



STATEMENT OF IAN HOWIE
UNFPA REPRESENTATIVE TO VIET NAM
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2006 STATE OF WORLD POPULATION REPORT PARLIAMENT
HOUSE, CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA
6 SEPTEMBER 2006

GOOD AFTERNOON,

AS YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD, MY NAME IS IAN HOWIE AND I AM THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA) REPRESENTATIVE TO VIET NAM. IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE TO BE HERE TODAY, AND ON BEHALF OF THE FUND, I WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME YOU ALL TO THIS 2006 LAUNCH OF *THE STATE OF WORLD POPULATION* REPORT.

THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S REPORT IS ONE THAT HAS BEEN, AND REMAINS, INTEGRAL TO AUSTRALIA'S DEVELOPMENT. IT IS ONE THAT PERSONALLY TOUCHES MANY OF THIS COUNTRY'S CITIZENS. IT IS A THEME THAT STIRS EMOTIONS AND SPARKS HEATED DEBATE. BUT ABOVE ALL IT IS A REALITY THAT CONTAINS VAST POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING THE STANDARD OF LIVING FOR INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRIES ACROSS THE WORLD. AT THE HEART OF THIS YEAR'S THEME ARE THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS OF EVERY WOMAN, MAN AND CHILD. THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S *STATE OF WORLD POPULATION* REPORT IS MIGRATION. THE TITLE: *A PASSAGE TO HOPE, WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION*.

LET'S START WITH THE FACTS.

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY OF BIRTH IS GREATER TODAY THAN AT ANY TIME IN HISTORY. CLOSE TO 200 MILLION PEOPLE ARE INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS. IF THEY ALL LIVED IN THE SAME PLACE, THEY WOULD CONSTITUTE THE WORLD'S FIFTH MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY, AFTER CHINA, INDIA, THE USA AND INDONESIA.

AND NUMBERS ARE EXPECTED TO GROW, NOT LEAST DUE TO THE DEMAND FOR MIGRANT LABOUR BY THE AGEING SOCIETIES AND MATURE ECONOMIES OF THE WORLD'S WEALTHIEST COUNTRIES.

SO WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE WHO ARE MOVING? DO THEY HAVE CHARACTERISTICS IN COMMON OR ARE THEY JUST A RANDOM SELECTION OF INDIVIDUALS?

THERE IS NO STEREOTYPICAL MIGRANT; INSTEAD, HE OR SHE HAS A MILLION FACES: RICH /POOR, OLD /YOUNG, FEMALE /MALE, HIGHLY-EDUCATED/ ILLITERATE, LEGAL /ILLEGAL, TEMPORARY /PERMANENT.

I, MYSELF, AM A LABOUR MIGRANT OF SORTS, AND HAVE BEEN FOR THE 30-ODD YEARS I HAVE SPENT WORKING FOR THE UNITED NATIONS. INDEED, MANY OF YOU HERE MAY BE MIGRANTS, OR THE CHILDREN OF MIGRANTS?

WHILST WE CANNOT PORTRAY THE TYPICAL MIGRANT, WHAT WE CAN SAY WITH CERTAINTY IS THAT WOMEN ACCOUNT FOR HALF THE WORLD'S INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS, AND DESPITE DEMAND FOR THEIR SKILLS BEING AT AN ALL TIME HIGH THEY REMAIN LARGELY INVISIBLE IN MAINSTREAM PUBLIC DEBATES AND POLICIES.

THIS YEAR'S REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE NUMEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY WOMEN WHO MOVE:- TO BOTH THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND TO THE RECEIVING STATE.

IT ALSO DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE VULNERABILITIES FACED BY LOW-SKILLED OR UNDOCUMENTED WOMEN MIGRANTS, SPECIFICALLY THE VIOLENCE, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, POOR WORKING CONDITIONS AND LOW PAY THEY ENCOUNTER. THESE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE A HEAVY COST ON WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, INCLUDING THEIR RISKS OF EXPOSURE TO SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES SUCH AS HIV. INDEED, MIGRATION PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE SPREAD OF HIV.

ANOTHER KEY CHARACTERISTIC OF THOSE WHO MIGRATE IS THAT MANY OF THEM ARE YOUNG. IN RECOGNITION OF THIS, THE REPORT CONTAINS A YOUTH SUPPLEMENT, ENTITLED *MOVING YOUNG*. THIS SPECIAL SECTION DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE PARTICULAR VULNERABILITIES, AS WELL AS THE ENORMOUS POSSIBILITIES, ASSOCIATED WITH BEING A YOUNG MIGRANT. THEY OFTEN MOVE ALONE, SEARCHING FOR WORK, AND ARE DRIVEN BY THE DREAM OF A FUTURE WHERE THEY CAN REALISE THEIR AMBITIONS, AND ESCAPE A LIFE OF POVERTY.

OTHERS MIGRATE TO SEEK AN EDUCATION. SOME LEAVE THEIR HOMES TO BE REUNITED WITH RELATIVES, OR FOR MARRIAGE, INCLUDING ARRANGED AND FORCED MARRIAGES. STILL OTHERS ARE DRIVEN TO LEAVE TO ESCAPE CONFLICT OR PERSECUTION.

