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**REGIONAL FOLLOW-UP TO THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

REGIONAL CHALLENGES IN MANAGING MIGRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

Cross-border population movement in search of better economic and other opportunities is a long-standing characteristic of the Asian and Pacific region. Out of an estimated 191 million migrants in the world today, nearly one third, or about 58 million, live in the region.

The contemporary development agenda has given the highest priority to eradicating extreme poverty. In this respect, the contribution of international migration to poverty alleviation and overall socio-economic development has been duly recognized. In order to maximize its developmental impact, it is crucial to reduce the costs and risks associated with international migration.

The purview of migration policies in the region tends to focus more on orderly migration than on social protection, human rights and decent working and living conditions for migrants. Lacking in legal and social protection, migrants with irregular status, especially migrant women, are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Unless these concerns are addressed, they will erode the gains from migration.

The international community is intensifying its efforts to address migration issues. The latest endeavour in this respect is the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held in New York on 14 and 15 September 2006. At that historic meeting, it was broadly agreed that international migration, if supported by the right set of policies, could be a positive force for development in countries of both origin and destination. The outcome of the High-level Dialogue is expected to quicken the pace of regional multilateral talks on the management of international migration and its impact on development. The Committee is invited to propose regional follow-up action to the Dialogue.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Cross-border population movement in search of better economic and other opportunities is a long-standing characteristic of societies in Asia and the Pacific. However, more countries are now significantly affected by international migration than at any time in history. Contemporary migration systems in Asia took hold in the 1970s with large-scale labour migration from South and South-East Asia to the oil-producing countries in Western Asia. Another large-scale migration stream originated in the 1980s when the soaring economies of the newly industrialized countries and areas of East and South-East Asia sought migrant labour to sustain their economies. International migration is being propelled in the region by various pull-and-push factors, including persistent disparities in development, intertwining regional economy and divergent demographic dynamics. These structural realities have set in motion the dynamics for subsequent population mobility in decades to come.

2. International migration has also been at the forefront of the policy discourse on managing globalization. The international community, through the United Nations system, has focused on finding solutions for migration pressures and the development gap between origin and destination countries. The latest endeavour in this respect is the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held in New York on 14 and 15 September 2006. The High-level Dialogue deliberated on international migration within the broader context of the implementation of internationally agreed economic and social development goals and respect for all human rights. At that historic meeting, it was broadly agreed that international migration, if supported by the right set of policies, could be a positive force for development in countries of both origin and destination. Moreover, the proposal to establish a global forum on migration and development, a standing informal consultative body open to all Member States, was embraced at the meeting.

3. The present report first examines key issues of international migration in the ESCAP region, with particular emphasis on its developmental impacts. It then reviews the recent activities of ESCAP in advance of the High-level Dialogue, as well as the outcome of the Dialogue. The last section addresses the future direction of activities that ESCAP envisages in the area of international migration. The Committee is invited to propose regional follow-up action to the High-level Dialogue.

I. KEY ISSUES OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

A. Key features

4. Today, international migration patterns and systems in Asia and the Pacific are growing in scope and complexity. An increasing number of countries are partaking in the migration process as both sending and receiving countries. The estimated number of international migrants in the world exceeded 191 million in 2005. Of this number, the stock of international migrants in Asia and the Pacific comprised nearly one third, or about 58 million: 53 million in Asia, and 5 million in the Pacific. A major proportion of this migration occurs within the region.

5. A salient feature of migration flows in Asia is the large volume of labour migration. With few exceptions, international migration within Asia is primarily intended to fill labour gaps. By contrast, the predominant form of international migration in the Pacific is settlement migration. The Pacific island countries and territories experience high levels of outmigration to Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America, often resulting in slow population growth or population decline. Irregular migration, including trafficking, is pervasive and a source of major concern in the region.

