

## Welcome Remarks

Honorable Secretary of Labor, Arturo Brion,  
Respectable representatives from the Filipino Government, International Organizations, the Academe, Non-Government Organizations, and the Media,  
Distinguished participants

International migration has been a prominent feature of Philippine life since the 1970s. A combination of internal factors - *emigration pressures, the role of the state in tapping the global labor market for its nationals, and the development of a culture of migration* – has created the necessary conditions to trigger, and more importantly, to sustain international labor migration and related flows. The Philippines has cornered a significant slice of the global labor market, a feat that has compelled other countries of origin to study the Philippine experience and how it became a major source of workers and professionals for the world. In addition to launching Filipinos as global workers, the Philippines has also achieved renown as a source of many good practices in the area of migrant workers' protection and empowerment. The Philippines is unmatched in terms of developing an elaborate institutional and legal framework governing all stages of labor migration – pre-migration, on-site and return – although policies and programs concerning return migration are still in need of significant improvements.

Looking into the future, current trends and policies seem to suggest that the future might be more of the same story. Recently, the Philippine government has set a target of sending a million workers every year, a goal that was finally met in 2006. Alongside increasing deployments is the upward climb of remittances, with forecasts of US\$14 billion dollars by the end of 2007. Aside from the numerical target, the Philippines also aspires to increasing the deployment of skilled workers and professionals, who are seen as better protected, better earners, and better remitters. The inclination to deploy more workers in the future, particularly skilled workers and professionals, will have to address other questions: What comes next? What about the social costs of migration? How can the country develop in the face of the large-scale departure of its people?

The current discussions and debates on migration and development in the international community seem to have “bypassed” the Philippines. With almost four decades of sustained international migration, what are the indicators that international migration has contributed to development (national and/or local), particularly sustainable development? While the Philippines is often mentioned in

discussions on managing labor migration or promoting migrant workers' empowerment, the jury is out on whether international migration has contributed to development. Interestingly, the Philippines' "success" in promoting labor migration has in fact led to speculations that overseas employment may have stalled the introduction of needed political and economic reforms for the country to move forward. In the same vein, instead of promoting development, the continued migration of Filipinos seeking greener pastures may be even interpreted as failure of development.

Looking back to the early years of state-led overseas employment, it is instructive to note that labor migration was not only designed as a temporary measure to relieve the country of balance of payments and unemployment problems, but it also aspired to follow the Korean model of labor export, which also successfully launched the export of Korean products and technology, a package that contributed to Korea's economic growth. Later on, the return of Korean scientists and entrepreneurs was also a contributing factor in ushering Korea's pathway to development. Thus, by the 1990s, Korea became a labor-importing country.

Up until now, the Philippines trod a labor export program without being mainstreamed in development policies. Likewise, except for the mention of targeting a million deployments every year, the Medium Term Plan, 2004-2010, has little to say about the challenges and opportunities international migration poses for the country's development prospects. Based on the experiences of former emigration countries that became immigration countries, none of them made the transition on the strength of labor export alone, or on the strength of remittances alone. Rather, there were other proactive measures that were in place to promote development in general; development, thus, served as a good migration policy. The development potentials of international migration – the various forms of remittances, possibilities of brain gain/brain circulation, the role of transnational communities, the role of return migration, among others – have not been systematically examined *in relation* to development goals in the Philippines. To date, international migration policies *and* development policies are pursued independently.

This is the main reason why the Scalabrini Migration Center, in partnership with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, and with support from the National Economic and Development Authority, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, the AIM Policy Center, Ayala Foundation, Inc., the International Organization for Migration, and the Foundation for Population, Migration and

Environment, decided to organize this conference with the theme, “Turning Transnational? International Migration and Development in the Philippines.”

The conference aims to stimulate a systematic assessment of how international migration can work to support development processes in the Philippines. It is urgent to take stock of the various dimensions of its international migration experience, assess the implications of the migration-development nexus (migration as one of various strategies to achieve development and/or development as a pathway to migration as a choice), and develop plans of action to promote development in this age of migration. The Philippines can also learn from the good practices of other countries in the field of migration and development. I hope this conference will serve to attain all these goals.

Thank you and welcome to conference “Turning Transnational? International Migration and Development in the Philippines.”