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IOM International Organization for Migration

SEE MIGRANTS AS PART OF THE SOLUTION DURING ECONOMIC CRISES, SAYS IOM ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS' DAY

GENEVA- 18 December 2008 - Countries should recognize the positive contribution that migrants can make to economic growth and recovery and resist the temptation to close doors to them in times of economic slowdown, says the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as it marks International Migrants' Day today.

“Although the economic crisis is still unfolding and its full impact remains unclear, it would be counter-productive for governments in developed countries to close their doors to migrants. Many of them are still needed in jobs that citizens in industrialized countries are unable or unwilling to take,” says IOM Director General William Lacy Swing.

This structural need for migrants, who represent the human face of globalization, is underlined by demographic projections showing that by 2050, these countries will experience even greater labour shortages due to falling birth rates and aging working populations, leaving twice as many people over 60 years of age than children. Indeed, migration has become a linchpin of globalization.

“Closing doors will undoubtedly encourage migrants to use the exploitative, abusive and often life-threatening back entrance into destination countries offered by human smugglers and traffickers. Just as importantly, such a reaction risks contributing to greater social division and xenophobia towards migrants already in these countries by perpetuating the myth that migrants are job-takers,” says Swing.

The economic crisis should also not be used to exploit migrants in the informal sector through the lowering or non-payment of wages, abuses to which undocumented migrants are especially and routinely vulnerable.

Their continued ability to send money back home is crucial to fighting poverty in migrant origin countries, where families are often dependent on such funds to pay for basic needs such as food, housing, health and education. Families all over the world are already suffering the consequences of reduced remittances and face an uncertain future.

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Closing the door to migrants would also negatively impact on the increases in remittances to developing countries witnessed year-on-year, and which now far exceed official development assistance (ODA) flows. This growth rate has already seen a sharp deceleration in the past few months, particularly to Sub-Saharan Africa where remittances are probably needed the most. The World Bank now estimates that remittances to developing countries in 2009 will be less than the estimated total of US\$ 283 billion for 2008.

“It becomes ever more crucial to ensure that ODA levels do not drop at this time to ensure that poverty and development gaps aren’t exacerbated by this economic crisis. If they are, then the pressure on people to migrate by whatever means they can find will increase,” Director General Swing adds.

At the same time, migrant-origin countries have a greater responsibility to fully inform their citizens of the realities of both regular and irregular migration and step up to the challenge of working more closely than before with destination countries and societies to ensure migration becomes a win-win situation for all involved.

“Let’s not make a migrant crisis out of an economic crisis. Keeping sight of the fact that migrants are part of the solution for both countries of origin and destination can help in coming out of this crisis sooner rather than later,” Swing concludes.

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