6. The key source countries of migrant workers in the ESCAP region are Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In 2005, the Philippines alone deployed over 980,000 contracted migrant workers, including new hires and re-hires composed of land-based and sea-based workers.¹ Filipino workers are widely drawn not only to the oil-producing countries in Western Asia but also to the newly industrialized economies of East and South-East Asia, and as far as Western Asia. The annual number of migrant workers leaving Bangladesh nearly tripled, from 103,000 in 1990 to 273,000 in 2004.² In the period 1995-2004, an annual average of 182,000 migrant workers left Sri Lanka, the majority to destinations in the oil-producing countries of Western Asia.³ Pakistan deployed an average of 154,000 workers per year over the five-year period 2000-2004.⁴ Several countries of origin in Asia are actively involved in promoting labour emigration.

7. There have been two poles of attraction for migrant workers in Asia. The oil-producing countries of Western Asia, such as Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, draw a large number of workers not only from neighbouring countries but also from South and South-East Asia. In addition, the newly industrialized economies of East and South-East Asia have become the hub of temporary migration. These include Brunei Darussalam; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Malaysia; the Republic of Korea; Singapore; Taiwan Province of China; and Thailand.

8. A notable feature of international migration in Asia is that women constitute a significant proportion of labour migration, and the proportion of women in labour outflows is climbing. Indeed, in Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, women outnumber men in labour outflows. Many female migrant women work in feminized occupations in the service sector as domestic helpers, health workers and entertainers, as well as in the production sector.

9. Most of the labour migration in the ESCAP region is temporary in nature. The vast majority of migrants are expected to return to their countries of origin. It is the stated official policy of several labour-importing countries that foreign workers, particularly low-skilled ones, be allowed to stay for a

¹ Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, *Annual Report 2005* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines, 2005).

² Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, Government of Bangladesh, BMET website <http://www.bmet.org.bd/report.html>, accessed on 11 September 2006.

³ Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, Bureau website <http://www.slbfe.lk>, accessed on 11 September 2006.

⁴ Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Government of Pakistan, Bureau website <http://www.beoe.gov.pk>, accessed on 11 September 2006.

temporary period and be covered by an employment contract. Most temporary migrant workers cannot bring or be united with their family members.

10. Labour migration in Asia involves mostly less-skilled workers. The demand for those workers is not likely to diminish, driven as it is by foreseeable changes in demographics and lifestyle in relatively affluent destinations, where young people tend to shun so-called “3D” (demanding, dangerous and dirty) jobs. Indeed, certain jobs in the more developed destinations have come to be identified as migrants’ jobs. Jobs in such sectors as construction, plantation and domestic help have largely been relegated to migrants.

11. Since the 1990s, migration of the highly skilled, particularly in information technology and health, has increased to meet the greater demand in destination countries. In addition to traditional countries of immigration, highly skilled workers were also drawn to newly industrialized economies in Asia offering permanent residence. Highly skilled migration is also likely to increase in the future, as foreign skilled workers are increasingly seen as essential for maintaining the economic vitality of destination countries and areas.

B. International migration and development

12. The contemporary development agenda has given the highest priority to eradicating extreme poverty. In this respect, the contribution of international migration to poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is increasingly being noted.

13. The most direct link between migration and poverty reduction is through remittances. Migrant remittances have been increasingly seen by policymakers as a tool for realizing the potential of migration for development. The volume of remittances to several countries of origin is now so high in absolute size as well as in relation to other sources of finance that it has become essential to harness its potential for bringing about longer-term and broader economic and social development.

14. Remittances have become a structural element of the Asian and Pacific economy, playing an essential role in sustaining local and national economies. According to World Bank estimates, \$228 billion in remittances were remitted globally in 2004.⁵ Of these, ESCAP member countries received about \$85 billion. The region is home to some of the top remittance-receiving countries in the world. The top such countries in the region are India (\$21.7 billion), China (\$21.3 billion), the Philippines (\$11.6 billion), Pakistan (\$3.9 billion), Bangladesh (\$3.6 billion) and Viet Nam (\$3.2 billion).

