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Secretary-General of the United Nations
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Address to the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development

President Arroyo, Excellencies, Delegates

I am honoured to welcome you to the second Global Forum on Migration and Development.

As we assemble today, our world faces economic upheaval of a kind not seen in generations. This sobering fact makes your work here of critical importance. Today, more than ever, we must understand how to draw on the power of migration to advance development.

Allow me to express my deep appreciation to President Arroyo for the outstanding work she and her government have done in preparing the second Forum, and in bringing us all together here in the captivating city of Manila.

It is never easy to follow an opening act as exemplary as Belgium's last year. But the Philippines has more than met the challenge. Your experiences as one of the most important countries of emigration, whose citizens are respected around the world, make you a natural leader in this field.

I am also grateful to the "Troika" of the Forum -- Belgium, the Philippines, and Greece -- for having established, in so short a time, a new model for global policy cooperation. You have respected the founding principles of the Forum -- to be informal, non-binding, and practical. And you have built a dynamic process that is already bearing fruit. On behalf of us all, I thank you for this.

The idea of the Forum was born just over three years ago, on the way to the High-Level Dialogue conducted by the General Assembly in 2006. In many respects, that moment seemed to be an ideal one to launch a global conversation on international migration and development. We were at the peak of an economic cycle. Many countries were thriving. The need for labour migration was self evident.

Remittances were booming. They stood as the most potent indicator of how migration contributes to development and to the well-being of families. There also was a growing recognition of how the skills and know-how accumulated by migrants could be instrumental in transferring technology, capital, and institutional knowledge to their countries of origin.

Despite these propitious conditions, it took a determined effort by my predecessor, my Special Representative and the Forum's other champions to overcome skepticism and ensure the Forum's birth.

Yet by the time of the High-Level Dialogue took place, almost all Member States voiced their support, making clear that the Forum was a necessary innovation.

The Forum has generated extraordinary momentum. Given how much has been achieved, it is hard to believe that today's gathering is just over one year removed from the inaugural event in Brussels. You have come a very long way in a very short time.

This unique, States-led process has proven its worth.

Last year, representatives from 156 nations exchanged experiences and explored new ideas. You discussed issues such as leveraging remittances, fostering co-development, promoting the entrepreneurial spirit of migrants, and helping countries of origin tap the skills of their migrants abroad.

This year, you will build on those exchanges by discussing how to protect the rights of migrants, foster opportunities for regular migration, and improve policy coherence through partnerships. We have a remarkable turnout today. At least 163 countries have traveled to Manila for this event, exceeding even last year's exceptional rate of participation.

Every few months, meanwhile, at least one hundred Member States gather in Geneva at meetings of the “Friends of the Forum” to decide together how best to move this Forum process forward. Relationships among policymakers across the world are being reinforced daily, laying the groundwork for more cooperative efforts between countries of origin and countries of destination.

Already, the future of the Forum seems assured. Greece has generously offered to host the third meeting in Athens next year. Several other Member States have volunteered for years to come.

I am also delighted and relieved that the birth pangs of the Forum occurred during robust economic times. Today, we face a cascade of national financial crises throughout the world. Almost none of our economies is insulated.

Global growth is slowing, unemployment is rising, personal hardship is spreading and anxiety is increasing. Many countries have slipped into recession.

Given these developments, it would be naïve to think the current crisis will have no effect on the movement of people across borders, and on how our publics perceive migration and the migrants in their midst.

Already, migration flows are reversing. In several instances, we are seeing a net outflow from countries facing economic crises, especially from badly affected sectors such as construction and tourism, where many migrants are employed. There is also mounting evidence of a significant slowdown in remittance flows. And in several countries, the political discourse on immigration has become discouragingly negative, heightening the risk of discrimination.

In the face of such trends, it is incumbent upon us to reaffirm another reality: That migration can and should be a tool to help lift us out of this economic crisis. Now more than ever, politicians and policymakers need to cooperate across borders. Only in this way can we draw the greatest possible development benefits from migration.

Human mobility makes our economies more efficient, even when they are not growing, by ensuring that the right skills can reach the right places at the right time.

Human mobility also helps redress the enormous imbalances that have led to harsh economic inequality. This inequality, both within and across borders, is one of the most dangerous realities we need to confront. International migration can be a force for good in this respect.

And, with or without an economic crisis, the underlying forces that have led 200 million people to cross international borders in pursuit of a better life will not disappear.

Inequality is one such force. Demography is another. The developing world, with an all-time high of young adults, is bumping up against an aging and shrinking developed world. Political instability and persecution, meanwhile, will not go away. Nor will the deep human desire to rejoin loved ones in far-off lands, which is what drives family reunification.

New forces are at work as well. If future scenarios prove accurate, climate change could lead to significant relocations of people away from increasingly uninhabitable areas.

At the same time, new poles of economic dynamism will attract migrants. Asia's economic rise has attracted many intrepid spirits. So, too, have the increasing investments made by Asian countries in Africa.

If we are to rely on migration to help heal our economies, however, we also must confront the challenges and fears it can generate.

If we needlessly constrain legal means for migration, migration will flow through unsafe and irregular channels. This will undermine confidence in our ability to govern -- confidence that has already been damaged by the financial crisis.

Likewise, we must work much harder to understand the demands of our increasingly diverse societies, so that we can foster social harmony and solidarity. We must make a special effort to inform and educate people about how migration can be a benefit for all, and how migrants share common bonds and aspirations with people in the countries to which they have journeyed.

This, again, is where this Global Forum can play such a crucial role.

This Forum, from its inception, aimed to foster cooperation so that we can draw the most from human mobility. We want to create a so-called "triple win": for countries of origin, for countries of destination, and for the migrants themselves.

I have been heartened to learn that the Forum has brought together stakeholders to promote new ways of making migration work for development.

There are many examples of this, but allow me to mention just one: The recently launched Joint Initiative on Migration and Development. This has been funded by the European Commission. It is being implemented by UNDP in partnership with IOM, UNFPA, UNHCR, and ILO. And it will reinforce networks among civil society organizations and local authorities of EU Member States and 16 developing countries.

I was also encouraged by the relentless focus on results at the inaugural Forum.

I expect this second meeting to yield equally impressive outcomes. And I hope that these can be leveraged by the work of the UN system.

Your agenda this week reflects a practical spirit. It emphasizes identifying, assessing and sharing the many experiments in managing migration now being tried around the world.

I am also pleased that the protection of human rights features prominently in the Forum this year. Only by safeguarding the rights of migrants, and ensuring that migrants are treated with the dignity and respect due any human being, can we create the conditions in which migration can contribute to development. Exploitation is the antithesis of development. In these times of financial hardship, we all need to be especially vigilant.

Deep cooperation between governments and civil society is essential. For this reason, I value the meeting of civil society that took place over the past two days, and which was generously and efficiently organized by the Ayala Foundation. I look forward to learning about its conclusions. In closing, allow me to underscore again how critical your mission is.

For too long, and by too many, international migration has been perceived as a threat. This invaluable Forum has been crucial in energizing a movement to change this perception. It has sparked a broader recognition of the enormous benefits that migration can bring.

The Forum has already forged a remarkable legacy. Let it inspire and motivate you during these two days, again next year in Athens, and for many years to come.

Thank you very much.