



## Lori Forman

### Regional Director, Community Affairs, Microsoft Asia

International Conference on Gender, Migration and Development

Luncheon Remarks – Thursday, September 25, 2008

Good afternoon. My name is Lori Forman, I am one of **many**. I am one for **few**.

I am one of some 90 million labor migrants in the world. I have worked outside the country of my birth for most of the last 18 years. I can not only talk about this topic, I **LIVE** this topic.

But I'm here right now speaking to you as one of the very **few** – the very few corporations that is actively involved in improving the ecosystem of labor migration, and one of even fewer involved in combatting the insidious side of migration, the side of human trafficking and exploitation.

Now, I'm not talking about just sponsoring an event, but about having a *sustained business commitment* to these issues. Not because we *HAVE* to do anything about the, but because we **CAN**. Doing something because you *CAN* defines responsible corporate leadership today.

Why aren't more corporations here? That's a discussion for another time, but there *SHOULD* be. Because make no mistake about this, labor migration is a business. A very *BIG business*. Not just for recruitment agencies, or for companies who hire migrants, but the whole ecosystem that supports this global phenomenon.

With deployments that are equivalent to 3000 Filipinos, 2300 Bangladeshis, 1600 Indonesians and 600 Sri Lankans leaving their countries every day, that's a huge market for airlines, financial and remittance industries, and for telecoms who benefit from the billions of text messages sent by such workers and their families every day.

We can talk more about this in the private sector parallel session tomorrow morning. For now, allow me turn to what Microsoft is doing and why we are doing it.

Labor migration is a key issue for Microsoft as the ability to attract talent from a global pool is intrinsic to becoming a global leader. Around the world, thousands of our employees are working in a location other than the country of their birth. In addition to their top notch skills, we value the diversity of viewpoints and experiences that come with a global workforce.

But most labor migrants are not engineers who are writing code for Microsoft software, but are represented by the millions of domestic helpers, construction laborers, drivers, and such. This group is the focus of a program we started five years ago in the Philippines, called Tulay, the Tagalog word for bridge. Tulay brings IT skills training to overseas workers and their families back home. The program bridges both the “digital divide” between those who have IT skills and those who do not, but also bridges the physical divide of families living tens of thousands of miles apart – mothers and fathers who haven’t seen their children, their spouse, or their own parents for years.

As IT skills are a key determinant of employability, this training can also increase the employability prospects for these workers, either abroad or upon return. But rather than me telling you about it, let me call on two friends, graduates of the Tulay program, to tell you a few words about their experience.

Intro Ramon and Lorna.

This program currently operates in all 17 regions of the Philippines, and there are Tulay centers in key destination countries like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, KL, Italy, and Saudi Arabia. We’ve also expanded this program to India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, where we are working with NGOs and government partners who wish to bring similar benefits to the workers who migrate from those countries.

The program is based on several sound development and economic tenets, including addressing the social aspects of family dislocations, and special efforts to ensure safe migration and productive reintegration.

Perhaps the most important element, as captured in the stories of Ramon and Lorna, is a belief that the “return on investment of being an overseas worker is also found in returning and investing” in your own country. That’s why we focus on the family back home, who may combine new skills and remittance income to create a small business back home – thereby increasing the chance that the decision to go abroad is a “choice” rather than an inevitability.

At Microsoft, our goal is to help people around the world develop their full potential. It’s potential for women, as well as men. It’s for young as well as old. It’s for those who go abroad, as well as those who stay at home. It’s *your* potential, it’s **our** passion. We’re delighted to bring that passion to this issue and to this conference. Most of all, we look forward to inspiring more of our corporate colleagues to do the same.

On behalf of Ramon, Lorna, our NGO and government partners in ten countries, and the thousands of Tulay, graduates, thank you for listening to us today. Maraming salamat po.