15. At the national level, remittances transferred through formal channels are a source of foreign exchange. Remittances alleviate balance-of-payment pressure and boost sovereign credit ratings, which help to attract subsequent investment. Remittance flows into many developing countries now exceed official development assistance and are fast becoming a potential form of financing

⁵ Workers’ remittances and compensation of employees received comprise current transfers by migrant workers and wages and salaries earned by non-resident workers.

development. Compared with other forms of capital flows, remittances are more stable. Indeed, transfers increased during the period of the Asian economic crisis and, more recently, after the 2004 tsunami disaster. Remittances grow in tandem with growing migration and, unlike foreign aid, go directly to the people who need them without going through costly bureaucracy.

16. The benefits of remittances are also evident at the household level. Whether used for consumption or investment, remittances bring important benefits to the households and communities that receive them. Remittances enhance the well-being and economic security of the households by providing resources for food, housing, health care and education, as well as savings and investments in productive assets. When remittances are invested in community-based projects or in small enterprises that require labour, they also benefit a broader range of people than those who receive them directly. Such uses of remittances have stimulating multiplier effects on local and national economies. One growing concern of development practitioners is how to channel remittances so as to maximize their development impacts.

17. International migration also benefits the economic development of host countries by allowing their economies to expand rather than be constrained by labour shortages in such key industries as agriculture, construction and manufacturing. Migrant domestic workers benefit the host economy by freeing household members to engage in more productive employment. The evidence on the impact of migration in host societies is mixed when seen at the sector level. Some findings show that in the construction and manufacturing sectors, migrant workers have increased the unemployment rate of the local labour force. The availability of migrant workers at low wages has the unintended consequence of creating incentives for labour-intensive industries to expand the admission of foreign workers.⁶ Further research-based information is needed to clarify the various impacts of migration in host countries, which could then serve as the basis for more realistic policies.

18. The Asian and Pacific region has also witnessed a significant number of skilled personnel seeking employment abroad on a more permanent basis. Thus, the loss of human capital through migration, or the so-called “brain-drain”, is a growing concern of origin countries, as is the emigration of nurses from the Philippines and information and communication technology personnel from India. A shortage of human capital in such key sectors as health, technology and industry depresses productivity and economic growth and retards the provision of social services. In particular, the social consequences of health professional migration make it a concern for public policy. There is a need to balance the economic benefits and the freedom of mobility of labour with protection of public health objectives. This requires a shift in policy responses towards managing migration in a manner that benefits both source and destination countries.

⁶ Manolo I. Abella, “Social Issues in the management of labour migration in Asia and the Pacific”, *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 20, No. 3, December 2005.

19. Whether and to what extent the beneficial effects of migration outweigh its negative effects is still a subject of debate. Some studies indicate that the emigration of highly skilled persons may have redemptive impacts through return migration. Return migrants can enhance the transfer of technology, skills, knowledge and capital to their countries of origin. They may be leaders who spread ideas ranging from small family norms to small business entrepreneurship.

20. Similarly, the diaspora could be instrumental in creating business networks and increasing trade, foreign direct investment and access to markets in receiving countries. Diaspora entrepreneurs and investors can play a critical role in bringing new ideas and ways of doing business to their home countries. By sharing new knowledge and fusing it with local customs they can speed up the adoption and acceptance of positive change. The stunning growth of India's software industry is a successful model for mobilizing the diaspora. In 2002, such an approach generated 400,000 new software jobs and revenues in excess of \$6 billion for India.⁷ Nineteen of the top twenty Indian software businesses were founded and managed by professionals from the Indian diaspora. The Afghan diaspora living in Europe, North America and Australia are contributing to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan.

21. The migration of women has the potential to improve the status and autonomy of women. When women migrate and become the major income-earners for their families, their status is enhanced; when other family members migrate, the responsibility and decision-making authority of women increases. Beside economic empowerment, heightened self-esteem associated with employment, education and knowledge can empower female migrants. This may affect the next generation, providing children with female role models. However, migration processes and structures that place women in vulnerable situations could pose a challenge to the achievement of gender equality.

