

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENDER, MIGRATION AND
DEVELOPMENT: SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES, UPHOLDING RIGHTS**

25 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2008

MANILA, PHILIPPINES

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

MS. MYRNA T. YAO

CHAIRPERSON, NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE ROLE OF
FILIPINO WOMEN (NCRFW)

YOUR EXCELLENCIES FROM THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY,
REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS, CIVIL SOCIETY ,
PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE ACADEME, DISTINGUISHED
GUESTS, FRIENDS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

ON BEHALF OF HER EXCELLENCY GLORIA MACAPAGAL
ARROYO, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ORGANIZING
COMMITTEE COMPOSED OF THE UNITED NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN (UNIFEM), INTERNATIONAL
LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO), UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S

FUND (UNICEF), MIGRANT FORUM IN ASIA (MFA), WOMEN AND GENDER INSTITUTE OF MIRIAM COLLEGE (WAGI-MC), AND THE LOLA GRANDE FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN, INC. (LGFWCI), IT IS MY GREAT PLEASURE TO WELCOME YOU ALL TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENDER, MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT .

MIGRATION IS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON THAT AFFECTS ALMOST ALL COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD TODAY. PEOPLE ARE CONSTANTLY MOVING TO FIND BETTER WORK OPPORTUNITIES ABROAD, TO STUDY TO FIND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES OR REUNITE WITH FAMILIES. IN 2005, IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE ABOUT ONE HUNDRED NINETY ONE MILLION (191 M) MIGRANTS WORLDWIDE (IOM). ANOTHER ESTIMATE PEGS THE FIGURE AT ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY FIVE MILLION (175 M) PERSONS RESIDING OUTSIDE OF THEIR COUNTRIES OF WHICH ONE HUNDRED TWENTY (120) MILLION OF MIGRANT WORKERS (ILO).

WHILE MIGRATION HAS BEEN DOMINATED BY MEN IN THE PAST, THERE ARE NOW MORE AND MORE WOMEN LEAVING THEIR HOMES TO WORK ABROAD IN GREATER NUMBERS THAN EVER BEFORE. THIS HAS SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED NOT ONLY THE COMPOSITION OF MIGRANTS BUT ALSO THE NATURE, DYNAMICS AND PROCESSES OF MIGRATION. STATISTICS SHOW THE PREPONDERANCE OF WOMEN OVER MEN IN ASIAN COUNTRIES LIKE THE PHILIPPINES, SRI LANKA, AND INDONESIA, TO NAME JUST THREE OF THE BIGGER LABOR SENDING COUNTRIES.

THIS IS PERHAPS THE FIRST EVER CONFERENCE TO HIGHLIGHT GENDER ISSUES ALONGSIDE THE ISSUE OF MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT. THE ENTRY OF WOMEN AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS REQUIRES A MORE SYSTEMATIC GENDER AND RIGHTS -BASED APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF MIGRATION. I AM CERTAIN THAT IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO ALL OF YOU THAT THIS CONFERENCE IS BEING HELD IN THE PHILIPPINES. OUR COUNTRY AS STATED IS ONE OF THE TOP SENDING COUNTRIES OF SO-CALLED 'GLOBAL WOMEN'.

FOR MANY FILIPINAS, GOING ABROAD MEANS WORKING AS DOMESTIC HELPERS, CAREGIVERS, NURSES OR EVEN ENTERTAINERS - ALL GENDER DEFINED OCCUPATIONS.

BY EXAMINING THE DIFFERENTIAL FACTORS, IMPACTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION ON WOMEN AND MEN, THIS CONFERENCE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO REALISTIC, APPROPRIATE AND GENDER SENSITIVE AND RIGHTS-BASED MIGRATION POLICIES. I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THE PARTICIPATION OF EXPERTS, FROM THE GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE CORPORATE WORLD. THE DISCUSSION ON ISSUES SUCH AS FAMILIES AND CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND; IDENTITIES AND EMPOWERMENT; THE SOCIAL COSTS OF MIGRATION; THE USE OF REMITTANCES AND WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL ECONOMIES; THE ROLE OF NGOS AND TRADE UNIONS; CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DRAW FROM YOUR EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE, EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE.

WE ARE LIKEWISE FORTUNATE TO BE PART OF THE DYNAMIC AND ONGOING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER EFFORTS IN DEVELOPING POLICIES THAT WOULD RESPOND BETTER TO PROTECTING THE RIGHTS, HUMAN SECURITY AND LABOR CONDITIONS OF THOSE MIGRATING FOR WORK; PARTICULARLY WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS WHO ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION. WE WELCOME ONGOING GOVERNMENT DIALOGUES AND ENGAGEMENTS ON MIGRATION ISSUES AT THE FORTHCOMING GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN MORE CONCRETE FORMS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN AND AMONG LABOR SENDING AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES.

