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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

18 December 2009

Migration touches upon every country, either as a place of origin, transit or destination, or as a combination of these. In 2009, an estimated 200 million people, or 3 per cent of the world's population, lived outside the country of their birth.

Migration can be a positive and empowering experience for migrants themselves, and for both the home and host societies. But for too many migrants, the reality is discrimination, exploitation and abuse. They are frequent targets of hate speech, harassment and violence. They are unfairly blamed for crime and economic difficulties, and are subjected to widespread discrimination.

The global economic and financial crisis has exacerbated the vulnerability of migrants. Many countries have tightened restrictions on migration, and adopted stronger measures to combat irregular migration. Such measures can increase the risk of exploitation and abuse. They may also reinforce the impression that migrants are partly to blame for the effects of the crisis, fuelling anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes.

Yet, even in places where unemployment is high, there is often a demand for foreign workers in particular sectors, where they provide the skills needed to propel economic growth. Far from causing the crisis, migration is in fact part of the long-term solution.

At the international level, The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families is a comprehensive framework for the protection of migrants' rights. I urge all Member States who have not yet ratified or acceded to the Convention to do so.

On this tenth International Migrants Day, I encourage Governments to protect the human rights of migrants, to put human rights at the heart of migration policy, and to raise awareness of the positive contributions migrants make to the economic, social and cultural lives of their host countries.