



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Ministry of Labour, Thailand and UNIFEM Host High-Level Government Meeting of Countries of Employment on Good Practices to Protect Women Migrant Workers**

*United Nations, Bangkok* – The Ministry of Labour of the Royal Thai Government and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) are jointly hosting a meeting of high-level government officials from countries of employment who will share good practices on protecting women migrant workers. This meeting is to provide a forum for sharing information among the governments of Brunei, Bahrain, Jordan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to encourage the adoption of these practices by countries of employment.

It is perhaps the first time ever that Southeast Asian and Arab States employing women migrant workers are meeting in Bangkok and in Southeast Asia to share practices to protect women migrant workers. There is a conspicuous increase in women migrating overseas for work. Women constitute about 50% of the overseas workforce in Asia, Latin America and growing proportions elsewhere. In fact, in some countries in the region, women exceed the number of men. The feminization of migration is a feature that is embedding itself in the Asia socio-economic and political system.

Women are recruited into woman-specific skilled and unskilled jobs in the formal and informal manufacturing and service sectors. But the heaviest concentration of women migrant workers is at the lower end of the job hierarchy in domestic work and the entertainment sector where they suffer gross human rights violations. Remittances to countries of origin contribute significantly to GDP, family health and welfare, education and consumer demand and community development.

Women have different experiences than their male counterparts. Women migrant workers can sometimes be involuntary victims of trafficking activities which is yet another reason for destination countries to develop and implement policies to specifically address the issues of women migrant workers.

Protecting women migrant workers is a development issue. It promotes human development, human security, peace, stability and economic growth. Women migrant workers contribute by way of their skill and labour and help generate profits in countries of employment. They further contribute to the economy of countries of employment as consumers of goods and services. They plug labour shortages in certain sectors and as domestic workers they facilitate educated middle class women's paid public employment and increase family income. They also subsidize what the State would otherwise have to invest in for child care and other domestic services.

Abuse of migrants, including women, is a drain on economic and financial resources. It involves direct costs such as spending on medical care, as well as other expenses to facilitate recovery from abuse, loss of productivity, absenteeism, loss of wages, and a reduction in GDP. It involves indirect costs to families of women migrants in the form of emotional stress and the like. This makes protecting these women an issue of equality and efficiency.

Protecting women migrant workers is a human security issue. If women suffer routine abuse, the human security of half the world's population is threatened. It is a poor reflection on our capacity to provide safe environments. Moreover, gender based discrimination and violence, including sexual violence, is a major cause of HIV/AIDS transmission to women, including women migrant workers, creating another type of human security crisis.

Protecting women migrants is an indication of good governance which is expressly tied to creating and ensuring peace, stability and human security.

It is gratifying that there is a pool of good policies and practices that protect women migrant workers to draw from, in line with global human rights frameworks like CEDAW that have been ratified through a process of consensus that governments own.

Some of these practices include on-site services for women migrant workers; awareness raising for employers on worker protection; registration of undocumented migrant workers; and in Thailand MOUs have clauses to protect migrant workers. There are other examples of countries amending the labour law to include domestic work as work, domestic workers as workers and legal protections for domestic workers. This is a precedent setting initiative in the Arab region and we hope countries in Southeast Asia set similar precedents and pioneer the introduction of legal protections for domestic workers for the Southeast Asian region.

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UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations, providing financial support and technical assistance to innovative programs promoting women's human rights, their economic and political empowerment, and gender equality in over 100 countries. For more information, visit [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org).