ROUGHLY HALF OF THE WORLD'S 13 MILLION OR SO REFUGEES ARE CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18. THESE GIRLS AND BOYS ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE, AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SUPPORT AND PROTECT THEM.

BUT ALL TOO OFTEN, WHEN WE TALK ABOUT MIGRATION, THE FOCUS IS ON THE PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES FOR RECIPIENT COUNTRIES, MANY OF WHICH ARE BASED ON MISCONCEPTIONS OR A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING.

I WANT TO HIGHLIGHT TO YOU, AS THE REPORT DOES, THAT MIGRANTS ARE A POSITIVE FORCE IN TODAY'S WORLD OF GLOBALISATION. THEY GENERALLY WORK HARD AND ENERGISE THE ECONOMIES OF BOTH HOST AND ORIGINATING COUNTRIES.

ACCORDING TO WORLD BANK ESTIMATES, THE MONEY SENT HOME LAST YEAR BY MIGRANTS TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES VIA FORMAL CHANNELS TOTALLED AROUND US\$167 BILLION. THE AMOUNT SENT UNOFFICIALLY, ALTHOUGH NOT QUANTIFIABLE, IS SAID TO BE CONSIDERABLY MORE.

THE OFFICIAL AMOUNT IS MORE THAN THE GDP OF ALL BUT 35 OF THE WORLD'S WEALTHIEST COUNTRIES (*WORLD BANK WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS DATABASE, 1 JULY 2006*), AND CONSIDERABLY LARGER THAN THE VALUE OF OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA). AFTER FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI), REMITTANCES COMPRISE THE SECOND-LARGEST SOURCE OF EXTERNAL FUNDING FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THEY ARE ALSO MORE PREDICTABLE AND STABLE THAN EITHER ODA OR FDI, AND REMITTANCES HAVE A MULTIPLIER EFFECT ON NATIONAL INCOME.

AND IN THIS CONTEXT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT IT IS WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS WHO ARE OFTEN THE SOLE BREADWINNERS FOR THEIR FAMILIES BACK HOME. STUDIES CITED IN THE REPORT SHOW THAT WHILE WOMEN GENERALLY EARN LESS THAN MEN, THEY TEND TO SEND A HIGHER SHARE OF THEIR WAGES HOME.

AT THE RECEIVING END, WHEN WOMEN ARE IN CONTROL, THEY ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO INVEST THEIR MONEY ON THEIR CHILDREN THAN ON THEMSELVES. MEN, ON THE

OTHER HAND, TEND TO SPEND REMITTANCE INCOME ON CONSUMER ITEMS SUCH AS CARS AND TELEVISION SETS, AND ON INVESTMENTS SUCH AS PROPERTY AND LIVESTOCK.

IN ADDITION TO FINANCIAL REMITTANCES, COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN ALSO BENEFIT FROM SOCIAL REMITTANCES.

THE MOST COMMONLY SPOKEN OF THESE ARE THE SO CALLED “BRAIN GAIN” NETWORKS WHERE TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PERSONNEL LINK UP WITH COMPATRIOTS ABROAD TO BRING HOME TECHNOLOGICAL KNOW-HOW.

BUT THERE ARE OTHER SOCIAL GAINS.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN WOMEN MIGRATE TO COUNTRIES WITH STRONG REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROGRAMMES, THEY BECOME MORE AWARE OF THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY THEIR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

THEY ADOPT NEW ATTITUDES ABOUT GENDER ROLES AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS, SERVE AS ROLE MODELS FOR THEIR CHILDREN AND PROMOTE EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN.

IN FACT, THE WORLD BANK LISTS HEALTH EDUCATION THAT WOMEN ACQUIRE ABROAD, AS ONE FACTOR LEADING TO IMPROVED CHILD HEALTH AND LOWER MORTALITY RATES.

IN BRIEF, WOMEN MIGRANTS BRING BACK TO THEIR HOME COMMUNITIES A NEW IMAGE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FEMALE, WIFE AND MOTHER.

THE SOCIETIES AND ECONOMIES OF HOST COUNTRIES ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF WOMEN. MIGRANTS PAY TAXES AND CONTRIBUTE TO PENSION SYSTEMS. THE HIGHLY-SKILLED ADD TO THE TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW. AS TRADERS, MIGRANTS KEEP GOODS FLOWING; AS FACTORY WORKERS, THEY SUSTAIN CERTAIN ECONOMIC SECTORS; AND AS DOMESTIC WORKERS THEY ENABLE THE WORKING WOMEN AND PARENTS OF RECEIVING COUNTRIES TO BALANCE FAMILY AND WORK RESPONSIBILITIES.

THEY ALSO KEEP HOMES TIDY AND ORGANISED, TEND TO THE ILL AND ELDERLY, AND CARE FOR SMALL CHILDREN. PUT SIMPLY, MIGRANTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR THE CONTINUED ECONOMIC GROWTH OF INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES.

