even higher heights. And for that, ladies and gentlemen, accept the thanks and the appreciation of the countries of the world who will be coming in Manila next month. Thank you my friends and I wish you all a pleasant evening.