THIS IS THE VERY HEART OF THIS CONFERENCE – WE ARE HERE TO CREATE A FUTURE FREE FROM INEQUALITY, EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT FOR OUR MIGRANT WOMEN. WE ARE HERE TO EXAMINE THE GENDER DIMENSION OF MIGRATION BECAUSE GENDER ROLES, RELATIONA AND INEQUALITIES NOT ONLY AFFECT THOSE

WHO MIGRATE BUT ALSO IMPACT ON THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION OF SENDING AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES. THEY ARE, AS WE HAVE WITNESSED, MORE VULNERABLE TO EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING AND ABUSE. WE ARE HERE FOR OUR COMMITMENT IS TO CREATE AND NURTURE A MORE HUMANE AND EQUITABLE WORKING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS AROUND THE GLOBE.

AT THIS POINT, I WISH TO SHARE THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION I GATHERED FROM AN INTERESTING ARTICLE. FIRST, MIGRATION MIGHT BE A RESPONSE TO POVERTY – BUT MAY OR MAY NOT RESULT IN A BETTER LIFE FOR WOMEN AND MEN. SECOND, MIGRATION MAYBE A RESPONSE TO GENDER DISCRIMINATION OR CONSTRAINING GENDER NORMS – CHALLENGING THESE MAY OPEN NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THIRD, RETURNING MIGRANTS MAY GAIN PRESTIGE AS WELL AS BRINGING HOME NEW SKILLS AND ENHANCED CAREER OPPORTUNITIES. HOWEVER, IF MIGRANTS ARE PROSTITUTED, THEY ARE FURTHER STIGMATIZED. FOURTH, MIGRATION MAY LEAD TO

HIGHRE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS FOR THOSE MIGRATING AND FOR THOSE LEFT BEHIND. LASTLY, IF MIGRATION IS IN THE FORM OF TRAFFICKING, WOMEN MAY EXPERIENCE FURTHER DISCRIMINATION, EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE.

AS EXPERTS AND ADVOCATES, YOU HAVE MORE FACTS TO ADD TO WHAT I HAVE JUST CITED. BUT SHARING OF FACTS, NUMBERS AND STORIES. WHILE APPRECIATED, IS NOT SOLELY OUR TASK FOR THIS TWO-DAY CONFERENCE. WE ARE TASKED TO SHARPEN OUR AWARENESS ON DIRECT, TIMELY AND WORKABLE AND FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THR PROTECTION OF OUR OVERSEAS WOMEN WORKERS. WE ARE TASKED TO HARNESS OPPORTUNITIES THAT CONSIDERS GENDER AS FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT. WE ARE TASKED TO UNIFY OUR EFFORTS TO SUBSTANTIALLY CONTRIBUTE FOR A SUCCESSFUL SECOND GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT TO BE HELD IN OCTOBER THIS YEAR. WE ARE TASKED TO ENSURE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MILLENIUM GOALS BY 2015.

TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF THE TASKS ON HAND, ALLOW ME TO RESTATE OUR CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES:

THE CONFERENCE SEEKS

1. TO FACILITATE THE EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE AND BEST PRACTICES IN PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES AND GENDER EQUALITY FOR WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS, ENHANCING THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT AND UPHOLDING THEIR RIGHTS AND THOSE OF THEIR FAMILIES;
2. TO INFUSE A GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES ON MIGRATION; AND
3. TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE SECOND GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN MANILA.

AFTER OUR TWO DAYS WE HOPE TO BE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THE FOLLOWING:

1. FORGE STRONG GLOBAL AND MULTI-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS FORGED AND STRENGTHENED ON APPROACHES TO ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS AND UPHOLDING THEIR RIGHTS AND THOSE OF THEIR FAMILIES;

AND

2. COME UP WITH A CALL TO ACTION TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

WITH THESE IN MIND, I REITERATE MY WARMEST WELCOME TO ALL OUR DELEGATES AND DISTINGUISHED GUESTS FROM THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, THE GOVERNMENT SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, INTERNATIONAL BODIES, THE ACADEME, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

AS HOST AGENCY, THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE ROLE
OF FILIPINO WOMEN EXPRESSES ITS SINCEREST
APPRECIATION FOR BEING GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO
PARTNER WITH YOU ALL

THANK YOU AND LONG LIFE TO YOU OR MABUHAY IN
PILIPINO!