



**ASEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS ON
STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS**

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MESSAGE

Secretary Imelda M. Nicolas

Cabinet-Rank Secretary, Commission on Filipino Overseas

It is with great pleasure that I join all of you in this ASEAN Regional Conference of Senior Officials on Strengthening the Protection and Empowerment of Women Migrant Workers.

As head of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas under the Office of the President of the Philippines which uses International Migration and Development as its framework in recommending policies, its programs and projects, allow me to give you a brief overview of the situation of migration in the ASEAN region.

Most of the data I will cite here have been culled from the report of the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013), Trends in International Migrants' Stock and from the publication of the ADB/ILO "ASEAN Community 2014: Managing Integration for Better Jobs and Shared Prosperity".

According to the abovementioned 2013 United Nations report, out of the world's stock number of migrants of 232 million, 39% or 70,8 million are in Asia and an estimated 9.5 million migrants live and work in the ASEAN region.¹

As you all know, ASEAN is composed of ten countries -- a region characterized by a distinct and unique migration profile where so-called sending, receiving and even transit countries exist side by side. In one hand, we see within the region the lack of local employment opportunities in some countries while on the other hand, we witness the need for workers of neighboring countries. Many of them share common borders with their people aspiring for self-development. Demographically, they are as varied as they come - all these result in a very dynamic and constant movement of people.²

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013), Trends in International Migrants Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex

² Advancing Regional Cooperation on International Migration Among Southeast Asian Conference Reports 2013

Philippines, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos are considered the region's "sending" countries while Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei are referred to as "receiving" countries or "hubs" for migration although Malaysian and Thai workers still migrate for overseas employment. In addition, Malaysia and Thailand serve as transit countries used by migrants to jump off to other countries.

Although migration from the "sending" countries happen within ASEAN, the trend and the direction towards the so-called South-North still prevail although we see more and more of these South-South migration. For example, the intra-ASEAN migration from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia has risen by around 40%. On the other hand, the intra-ASEAN migration from the Philippines and Viet Nam has declined since majority of these countries' nationals have sought employment in Gulf Arab states, East Asia, Europe and North America.³

A good development noted in sending countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam as well as countries fairly new to organized migration like Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar is that legislations and mechanisms to govern migration are in place and constantly updated and improved in the face of ever-changing migration situations and challenges.

In the 2013 Report of the Asia Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UN High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the members of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (or ESCAP) described the region (which includes the South East Asia) in the following manner: **"The region is home to three fifths of the world's population and that international migration makes a significant contribution to the development of countries of origin and countries of destination. The key features of international migration in Asia and the Pacific are that a) the largest flows of migrants consist of low-skilled temporary migrant workers; b) the majority of migrant workers are documented and regulated by government agencies but deployed by private recruitment agencies; c) large numbers of migrants in the region are staying or working in an irregular status; and d) unequal gender constructions greatly affect the nature of international migration and large numbers of women migrants from the region are employed as domestic workers."**

With this background, let me now talk to you on the subject of great concern for us here: the growing feminization of women migrants.

Since the 1970's there has been a steady increase in the number of women from the ASEAN region working and living overseas. According to the 2013 UN Report I cited, out of the 9.5 million estimated migrants in ASEAN, 48.3% are women, while 51.7% are men.

³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013), Trends in International Migrants Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex

Women migrate for many reasons, including offers of permanent jobs or labor contracts, anticipated improvements in their conditions and offers of marriage. But the main motivation for decisions to migrate is generally for economic reasons. Although a family's financial condition may improve, there is, however, a downside to migration.

The ESCAP Preparatory Meeting I mentioned earlier addressed in a round table discussion the gender dimension of the international migration and their impact on women, children and family. The discussion highlighted **“the complex and increasingly feminized nature of migration and the importance of rights-based comprehensive labor and social policy responses. In particular, the panelists (of the round table) stressed the need to ensure that gender concerns were addressed across all forms and stages of migration, including pre-departure and reintegration. Panellists noted the mixed and context-specific impact of migration on families and children left behind, including implications for care provisions within transnational families. Providing good quality public service was highlighted as an effective response to address these varied needs, especially in rural areas. They recommended the collection of comprehensive, reliable and comparable data and enhanced focus on policy-oriented research.”**

Unfortunately, the gendered nature of migration flows in the region had resulted in human trafficking within the region with women victims an overwhelming majority. In the 2014 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore are classified under Tier 2 while Burma, Cambodia, Lao PDR are in Tier 2 Watch List while Malaysia and Thailand are in Tier 3. Please note that Myanmar is not included in the Report.

This classification means that: Tier 2 countries are those whose governments are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance of the minimum standards of the US legislation the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) but are still not fully compliant; Tier 2 Watch List countries are those where there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat human trafficking; Tier 3 countries are countries where the number of trafficking victims is increasing or have increased significantly.

In the Philippines, based on the Philippine Report on the Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons Cases (from 2003 to 2013) submitted to the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (or IACAT), there are 5 trafficked victims for every 100,000 persons in the Philippines. Women and girls remain to be the most trafficked for both sexual and labour trafficking, while adults constitute 74% of identified trafficked victims.

One aspect of migration in the region that is usually not discussed is what we call marriage migration. Citing the Philippine experience, CFO, my agency recorded that in 2013, out of 78,000+ Filipino emigrants, approximately 60% are women.

The records also show that in 2013 there were 21,000+ Filipino spouses or partners of foreign nationals, 93% of them are women.

These figures are based on the attendance of marriage migrants in our specially designed pre-departure orientation seminars consisting of a group and individual guidance and counselling sessions. Their top destinations are the USA, Japan, Australia, Canada and South Korea. Most of them are young or below 35 years old and have had at least a high school education and higher.

In a report by Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants featured in the 2012 issue of the Global Migration Report (GMR), there is a significant number of women migrants in Japan and Korea.

- In 2011 in Japan there were 24,000 international marriages. The top three countries of origin of women marriage migrants were China, the Philippines and Korea
- In 2011, in South Korea, there were 31,000 cases of multi-cultural marriages. The Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand were among the top five sending countries.

Given the situation of women migrants in the ASEAN region, I would like to put forward the recommendations made by the member countries of ESCAP during their 2013 Assembly in preparation for the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development:

- 1) Gender and age dimensions need to be mainstreamed into migration policies and programmes
- 2) Comprehensive gender-responsive and rights-based policies and programs are needed to address the particular vulnerabilities and situations of women and girl migrants
- 3) Policies need to be strengthened to ensure that international migration for the purpose of marriage does not lead to situations of exploitation and to assist with the social integration of marriage migrants and their children.
- 4) There is a need to develop programs to provide support to families separated by migration, particularly children with older adults. Given the diverse impacts of migration on children left behind, an effective policy response is to provide good-quality, effective and inclusive social services for all children.
- 5) There is a need to provide incentives for the productive investment of remittances, while taking into account the different uses of remittances by men and women.

- 6) Collect comprehensive, reliable, sex- and age-disaggregated and comparable data and enhanced focus on policy-oriented research.

In closing, allow me to commend the ASEAN Senior Officials of the Committee on Women for the very relevant topics which will be discussed during this conference. It is our hope that collectively we will address and respond to the challenges of migration especially those faced by women migrants and their family in the ASEAN region.