

THE REPUBLIC OF

K  **OREA**

PERMANENT MISSION

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Statement by
H.E. Mr. LEE Sung - joo
Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Korea

to

the 94th IOM Council

Geneva, 29 November 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I would first like to extend my warmest congratulations to you for your election as Chairman of the IOM Council.

Mr. Chairman,

Today more than ever, with the rapid advancement of means of communication and transport, people move across borders, around the globe, both physically and virtually. More and more people cross frontiers to see the world as tourists, some to study abroad, others to do business, but many still to find a better life and improve their economic lot.

The growing trend of migration of the latter type, economically motivated migration, offers both challenges and opportunities. It offers challenges, because it tends to create a host of problems in sending, as well as in receiving countries. It quite often causes brain drain from the sending countries; while at the other end, in the receiving countries, it generates many social tensions and frictions as we often witness in many developed countries.

On the positive side, migration is a great opportunity given to the world to reduce inequalities and accelerate the development of the developing world. No doubt that labor migrants contribute to the economic development of their countries of origin by sending their wages back home, by acquiring and bringing back skills and technologies, and by providing better education to their children. In this sense, we believe that migration serves as a great equalizer in today's world.

Migration also favors the receiving countries and the global economy as a whole. It enables companies to recruit well-qualified work force from the developing countries. It rebalances the demand and supply of the labor in the global context and can also help redress the asymmetry between the new entrants and retirees in the labor market in many developed countries facing aging problems.

We should not let the negative aspects overshadow the positive sides of migration. In today's globalized world, there is no way to stop and reverse the trend. What we need to do is to minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive aspects so that the world gets full benefit of migration.

Mr. Chairman,

It is in this belief that the Republic of Korea opens its door to immigrants.

From the 1950's to the 1980's, the Republic of Korea was a net exporter of labor force. The movements were mostly out-going, with in-coming immigrant workers virtually non-existent. The trend began to change in the late 1980's. Since then, my country has been receiving a growing number of immigrant workers. Today, it has become a receiving country, we have more than one million immigrants and the number continues to grow.

In 2004, the Government introduced the employment permit system. By allowing companies to employ foreign workers for a fixed period, the system discourages them from employing illegal workers and provides better legal protection to foreign workers. Furthermore, in an effort to protect the rights of immigrants, the Council for the Protection of Human Rights and Interest of Foreign Nationals was established in 2006. The Council assists immigrants in filing claims and seeking remedies in cases of violation of their human rights including labor rights.

Just 10 days ago, on November 19, my country and IOM signed a Memorandum of Understanding related to the establishment of a migration research and training center in Korea. The center aims at providing advice to the governments in Asia in the area of international migration.

Mr. Chairman,

Another important source of incoming migration in my country today is marriage migration. The number of foreigners acquiring Korean

citizenship through marriage has been sharply increasing over the years. In 1990, only 1.2% of the total number of marriages involved a spouse from abroad. The percentage reached about 17% in 2006, bringing the total number of such marriages to around 200,000.

The central government and local authorities have taken a number of measures designed to facilitate the smooth integration of these people as well as to prevent potential problems such as social exclusion and discrimination against them and their children. One of those is the creation of more than 100 cultural centers where marriage migrants can learn Korean language, traditions, customs and legal system, etc. and get other useful assistance.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the rapid growth of migration is something inevitable in today's world. It is irreversible and we have to face it. Rather than resisting the trend and turning our backs to the problems that mass migration might bring to our society and its social system, we must seek ways to maximize the benefits of migration, so that we may have a triple win situation for the sending countries, for the receiving countries and for the immigrants themselves.

The Republic of Korea used to be a mono-cultural, mono-ethnic society. But with the influx of large numbers of immigrants every year, it is now rapidly transforming itself into a multicultural, multiethnic society. We need to continue to improve our policies – not only migration policies but also related social, cultural, education and economic policies – to better cope with the changing migration trends and patterns. In this regard, we highly appreciate the various activities conducted by the IOM, and also look forward to learning from the experiences of other countries.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.