HOWEVER, THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH MIGRANTS OFTEN WORK – EVEN IN THE WEALTHIEST OF COUNTRIES – CAN BE VERY POOR. ALL TOO OFTEN IT IS MIGRANTS WHO UNDERTAKE THE LOW-PAYING WORK THAT NATIONALS ARE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO DO. THEY END UP IN THE SO-CALLED “FOUR D’S JOBS”: DIRTY, DIFFICULT, DEMEANING AND DANGEROUS. THESE INCLUDE GARBAGE COLLECTION, STREET CLEANING, CONSTRUCTION AND SEX WORK.

AND IT IS WOMEN MIGRANTS, IN PARTICULAR, WHO END UP IN EXTREME SITUATIONS OF EXPLOITATION AND SLAVE-LIKE CONDITIONS. THOSE, WHOSE LEGAL STATUS IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY IS TIED TO THEIR STATUS AS DEPENDENT WIVES, OR WHOSE VISAS ARE TIED TO THEIR EMPLOYERS, CAN BE TRAPPED AND VULNERABLE TO ALL FORMS OF ABUSE. THESE WOMEN ARE SCARED TO REPORT FOR FEAR OF BEING DEPORTED. THEY ARE FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PERSONAL SAFETY AND DEPORTATION. SOME RUN AWAY AND LOSE THEIR LEGAL STATUS; OTHERS SEE SUICIDE AS THE ONLY ROUTE OF ESCAPE.

THE ENSLAVEMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS, IN THE FORM OF TRAFFICKING, SEXUAL SERVITUDE AND THE GROSS EXPLOITATION OF DOMESTIC WORKERS, IS AN ABOMINATION THAT HAS NO PLACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. YET HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS THE THIRD MOST LUCRATIVE ILLICIT BUSINESS IN THE WORLD AFTER ARMS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND A MAJOR SOURCE OF REVENUE FOR ORGANISED CRIME.

UP TO 800,000 WOMEN, MEN AND CHILDREN ARE TRAFFICKED ACROSS INTERNATIONAL BORDERS EVERY YEAR. SOME 80 PERCENT OF THESE VICTIMS ARE WOMEN AND GIRLS, AROUND HALF ARE CHILDREN. AS WITH ARMS AND DRUGS, IT IS DEMAND THAT DRIVES SUPPLY. SUPPLY, IN TURN, IS FUELLED BY POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE IS THAT IT IS SOUTHEAST ASIA WHICH IS HOME TO THE LARGEST NUMBER OF INTERNATIONALLY TRAFFICKED PEOPLE, WITH SOUTH ASIA COMING SECOND. ACCORDING TO FIGURES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE REPORT, MANY OF THE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING END UP IN NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE AND AUSTRALIA.

TO REDUCE EXPLOITATION, IRREGULAR MIGRATION, SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING, WOMEN NEED TO HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO MIGRATE LEGALLY AND SAFELY. MIGRATION POLICIES NEED TO BE REVIEWED FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER PERSPECTIVE. POLICYMAKERS NEED TO RECOGNISE THAT THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE IS DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN AND MEN. ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS,

REGARDLESS OF THEIR STATUS, DESERVE ACCESS TO SERVICES AND PROTECTION.

THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN SLOW TO EMBRACE THIS APPROACH AND, INTERESTINGLY, ONLY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HAVE SIGNED AND RATIFIED THE *INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL MIGRANT WORKERS AND MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES*. ADOPTED IN 1990 THIS CONVENTION CAME INTO FORCE IN 2003 BUT PLEASE NOTE THAT NOT A SINGLE INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRY, INCLUDING THE TOP TEN IMMIGRANT-RECEIVING COUNTRIES, HAS RATIFIED IT. HOPEFULLY, NEXT WEEK'S FIRST-EVER HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT, TO BE HELD AT THE UN IN NEW YORK, WILL BE A STEP IN THIS DIRECTION.

TO CONCLUDE, ALL NATIONS HAVE A NEED AND A RIGHT TO CONTROL THEIR OWN BORDERS, BUT THEY ALSO HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THAT THE PEOPLE WITHIN THOSE BORDERS ARE TREATED ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR STATUS.

THE MINIMUM STANDARD TO WHICH ANY MIGRATION POLICY SHOULD BE HELD IS WHETHER IT ADVANCES HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY. POLICYMAKERS NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE MIGRANTS FIRST AND FOREMOST AS HUMAN BEINGS VESTED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS. THEY ARE DAUGHTERS, SONS, MOTHERS, FATHERS, SPOUSES, SISTERS, BROTHERS, FRIENDS. THEY, LIKE ALL OF US, HAVE DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS.

AS THIS YEAR'S *STATE OF WORLD POPULATION* REPORT DECLARES: "TODAY, WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO MANAGE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN A MORE HUMANE, EQUITABLE AND ETHICAL MANNER." AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE THAT OPPORTUNITY A REALITY.

I COMMEND THE REPORT TO YOU.