

Opening Remarks from Sharan Burrow

Let me acknowledge the working people of the Phillipines and indeed the Phillipine migrant workers who live in all of our nations and make such a valuable contribution to our communities and our economies.

To all of them Mabuhay !

Migration is a permanent feature of each of our nations and indeed of globisation but all too often we forget that it is about people, working people and their families and hence at its core migration must be about human rights and dignity.

This forum takes place at a time when the world's attention is focussed on two critical threats to world order, namely the global financial crisis and climate change. To deal with both of these challenges we require new rules, new transparency and new global architecture.

The challenge is no less for the worlds leaders to ensure that the potential for the mobility of the worlds people, a mobility that is born of choice and not desperation, a mobility that provides opportunities and not exploitation, is framed by a new architecture of protection.

The themes of this dialogue offer us the capacity to shape this new architecture and to both advise and stand ready to assist in partnership this very possibility. Like climate change or the financial crisis no one government acting alone can guarantee a rights based system of migration. Every government must act but they must also act collectively to require the standards set by the UN and the ILO Conventions, to build the policy coherence that ensures and maintains these standards and to drive action that meets the test of the UN's development model for a fair globalisation ;- that of full employment and decent work.

Rights, regular avenues for migration and coherence -These themes are interlinked and indivisible: respect for rights the guarantee of equal treatment as residents and workers is the only deterrent to exploitation; increasing legal avenues for migration of both highly skilled and less skilled workers will reduce irregular movements and improve rights through the guarantee of equal treatment and equal opportunity for migrants; and coherence is about global collective action that ensure both of the above.

The miracle of migration for nations like mine, Australia, holds a story of great social and economic consequence but the story also warns of the dangers of exploitation and the risks of new demands for both temporary and circular migration.

Australia – a land of migrants.

- waves of immigration – a population, culture and economic miracle
- the opportunity for our people of being both a sending and destination country

- the role of the diaspora
- the dark years of the Howard Government
- the struggle with new demands for temporary and seasonal or circular migration.

As we struggle with the often conflicting demands of permanent migration and temporary or circular patterns of migration lets put an end to the exploitative practices of the fly by night recruitment agencies who charge illegal fees (ILO Convention 181) to workers and congratulate those recruitment firms like Manpower who are leading the way with international framework agreements such as that signed last week with Union Network International.

My stories coincide with your stories, your people are our people and our social cultural and economic prospects are entwined. Thus we all share the responsibility to ensure that this piece of the story, The GFMD in Manila in 2008 takes us forward.

However we meet when the bleakness of the picture threatens to change the debate.

The ILO estimates that the present financial crisis is likely to lead to the loss of some 20 million jobs world wide. The ILO added that “the number of working poor living on less than a dollar a day could rise by some 40 million – and those at 2 dollars a day by more than 100 million”. Others say this is an underestimation.

As with previous crisis (Asia 1997) migrant workers are likely to be the first to lose their jobs. This is true as sectors such as construction is being hardly-hit, a sector where migrant workers are numerous. During the Asia crisis in 1997, the first reaction of governments was to announce the expulsion of migrant workers to free up jobs for nationals. Last week in the wake of the global financial crisis, a number of governments have announced a possible tightening of their immigration intake.

This time the face of migration has shifted and while construction workers, miners and other traditional areas of male employment will be threatened it is the downturn in the largely female face of work, services and care that are seeing people return home to face the poverty of no employment in their own countries.

I am not convinced it is an economic sanity as restrictions on labour migration will not only deprive developed countries of badly-needed manpower in certain areas (and potential taxpayers and consumers) and constrict rather than expand growth potential. But we do know it can create a vicious circle: restriction in destination countries will intensify labour market tensions in countries of origin of migrants which may be doubly hit by unemployment resulting from the global crisis. In addition the restriction on migration will affect remittances on which some economies have become dependent. When you consider that we are talking about billions of dollars in some nations, including 15 billion dollars here in the Philippines and up to 36% of GDP in countries like Moldova or 20% of GDP in Jordan, this is of serious consequence.

The crisis has generated legitimate demands for regulation of financial markets, similarly labour migration need to be based on agreed rules and rules exist: the rights-based approach.

Then there is the question of ‘climate change’, which can’t be simply put on hold while we deal with other matters. The displacement of people due to consequences such as monsoons, draughts, the rise in sea levels and coastal erosion require a framework for action now. With the potential for more than a 100m refugees, perhaps double that if the world fails to take preventative action, this is not a discussion for another day.

I am certain the UNHCR staff here today are probably wondering how on earth we do that when we have failed to resettle the existing refugees, suffering in camps all over the world. This challenge, the challenge of displacement from the financial crisis and that of climate change are one – our responsibility for both national and global action. It is of equal importance to that of government as we stand for and with refugees and migrant workers and their families. Our humanity is on trial here in this the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As a trade union leader let me also remind you that it is the 60th anniversary of the Convention on the Freedom of Association and urge governments to recognise the role unions play when they can organise migrant workers. With the UN Secretary general attending this week I hope Ban Ki Moon will spare a thought for the migrant workers in his own country for whom the Korean unions are fighting for the right to legally organise.

A number of governments have recently gone public about the need for global rules to regulate migration, as if those rules did not exist. In fact, beyond protecting the rights of migrants, the ILO (C97, C143) and UN (1990) Conventions provide a solid basis for coherent migration policies. They provide for international cooperation, for ways of combating irregular migration, for facilitating the integration of migrant workers in the society of countries of destination, for addressing family reunion, for assessing labour market needs through social dialogue, for dealing with remittances and ethical recruitment. In short for maximizing the benefits of migration for all and reduce its negative consequences. In addition, the ILO and others have compiled best practices.

Rights, must see these principles at the heart of pathways to progress adopted here. We cannot leave this to market forces – Labour is not a commodity and migrant labour is not a bill of sale. We urge those governments involved in bi-lateral arrangements and trade deals to focus on the rules of mobility that expand legal avenues of migration and desist from trade in people.

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What has been missing so far are not potential rules, but political will to adopt and apply them.

The voice of civil society needs to be heard and listened to.

It is my view that this forum must be brought under the UN mandate and genuinely include the presence of those who are supposedly at the centre of the debate. The optimism of seeing the world's leaders sit down for the first time in 2006 to consider migration was enormous. While we appreciate the work in Brussels and now in Manila, global architecture requires global governance and we should pledge support to those governments who share this ambition.

Discussion will be held on the future of the GFMD.

Two benchmarks will be essential to measure progress: a permanent place for both interaction with civil society through delegates nominated to participate in the whole of the forum itself with ongoing consultation - perhaps in the form of a migration economic and social advisory standing committee; and a firm anchor in the UN to ensure that coherence does not remain a mere ambition.

This dialogue is now in your hands. Let's make sure that we take the opportunity to focus on action. Lets make our stories, our concerns, our frustrations the levers for a platform for action; action that has its focus on a small number of priorities that we will urge Governments to adopt to help shape a global architecture for both opportunity and protection for migrants and their families in all of our nations.

Thank You