

## “Good Shepherd Beyond Borders”



Good Morning Mission Partners,

Today is actually a day of exposure but instead of going out, we will give you a feel of it within these four walls. To set the tone for the day's programme, I will present an overview of this huge phenomenon of people on the move, how and when it began to the present time.

In the 1970s and 1980s, international migration from Asia grew dramatically. The main destinations were North America, Australia, and the Middle East.

Since the 1990s, migration within Asia has grown, particularly from less-developed countries with massive labor surpluses to fast-growing newly industrializing countries. The main destination countries were Brunei, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan together with Malaysia and Thailand. The source countries were Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam.

Asian governments seek to strictly control migration, and migrants' rights are often very limited. Policymakers encourage temporary labour migration but generally prohibit family reunion and permanent settlement. While most migration in the region is temporary, trends toward long-term stay are becoming evident in some places.

### **The Development of Asian Migration**

Asian migration is not new: Movement to the West started to grow in the 1960s. The U.S. military presence in Korea, Vietnam, and other Asian countries forged transnational links. The Vietnam War caused large-scale refugee movements. The openness of the United States, Canada, and Australia to family migration meant that primary movements from Vietnam, whatever their cause, gave rise to further entries of permanent settlers.

In the early 21st century, some 6.1 million Asians were employed outside their own countries within the Asian region. Asian migration to countries across Europe, a recent trend, has grown. Top European destinations include Italy, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. China, India, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand are all significant source countries. The migrants include medical and information technology personnel, female domestic workers, and manual workers who often move illegally.

### **Labour Migration within Asia**

Since the mid-1980s, rapid economic growth and declining fertility have led to strong demand for labour in the new industrial economies in the region. Early flows were mainly low-skilled workers. In recent years, flows of the highly skilled have increased throughout the region, and demand for health-care workers is increasing.

While existing flows from countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines have continued, new source countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar have become more significant.

## **Feminization of Migration**

The demand for female domestic workers surged first in the Middle East, and, from the 1990s, within Asia, particularly Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Women made up 65 to 73 percent of labour migrants departing from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.

In the Asia Pacific region alone there are 20 million domestic workers – that is the population of Sri Lanka! Malaysia is a top destination for migrant domestic workers from around the region. Many of Malaysia's estimated 380,000 foreign domestic workers are often exploited and subjected to practices indicative of forced labor, such as restrictions on movement, deceit and fraud in wages, passport confiscation, and imposition of significant debts by recruitment agents or employers.

Beyond domestic work, most migrant women within Asia have "typically female" jobs: entertainers, restaurant and hotel staff, cleaners, masseurs, beauticians and assembly-line workers in clothing and electronics.

Another form of female migration is for marriage. Since the 1990s, foreign brides have been sought by farmers in rural areas of Japan and Taiwan due to the exodus of local women to more attractive urban settings. This is one of the few forms of permanent immigration permitted in Asia.

In the last decade, marriage migration to Korea has increased, with international marriages accounting for almost 14 percent of all marriages in Korea in 2005. Indian men now recruit brides in Bangladesh. Chinese farmers, due to severe gender imbalances resulting from the one-child policy, seek wives from Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar.

## **Illegal Migration**

Illegal migration has grown rapidly and affects many countries in the region. Up to one in four migrant workers in Asia may have illegal status according to International Labour Organisation. Labour flows from Indonesia to Malaysia have been largely illegal, as have the movements of Thai workers to Malaysia and other countries. Thailand

itself hosts up to 1.7 million illegal workers, mainly from Myanmar according to the International Organization for Migration.

The growth of illegal migration in Asia is linked to governments' unwillingness to effectively manage migration and to employers' desire for easily available and exploitable workers. Spontaneous illegal migration can meet labour needs effectively, but it creates a situation of insecurity for workers.

Malaysia is a good example: mass expulsions have been announced on a number of occasions, particularly during the 1997-1999 financial crisis and more recently in response to the global recession. Irregular migrants have been blamed not only for unemployment but also for crime and disease. Vigilante groups have been encouraged to support the authorities in seeking out irregular migrants, leading in some cases to violence.

Recently, Asian governments' desire to combat drug trafficking and terrorism have led to attempts at multilateral cooperation to prevent illegal migration. For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has adopted a Plan of Action on Immigration Matters designed to encourage skilled migration, facilitate legal movement between ASEAN countries, and combat people smuggling and trafficking.

## **Refugees**

There were two huge refugee movements - in the war-torn Afghanistan and when the Vietnam War ended- when more than 3 million people fled from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, many as "boat people," sailing long distances in overcrowded small boats, at risk of shipwreck and pirate attacks. Apart from these two huge refugee movements, Asia has seen many smaller exoduses smaller in numbers.

At least 50,000 North Koreans have fled to China, South Korea, and elsewhere. In 2005-2006, Muslims from both southern Thailand and southern Philippines fled to Malaysia to escape persistent internal conflict. The long civil war in Sri Lanka led to mass internal displacement as well as refugee outflows. The major political shifts in

Indonesia after 1998 led to massive internal displacements, as well as refugee flows from areas of civil war, such as Aceh. Again, recent peace settlements have allowed many people to return.

There are about 90,000 refugees registered with UNHCR in Malaysia and the number not registered – over twice that number. Ninety percent are from Myanmar. Refugees and asylum seekers lack formal status or the ability to obtain work permits under Malaysian law, making them vulnerable to trafficking. They have to fend for themselves and their families. Often their work is without proper supervision and protection, highly risky. They often have to work for less, and have no job security and legal protection.

By the early 21st century, Asia was beginning to see signs of increasing dependence on foreign workers for dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs as labour force growth slow in industrializing countries and local workers reject menial tasks.

### **In conclusion**

The new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in his opening statement at the Human Rights Council 27<sup>th</sup> Session recently was particularly concerned by the human rights situation of migrants around the world. He said, "We continue to see countless avoidable deaths of migrants in the course of their journeys; brutal forms of human trafficking; ill-treatment at borders; and prolonged detention in deplorable conditions. Many migrants, including documented migrants, also suffer forced labour or dangerous, exploitative or degrading working conditions, and these violations against migrants are frequently characterised by the victim's inability to gain redress from State officials.

Conditions for migrant workers in the fishing industry in Thailand were recently made notorious by media reports, but that industry is not unique. Australia's policy of off-shore processing for asylum seekers arriving by sea, and its interception and turning back of vessels, is leading to a chain of human rights violations. These root causes in the

countries of origin and destination must be tackled in a concerted manner, at the regional level.”

Dear Good Shepherd Mission Partners, the fight against modern slavery should matter to all of us. We have to combat big challenges. We are talking about real people and we stand for the dignity of all people. We realize the vision of a world that is more caring and more just. We all need to try harder and together we will surely make a difference!

Thank you.