22. Most migrant workers in the region who engage in temporary work abroad leave their family behind. Hence, international migration could give rise to problems affecting the welfare of the family in countries of origin. Separation of the family due to migration could be detrimental to family cohesion, marital stability and the children left behind. It is estimated that in South-East Asia alone, some 4 to 7 million children have been left behind by parents working overseas. Some of the difficulties faced by children of migrants include neglect, poor performance in school, delinquency and psychological and relationship problems.

23. As the recent outbreaks of SARS in Asia have demonstrated, human mobility and international migration have repercussions on public health. In fact, the impact of SARS went beyond health concerns and had consequences for the economy, international relations and tourism. Studies also suggest a close association between increased vulnerability during mobility and the spread of

⁷ Asian Development Bank, "Developing the diaspora", paper submitted to the United Nations Third Coordination Meeting on International Migration, New York, 27-28 October 2004.

HIV/AIDS. The link between migration and HIV/AIDS emanates from conditions of the migration process itself, as it may involve exploitation, separation from spouse and family, and linguistic and cultural barriers which prevent those involved from accessing health-care services. The migrants are also deprived of access to the information and prevention services which are crucial to reducing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

C. Undocumented migration, including human trafficking

24. Unauthorized migration is present throughout the Asian and Pacific region. Owing to the limited availability of reliable data, estimates of migrants with irregular status are, at best, approximations of the real extent of the phenomenon. In many cases, regularization campaigns reveal the extent and scope of irregular migration. According to one estimate, the number of unauthorized migrants numbered over 1.2 million in major receiving countries in East and South-East Asia in the period 2003-2005.⁸ The problem is particularly pervasive in countries such as Malaysia and Thailand, which share long and porous borders with neighbouring countries.

25. In 2004, Thailand conducted nationwide migration registration. The process registered some 1.3 million unauthorized migrants. Of these, over 800,000 obtained work permits, allowing holders to work for a period ranging from three months to one year and to be enrolled in a health insurance scheme.⁹ It is estimated that over 200,000 migrants live with irregular status in Japan and from 300,000 to 500,000 in Malaysia.¹⁰ Owing to historical links and an open border, hundreds of thousands of Nepalese have migrated to India through unauthorized channels to work in the informal sector.

26. Trafficking in persons is a pernicious form of irregular migration and a crime that involves elements of deception, coercion, exploitation, abuse and violence. It often targets women and children, though not exclusively. The economic vulnerability of trafficking victims is often compounded by physical and psychological abuse, exposure to life-threatening conditions, including sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, and abuse at the hands of the authorities. Women are often targeted for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced marriage and domestic servitude.

27. In order to tackle trafficking in areas of origin, development and poverty alleviation efforts must be intensified. However, studies have tended to show that outmigration increases with rising levels of development; hence, such efforts may be unlikely to reduce the volume of migration in the short run. Therefore, prevention approaches must involve education campaigns. In destination areas, policies need to be directed at demand: where the demand for trafficked migrants is large, as in the tourism sector in some countries, considerable political will is required.

⁸ Maruja M.B. Asis, "Recent trends in international migration in Asia and the Pacific", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, vol. 20, No. 3, December 2005.

⁹ Jerrold W. Huguet and Sureepon Punpuing, *International Migration in Thailand* (International Organization for Migration, Regional Office Bangkok, 2005).

¹⁰ Asis, loc. cit.

D. Social protection and human rights of migrants

28. The well-being of international migrants largely rests on the availability of decent work, secure legal status, and access to social services and protection. A temporary residence permit or work contract is normally sufficient to give a sense of security to short-term migrants. However, concerns of protection are likely to grow along with the rise in the flow of undocumented migrants, as migration controls are tightened in a number of host countries. Since undocumented migrants have entered countries illegally or stayed after the expiration of their visas, they lack recourse to legal protection and legal means of improving their wages, working conditions, living standards and access to social services. This renders such migrants, especially women, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

29. Despite the positive experiences of many migrant workers, a significant number face hardships that erode the gains from migration. Migrant labour recruitment in Asia and the Pacific is largely left in the hands of private agencies. The protection of migrant workers rests on the contracts signed between workers and their employers. This arrangement has given rise to irregularities and abuses that impose costs on migrants and their families. Some of the widespread abuses include excessive placement fees, contract violations, non-payment or delay in the payment of wages. These problems are especially common among women migrants in domestic work and the entertainment industry. The concentration of women in those sectors, which are not covered by national labour laws, renders migrant women vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Migrants with irregular status and trafficking victims are vulnerable because they have no recourse to legal protection.

