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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

On the occasion of *International Migrants Day*

Thursday, 18 December 2008

Panel discussion on **The Human Rights of Migrants: Facilitating migrants' participation in national and international affairs**

10:00 am to 1:00 pm, Conference Room 8, UNHQ

Celebrating International Migrants Day in 2008 – the year that marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – calls for special consideration of the challenges that inhibit the full implementation of the applicable international human rights instruments as well as the initiatives that have been taken to facilitate their ratification and enforcement.

Background

Nearly 200 million people, representing 3 per cent of the world's population, reside outside the country of their birth. As heterogeneous as migrants are as a group, so are the reasons for their migration, whether living abroad voluntarily or forced by circumstances beyond their control. Respecting the human rights of migrants is not only a legal obligation and shared responsibility amongst governments in countries of origin, transit and destination, but is also a pre-condition for societies to grow and prosper in peace and security. The United Nations, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and non-governmental organizations also have key roles in working with governments and migrants to achieve the protection and respect of the human rights of migrants

With new concepts of human mobility, trans-nationalism and circular migration emerging along the more traditional migratory patterns, participation of migrants in public life is taking new meanings, including their interest and ability to contribute economically, socially, culturally and politically to both their countries of destination and origin. However, when speaking of migrants' contributions to their countries of origin, reference is usually made to their remittances, often limiting this discourse to economic contributions. Easily overlooked are the social and political contributions of migrants to their countries of origin, e.g. by way of knowledge networks, skills, values and through their political participation.

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Focus

This panel discussion will present recent initiatives to advance knowledge on and galvanize political support for the human rights of migrants. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it will reflect on challenges and opportunities for realizing migrants' rights. These include maintaining the focus on migrants' welfare, rights and protection in the current debate on international migration and development. In addition, particular emphasis will be placed on the less-discussed issue of migrants' political participation in the democratic developments and public life in their countries of origin.

Art. 41 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families recognizes that migrants have "the right to participate in public affairs of their State of origin and to vote" and that "the States concerned shall, as appropriate and in accordance with their legislation facilitate the exercise of these rights". Indeed, responding to calls for a more inclusive and participatory approach that would enhance migrants' presence in public life beyond economic contributions, an increasing number of countries are today seeking the political participation of their nationals abroad.

Organization

As a practical guidebook on external voting rights for migrants, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) with the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico recently published "Voting From Abroad: The International IDEA Handbook". The handbook's key insights and recommendations will be presented during this event, including a comparative perspective on legal frameworks and electoral legislation, host country issues, the enfranchising of the political rights of refugees, displaced persons and migrant workers. In addition, the panel will discuss case studies of external voting operations implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Also on the occasion of this event, the Center for Migration Studies and IOM will present their joint publication *Conference on International Migration and Development: Continuing the Dialogue – Legal and Policy Perspectives*. The product of a two-day conference held in January 2008, the publication reviews the outcomes, implications, and achievements of recent major intergovernmental events on migration and development and considers the important role that rights, protection and welfare play in the integration of migrants and their participation in the development of their host and home countries.

Finally, UNFPA on behalf of the Global Migration Group (GMG) will present the recently published report *International Migration and Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities on the Threshold of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which examines the legal framework underpinning the human rights of migrants and highlights the importance of human rights in the migration and development discourse.

For more information please visit the following web site:

<http://www.un.int/iom/18%20December.html> or you may contact IOM at unobserver@iom.int or by phone at (212) 681-7000 ext. 212.

This event is being organized in collaboration with:

