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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men

High-level panel discussion on the gender dimensions of international migration

Summary submitted by the Chairperson

1. At its 9th meeting, on 2 March 2006, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level panel discussion on the theme "the gender dimensions of international migration". Panellists were Monica Boyd, Canada Research Chair in Sociology, University of Toronto; Manuel Orozco, Senior Associate, Inter-American Dialogue, United States of America; Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director-General, International Organization for Migration, Geneva; Maruja Milagros B. Asis, Director of Research and Publications, Scalabrini Migration Centre, Philippines; and Irena Omelaniuk, Migration Adviser, World Bank. The panel was moderated by Carmen María Gallardo (El Salvador), the Chairperson of the Commission.

2. The high-level panel discussion provided the opportunity for the Commission to examine the multi-dimensional aspects of international migration from a gender perspective and to provide input to the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which will be held on 14 and 15 September 2006 in the General Assembly.

3. Women are active participants in migration within and between countries. Statistics indicate, for example, that the proportion of women among international migrants has reached 51 per cent in more developed regions. Women move on their own as the principal wage earners or for family reunification purposes. Most women move voluntarily, but women and girls are also forced to migrate due to conflict and violence. There is increasing recognition that gender biases exist in the migration process, resulting in women's experiences being different from those of men, including in relation to exit and entry and in countries of destination. Causes and outcomes of migration can be very different for women and for men.

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4. The linkages between migration and development were identified as critical. A holistic and comprehensive approach is required to address the multidimensional aspects of international migration. Poverty and lack of access to economic resources were identified as main factors influencing the propensity of women to migrate. Increased socio-economic development, including through investments in the health sector, may lead to disincentives for migration. Increased gender equality within countries of origin may also reduce women's need for and interest in migration, including for economic reasons. Perceptions about the roles of women and men, relationships within households and resource allocations determine the ability of women to make migration decisions autonomously, to contribute to decision-making on migration within the household and to access resources for migration.

5. Insufficient information is available on the impact of migration of both women and men on the families remaining in the countries of origin. A closer examination of the structural conditions, including underdevelopment and poverty, that lead people to migrate and leave their families behind is needed. The importance of national policies in ensuring the welfare of those left behind was noted, and it was recommended that the High-level Dialogue in the General Assembly in September 2006 give attention to this issue.

6. The empowerment of women in the migration process requires the increased participation of women in migration decisions. The empowerment of migrant women should be given specific attention in migration policies and legislation. The need for countries of origin and destination to examine their exit and entry policies to determine the impact on women was noted, as well as the need for greater collaboration between ministries to ensure increased attention to gender equality and the linkages between gender equality, migration and development.

7. It was recognized that the migration of women and men was linked to specific demand for different types of labour. In some countries, the demand for labour in traditionally male-dominated jobs — for example, in construction — leads to high levels of male migration. In other countries, the demand for care workers leads to increased labour migration of women. However, participants noted that the care sector is often a precarious and unprotected sector.

8. Agreements between countries of origin and destination to encourage and facilitate migration are generally economically driven. Gender equality issues are often not given attention in such agreements, which can result in negative impacts on women. The issue of "brain drain" was raised, and it was pointed out that some developing countries have experienced a huge migration of professionals, including women, to developed countries to earn higher incomes.

9. The living and working conditions of both legal and undocumented migrant women workers should be further examined, including to identify their mistreatment and abuse. Violence against women migrants was cited as a critical issue. The issue of racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination were also raised by some participants. Gender-sensitive rights-based approaches to migration should include promotion and protection of the rights of migrant women workers, through, for example, the development of an enabling international environment, the ratification and implementation of international legal instruments, including the International Labour Organization's labour standards, and the harmonization of national legislation. Legal frameworks should meet the needs of both States and migrants. Partnerships with trade unions and training for police and border officials

were recommended. The key role of non-governmental organizations in promoting the rights of migrant women was highlighted.

10. In some countries, evidence suggests that men migrants remit more than women because their earnings are higher. In other cases, however, women tend to remit more because the ratio of migrant women to men is higher. Women tend to be the main receivers of remittances and generally invest in education and health care for their children. Both senders and recipients of remittances face major constraints in having access to financial institutions. Banks and other financial institutions should improve their services. Further research on gender and remittances is needed.

11. Both countries of origin and countries of destination share responsibility for the welfare of migrant women. The need for awareness-raising on the contributions of women migrants in destination countries was highlighted. The contributions, while significant, often remain invisible because of the concentration of female migrant workers in the private sphere. The importance of fostering greater sensitivity to the diversity of cultures among migrants was also raised.

12. Attention was drawn to the need to address the social challenges related to migration in countries of destination, and the need to link the social and economic aspects of migration. Migrant women themselves can play a key role in addressing social challenges. The important contribution of diaspora communities in providing support to migrant women, including in relation to integration into destination countries, was highlighted. Migrant associations and migrant non-governmental organizations could play an important role in addressing the challenges of migration.

13. Trafficking was recognized as a development issue that cuts across the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the goals on poverty eradication and gender equality and empowerment of women. The majority of trafficked women come from low-income, socially deprived circumstances, mostly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. In countries without comprehensive social security systems, women become vulnerable to trafficking and often end up in unregulated labour sectors.

14. The forced absence of women through trafficking leads to the breakdown of families, the neglect of children and the elderly and negative impacts on health and education. Trafficking can force children into work, denying them education and reinforcing the illiteracy and poverty cycles that hinder development efforts. It can have a negative impact on public health services, including upon the return of victims of trafficking. It was noted that such impacts of trafficking have been inadequately researched and indicators to effectively measure impacts on families are lacking.

15. It was recommended that organizations focusing on migration, including the International Organization for Migration, investigate the causes of trafficking and develop comprehensive indicators for cross-country analyses. Models for assessing trafficking flows, identifying early warning signals and assessing the impact of trafficking on countries of origin, including costs to public health systems, are needed. Evaluations of counter-trafficking programmes should include analyses of labour market factors and the role of recruiters. The need for effective legal measures to address trafficking in women and girls, as well as for cross-border collaboration, including on monitoring and prosecution, was also highlighted.