30. Less-skilled migrant workers commonly face deception, discrimination, exploitation and abuse in employment-related situations. Whereas the prevailing xenophobic sentiments and negative perception of migration provide some explanation, it is also due to the migrants' position in the labour market and the lack of application and enforcement of labour standards in host countries. Emerging trends towards informal work arrangements entail more disadvantages for migrant workers, including low wages, poor working conditions and lack of social protection and workers' rights.

31. Protecting the rights of migrants encompasses ensuring that they are equally treated under the law in the receiving country. Respect for a migrant's human rights is one of the most basic determinants of migrants' well-being and essential to the achievement of greater social and economic development. It is also important that migrants of all ages have access to affordable basic social and health services, including reproductive health care. In this regard, consideration should be given to the combination of factors relating to the health needs of migrants. This includes the psychological stress due to their movements, reduced security in daily life, experiences of alienation and discrimination, and reduced socio-economic status.

32. While it is the sovereign right of States to make laws and regulations concerning the entry of aliens and the terms and conditions of their stay, international human rights instruments call on States

to abide by international human rights principles when designing regulations and policies that affect the welfare of migrants. A significant step towards this objective is for countries to ratify the various international conventions pertaining to the protection of migrants. Among the most relevant United Nations conventions and protocols for the protection of migrants are the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families,¹¹ which entered into force in July 2003 (ratified by 7 and signed by 3 Member States); and the two protocols adopted in 2000, namely, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ratified by 10 and signed by 11 Member States), and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea (ratified by 11 and signed by 10 Member States); the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees¹² (ratified by 23 ESCAP member States) and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (ratified by 23 Member States). The pace of ratification of the Convention relating to migrant workers and their families of 1990 has been relatively slow in Asia and the Pacific, enjoying support mostly from countries of origin of migrant workers.

E. Regional and subregional migration management initiatives

33. Addressing the challenges of international migration requires a high degree of coordination both regionally and internationally. To this end, Governments in Asia and the Pacific are increasingly supporting the regional consultative processes (RCPs) that address specific aspects of international migration issues. These are informal, open and non-binding in nature. They are not necessarily directed at immediate, concrete outcomes, but place a great deal of emphasis on long-term goals such as increasing cooperation, dialogue, information exchange and technical cooperation. These interactions are crucial for developing links between States and laying the groundwork for future bilateral and multilateral agreements. RCPs have been credited with enhancing regional coordination on migration, building trust and a better common understanding of migration issues and providing an alternative to global migration management forums.

34. A number of RCPs on the management of aspects of international migration have emerged over the past decade in the ESCAP region. Most countries in the region participate in one or more of the following RCPs. The Manila Process, initiated in 1996, primarily focuses on combating and reducing irregular migration and trafficking in the region. The Intergovernmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants (APC), also launched in 1996, functions as an advisory body to Governments in the region while also serving as an informal forum for discussions on refugees and displaced persons. Some efforts are under way to integrate the Manila Process into APC and make it the irregular migration and trafficking arm of APC. The Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crimes, held in

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990, annex.

¹² United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 189, No. 2545.

Bali in 2002, known as the Bali Process, was launched in 2002 as a voluntary non-binding grouping of 38 source, transit and destination countries from throughout the region. Its various targeted workshops have been instrumental in capacity-building for operational-level officials representing law enforcement and other key agencies involved in combating trafficking and related transnational crimes. The Colombo Process, established in 2003, is a ministerial consultation on labour migration for countries of origin in Asia. Recently, certain destination countries have also participated in the ministerial consultations. The Colombo Process focuses on the protection of vulnerable migrants and optimizing the benefits from labour migration.

