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UNGA High Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants
Roundtable 5: Global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration: towards
realizing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and achieving full respect for
the human rights of migrants

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Mr. Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

If we are to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development we must ensure that global migration is safe, regular and orderly, with full respect for the human rights of migrants.

On one hand, migration is a useful mechanism for countries to fill labor and skill shortages arising from rapid demographic changes and it helps to maintain growth and raise productivity. On the other hand, it helps origin generate multiple benefits such as through remittances improving living standards and and financing development requirements.

The sheer magnitude of international migration is particularly evident in the Asia-Pacific region, which hosts over 60 million migrants and is the origin of over 95 million migrants globally.

The diverse types and patterns of migration in the Asia-Pacific region are (a) South-South labour migration. This is made up of men and women, who move to take up low-skilled occupations. The jobs these migrants take up in countries of destination differ, but common occupations include those in construction for men, and domestic work for women; (b) Refugees are the second-largest group of migrants in the Asia-Pacific. The region has three of the top five refugee-hosting countries in the world – Turkey, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Generally, migrants from South, South-West and South-East Asia tend to move within their respective subregions as well as to the Middle East, while migrants from Central Asian countries move to the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

Outside the region, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates host over 13 million migrants, and the United States of America hosts 11 million migrants from Asia and the Pacific.

The *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015*, produced by ESCAP in collaboration with the UN system, provides evidence on the positive contributions made by migrants in their host countries across the region. In Thailand, migrants contributed between \$6 and \$24 billion to the GDP representing 1.6 to 6.2 per cent

of value-added; in Malaysia, hiring migrants was found to stimulate greater employment of Malaysian workers in higher-added-value jobs; and in the Russian Federation migrants have helped to offset the overall decline in the working-age population, filling jobs that would otherwise be left vacant.

International migration also plays a central role in supporting development in countries of origin. Remittance flows from migrant workers to their countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific are some of the largest and most important flows in the world today. The three countries which receive the largest volumes of remittances globally – India, China and the Philippines – are from the Asia-Pacific region, and together account for 28 per cent of all remittances received in the world. Meanwhile, four countries from the region – Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and Tonga – received remittances equivalent to more than 27 per cent of their GDP in 2014.

Looking forward, the potential for harnessing migration across the region is significant and will increase. Rapid demographic transition in a number of countries will shrink working age populations, and managed migration will be an imperative for maintaining economic growth and the sustainability of social protection systems.

However, of major concern is the prevalence of irregular low-skilled labour migration in Asia and the Pacific, which prevents migrants from accessing their basic human rights, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. These conditions inhibit the benefits that migrants can deliver to their host countries and countries of origin.

Hence safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration is a priority for sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. Countries of the region have already recognized this, and are taking steps to ensure positive migration outcomes. This can be seen through examples such as the individual policy initiatives and reforms undertaken to improve migrant access to social protection; the many bilateral agreements signed between migration-receiving and sending countries in the region, that clearly regulate and delineate procedures for migration in decent conditions; and regional initiatives, such as the ambitious steps taken by ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Union to create a space of free movement of labour under conditions of equality and social protection.

International cooperation on migration, based on principles of human rights, and shared responsibility and mutual interest between countries of origin and destination at the core of the Global Compact. The Global Compact could also build on

existing multilateral schemes, ranging from bilateral agreements to regional consultative processes on migration. The global compact could also draw upon opportunities offered through regional economic cooperation and integration schemes. A liberalized approach to migration, with a focus on skilled migrants in areas of particular demand, can play a role as part of an overall package of measures to help countries maintain economic growth during demographic transformation. ESCAP will continue to provide analytical research and offer a regional platform for discussion to feed into the development of a Global Compact that will reflect Asia and the Pacific interests, while keeping the rights of migrants at its core.

Thank you once again, your Excellencies the co-chairs.