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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

18 December 2011

Migration affects all countries – and so do myths and misperceptions about its impact.

There are many false assumptions surrounding migration.

One such myth is that migrants are a burden. In reality, migrants make vast contributions to host countries. As workers, they bring skills. As entrepreneurs, they create jobs. As investors, they bring capital. In advanced and emerging economies, they play an indispensable role in agriculture, tourism and domestic work. Migrants often care for the youngest and oldest members of society.

People view irregular migration as a crime. Many think migrants who lack proper documents are a danger to society and should be detained, or that all women who migrate to take up low-skilled jobs have been trafficked.

These and other unfounded beliefs lead to the adoption of migration policies that are irrelevant at best or even dangerous.

States have the sovereign prerogative to manage their borders. But they also have the duty to abide by their international legal obligations. Under international human rights law, all persons, without discrimination and regardless of nationality or legal status, are entitled to enjoy fundamental human rights. No migrant should be sent back to a place where he or she will be tortured. Every migrant woman should have access to health care, including reproductive health care. Every migrant child should be able to go to school.

Human rights are not a matter of charity, nor are they a reward for obeying immigration rules. Human rights are the inalienable entitlement of every person, including the world's 214 million international migrants as well as their family members.

Forty-five countries have ratified the International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. I call on all others to join this important treaty as a concrete affirmation of their commitment to protect and promote the human rights of all migrants on their territories.

When their rights are violated, when they are marginalized and excluded, migrants will be unable to contribute either economically or socially to the societies they have left behind or those they enter. However, when supported by the right policies and

human rights protections, migration can be a force for good for individuals as well as for countries of origin, transit and destination.

Let us give meaning to International Migrants Day by taking constructive steps to leverage this global phenomenon into a force for progress.