35. Most existing RCPs in Asia and the Pacific focus on specific population movements, such as irregular migration and trafficking. RCPs addressing all forms of population movements are non-existent. Larger migration issues, particularly the linkages between international migration and development, remain largely unaddressed. Most attempts to manage and regulate migration in the region are limited in scope to the bilateral agreements between origin and destination countries used to formalize population movements, particularly labour migration. Where agreements exist, they are mostly in the form of memorandums of understanding which have not yet evolved into plans of action and operational processes.

36. The Bangkok Declaration on Irregular Migration, endorsed by 18 Asian and Pacific countries, at the International Symposium on Migration, held in Bangkok in April 1999, was an important step towards paving the way for the regional management of irregular migration. It underscored the need to go beyond migration controls and called for deeper analysis of the causes of irregular migration, adopting effective domestic legislation, criminalizing perpetrators of trafficking and assisting victims.

37. At the subregional level, there has been a strong commitment to address irregular migration, particularly trafficking. Two subregional initiatives represent some of the fledgling progress being made by RCPs in Asia and the Pacific. In South Asia, the Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution was adopted in 2002 by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which counts seven member States.¹³ Another subregional initiative devoted to combating trafficking is the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking involving the six Greater Mekong Subregion countries.¹⁴ In 2004, the six Governments signed a memorandum of understanding based on international standards that incorporate relevant conventions and principles. This subregional agreement lays down the framework for a systematic response to human trafficking and a three-year subregional plan of action for collaborative effort to protect victims of human trafficking, promote cooperation in investigating and prosecuting traffickers and undertaking protective efforts to address vulnerability to trafficking.

¹³ Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

¹⁴ Cambodia, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.

II. HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Background

38. The complex linkages between international migration and development have long been noted, attaining prominence when the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September 1994, gave explicit recognition to the migration-development nexus. As a follow-up activity to the Conference, the possibility of convening an international conference on international migration and development was pursued in accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/127 of 19 December 1994 on international migration and development.

39. Since then, the United Nations Secretariat has, on four occasions, solicited the views of Member States regarding the possibility of convening a United Nations conference on international migration and development, by sending letters to seek views of its Member States on the objectives and modalities for the convening of such a conference. However, each time, because of the small number of responses, it was not possible to assess views representing all Member States.

40. In recognition of the growing importance of international migration issues and the weak understanding of its relationship to development, the General Assembly, in its resolution 58/208 of 23 December 2003 on international migration and development, decided to convene a high-level dialogue on international migration and development in 2006. It was decided in the same resolution that the high-level dialogue was to discuss the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development in order to identify appropriate ways and means to maximize its development benefits and minimize its negative impacts.

41. In its resolution 60/227 of 23 December 2005, the General Assembly invited the regional commissions to contribute to and coordinate dialogue at the regional level in preparation for the high-level dialogue, and also invited appropriate regional consultative processes and other major initiatives undertaken by Member States in the field of international migration to contribute to the high-level dialogue. It also invited relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to contribute to the preparation of the dialogue.

42. In the preparatory process for the high-level dialogue, two panel discussions were organized, the first in New York on 8 June 2006 and the second in Geneva on 4 July 2006. The panel discussions provided excellent opportunities for fruitful interactions between Member States and representatives of the United Nations system, allowing debate on its role of assisting Member States in making the most of the opportunities that migration could bring. In recognition of the importance of the contribution of civil society, one-day informal interactive hearings with representatives of non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector were held in New York on 12 July 2006.

43. In response to the request made in General Assembly resolution 59/241 of 22 December 2004, and reiterated in its resolution 60/227 of 23 December 2005, on international migration and development, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the General Assembly on international migration and development¹⁵ which offered a comprehensive review of recent trends in international migration, focusing particularly on its impact on both countries of destination and countries of origin. The report drew on many previous studies, including the report of the Global Commission on International Migration, submitted to the Secretary-General in 2005.¹⁶ In his report, the Secretary-General also noted that, in seeking ways in which the United Nations could better serve its Member States, a consultative global forum could be a venue for discussing issues related to international migration and development and facilitating cooperation among Governments.¹⁷

B. Activities of ESCAP in advance of the High-level Dialogue

44. Complementing the international deliberations, ESCAP has conducted several activities dealing with international migration, taking into account the regional specificities of migration issues. These activities were undertaken as part of its programme of work in the area of emerging social issues and in anticipation of the High-level Dialogue, with a view to contributing to regional preparations.

