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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

18 December 2010

The global economy remains fragile and the effects of multiple crises are still being felt, not least by the world's 214 million international migrants.

Migration is more likely to benefit all when it is safe and through regular channels. Yet the opportunities for regular migration have diminished. Rising unemployment has spurred discrimination. The politics of polarization are on the rise.

It is important to recall, particularly in these turbulent times, the fundamental role that migrants play in strengthening the global economy.

Migrants contribute to economic growth and human development; they enrich societies through cultural diversity, knowledge and technology exchange; and they improve demographic balance in aging populations.

While for many, migration is a positive and empowering experience, many others endure human rights violations, xenophobia, and exploitation.

Clearly much more needs to be done to safeguard the rights of migrants. That is why the Global Migration Group -- which consists of 12 United Nations agencies, the International Organization for Migration and the World Bank -- adopted a joint statement in September that underscored the need to protect the human rights of all migrants, particularly the tens of millions who are in an irregular situation. These migrants are more likely to be denied basic labour protections, due process guarantees, personal security, and healthcare. They are vulnerable to suffering prolonged detention or ill-treatment, and in some cases enslavement, rape or even murder. I support the call of the Global Migration Group to promote and protect the fundamental rights of all persons, regardless of their migration status, as guaranteed by international law.

I urge the very many States that have yet to do so to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families. I also call on parties to the Convention to step up their efforts to help realize the rights guaranteed in the Convention. The irregular situation of many international migrants should not deprive them either of their humanity or their rights. Together, let us reaffirm the fundamental principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

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