45. In August 2005, ESCAP, jointly with the United Nations Population Fund, IOM and the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, convened the Regional Seminar on the Social Implications of International Migration. Participants agreed that migration should be viewed as an important, positive, contributing factor to development and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Regional Seminar adopted recommendations that called for, inter alia, the establishment of a regional consultative process on labour migration and development, coherence of national migration policies with broader development goals and a systematic regional study and research on international migration and development.

46. In September 2005, in recognition of the growing importance of regional cooperation in managing international migration, ESCAP, with 14 other United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations working for Asia and the Pacific, established the Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration, including Human Trafficking, which is aimed at contributing to a better understanding of and developing a common approach to the migration phenomena in the region by strengthening the mechanism of coordination and information sharing among concerned agencies. The Group is currently co-chaired by ESCAP and the IOM Regional Office in Bangkok.

¹⁵ A/60/871.

¹⁶ Global Commission on International Migration, *Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action* (2005).

¹⁷ A/60/871, paras. 39-41.

47. In October 2005, ESCAP organized the Expert Group Meeting on the Promotion and Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, with Particular Emphasis on Trafficking in Women and Violence against Women. The event served as an input into the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women.¹⁸

48. The Committee on Emerging Social Issues of ESCAP, at its second session held in Bangkok in November 2005, shed light on the issue of international migration under the agenda item on socially vulnerable groups. The secretariat prepared and presented a report on international migration (E/ESCAP/CESI(2)/2), examining the nexus between international migration and development and the social implications of migration in the region.

49. During the sixty-second session of the Commission, held in Jakarta in April 2006, ESCAP, jointly with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment of Indonesia, organized a Side event on the Gender Dimensions of International Migration and Regional Preparations for the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The event provided an opportunity for discussing various aspects of migration, and reaffirmed the regional approach to managing migration to enhance its developmental impacts. The positive and negative experiences of women in the migration process, as well as strategic interventions to reduce gender-based rights violations, received significant focus. The perspectives and concerns of both origin and destination countries, as well as those of IOM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the International Labour Organization, were addressed.

50. In June 2006, ESCAP participated in the International Symposium on International Migration and Development, held in Turin, Italy. The Symposium was convened within the framework of the preparatory work of the United Nations Secretariat for the High-level Dialogue. The Symposium debated, at the substantive level, key issues which Governments, international organizations and civil society face in addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by international migration. During the Symposium, ESCAP chaired a session on international migration in Asia and the Pacific, focusing on the key migration issues and challenges in the region, the role of remittances in contributing to development, and regional policy developments.

C. Outcome of the High-level Dialogue

51. The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development was held in New York on 14 and 15 September 2006. The very first General Assembly meeting focusing directly on international migration brought together delegations from over 130 countries, over 40 of which were represented at the ministerial or vice-ministerial level. Representatives of relevant international and intergovernmental organizations, as well as those of regional commissions, were also present. The two-day High-level Dialogue consisted of four plenary meetings and four round tables. The discussions in the round tables focused on the following themes: (a) the effects of international

¹⁸ A/61/122/Add.1.

migration on economic and social development; (b) measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of all migrants and to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons; (c) the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development, including remittances; and (d) promoting the building of partnerships and capacity-building and the sharing of best practices at all levels.

52. As anticipated, the historic meeting affirmed that international migration could be a positive force for development in countries of both origin and destination. It also affirmed that cooperation on international migration should be strengthened bilaterally, regionally and globally. A broad agreement emerged that migration was not a substitute for development. To alleviate migration pressures, the factors spurring migration, poverty, conflict and lack of human rights must be dealt with in countries of origin. Decent working conditions as well as respect for the dignity and rights of migrants, in both destination and origin countries, were necessary. There was also widespread support for incorporating international migration into the broader development agenda, including poverty reduction strategies. The High-level Dialogue underscored that securing positive outcomes from migration also required addressing the challenges of the brain drain, trafficking and smuggling, as well as protecting vulnerable migrants from exploitation and abuse.

53. The Secretary-General's proposal to establish a global forum on migration and development, a standing informal consultative body open to all Member States, was embraced by many delegations. The global forum would not set policy but would enable countries to extend the global dialogue on international migration and help build a relationship of trust while discussing and exchanging views and best practices on migration issues. Belgium offered to host the first meeting of the global forum in 2007.

54. As stipulated in General Assembly resolution 58/208, the outcome of the High-level Dialogue will be a Chairperson's summary. The summary, to include summaries of the four round-table discussions, will be issued as a document of the General Assembly.¹⁹ The document will also be widely distributed to Member States, observers, United Nations agencies and other appropriate organizations.

55. The High-level Dialogue was held with a number of parallel side events focusing on different aspects of international migration and development. Among these were two events on the regional perspectives of international migration and development, namely, (a) a round table, entitled "Regional Dimension of International Migration and Development", co-hosted by the Regional Commissions New York Office and IOM, and (b) a panel discussion, entitled "Seizing the Opportunities that International Migration Brings: a Regional Perspective", organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Regional Commissions New York Office. On both occasions, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP presented the Asian and Pacific perspectives.

¹⁹ A/61/515.

56. The side events helped to elucidate the regional specificities of migration and different developmental impacts. Hence, while international migration can be characterized by its global dimension, the regional perspectives of migration also warrant attention. For instance, intraregional migratory patterns, some of which are long-standing while others are more recent, vary from region to region. Panelists frequently stressed the need for the sound management of international migration, which requires the capacity for greater collaboration with and between countries and regions. To this end, the value of the regional consultative processes was reacclaimed.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

57. International migration will continue to be a matter of concern in the Asian and Pacific region. ESCAP has recognized that international migration is one of the key emerging issues which will challenge the region for the coming decades, economically, socially and culturally. Thus, ESCAP will place high priority on the issue of international migration and development in planning its future activities and programmes.

58. The effective management of migration in the region is still hampered by the lack of comprehensive policies at the regional level. The approaches to the management of migration adopted by many Governments in the region are mostly unilateral or bilateral. The few regional agreements that exist have not evolved beyond memorandums of understanding. ESCAP, based on its decades-long experience of leading the development of economic and social policies in the region, will continue to strengthen its policy-oriented analyses, seeking ways of enhancing the positive impacts of migration on development while mitigating the negative impacts.

59. ESCAP has a strong convening power, with a larger membership than any other regional United Nations bodies or intergovernmental institutions. Thus, it is also well suited to offer a venue and promote regular dialogue on the issue of migration among its members and associate members in the region for the purpose of exchanging information, experiences, best practices and policies. There has been a strong call for the establishment of a regional consultative process on international migration and development for the region; ESCAP is willing to be engaged in the establishment of such a process, if appropriate.

60. ESCAP will also work to strengthen mechanisms of collaboration among concerned institutions and synergize their activities at the regional level, primarily through the existing mechanism of the Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration, including Human Trafficking. The Group is already planning to publish a situation report on migration in Asia with a view to producing comprehensive reference material, enhance understanding of migration issues, identify knowledge gaps and generate policy recommendations.

61. The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development helped to increase awareness of the importance of the issue among members and associate members of ESCAP in the

region. The Committee is invited to deliberate on the growing phenomenon of international migration with a view to strengthening dialogue and cooperation for the regional management of migration and addressing the multidimensional linkages of migration and development. The Committee is also invited to provide the secretariat with guidance in order to enhance effectiveness in assisting members and associate members in addressing the manifold challenges and opportunities of international migration. The Committee is further invited to propose regional follow-up action to the outcome of the High-level Dialogue.

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