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Statement by
H.E. Mr. Sihasak Phuanketkeow
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Thailand
to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 94th Session of the IOM Council
29 November 2007, Geneva

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Director General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, once again, to extend our sincere congratulations to you on your election to the Chairmanship of this 94th Session of the IOM Council.

Mr. Chairman,

Our discussions over the past few days have underscored the multi-faceted dimensions of the migration problem. We all recognized that, along with climate change and energy security, the issue of migration will be one of the most formidable challenges confronting us in the coming years.

More than ever, we need to be forward-looking so that we can better position ourselves, both individually and collectively, to manage the manifold challenges of migration. Just as important, we must consider how we can strengthen the pivotal role played by the IOM and how we can come up with a comprehensive migration policy that will adequately deal with this complex issue.

Indeed, the challenge of migration has impacted all of us. Unfortunately, some of us have borne the brunt more than others.

For many decades, Thailand has been at the forefront of efforts to deal with the migration issue, whether in terms of displaced persons, illegal immigrants or economic migrants. To this day, we are host to about two million migrants, most of whom are the result of irregular migration. Throughout this all, humanitarian considerations have been one of the main guiding principles in our policy.

At present, we have succeeded in regularizing and registering over 1.2 million undocumented migrant workers, ensuring the protection of their

human rights and providing them with access to medical coverage and other necessary welfare. We look to organizations such as the IOM to assist in this respect and appreciate the public health programs for migrant communities that the IOM and other organizations have jointly undertaken with relevant Thai authorities with considerable success.

Thailand has also spared no efforts to engage our neighbors in bilateral discussions and negotiations on migration management. We have concluded MOUs with Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, aimed at managing labour migration in a systematic manner. Such MOUs provide legal channels for recruiting workers from those countries into Thailand. We have also initiated long-term development projects to address the development gaps in the sub-region and generate job opportunities along the border areas, where most of the migrants come from.

As we all are very much aware, Mr. Chairman, at the heart of irregular migration is the scourge of people smuggling and human trafficking. We consider human trafficking to be the worst form of exploitation.

This year alone, Thailand hosted one international and one regional conference to promote efforts to combat trafficking in persons. We are also in the process of enacting new legislation specifically drafted to combat trafficking in persons, focusing on harsher punishment for offenders and stronger protection for victims of trafficking.

For Thailand, in particular, due to our geographic location and the existing socio-economic disparities within the region, the problem of migration is indeed a daily reality that must be addressed over the long term. It requires us to make many tough decisions, as we seek to strike a proper balance between ensuring protection and welfare for the migrants, safeguarding national security concerns, and maintaining good relations with our neighboring countries.

To this end, it is of the utmost importance to devise a comprehensive migration policy that deals with the issue in all its dimensions. Policy coherence on migration must be developed, not only at the national level, but also at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

Policy coherence was one of the main topics that was extensively brought up at the Policy Dialogue on International Migration and Development in East and Southeast Asia that was recently held in Bangkok and co-hosted by UNESCAP and the IOM. Amongst the many outcomes reached at the meeting, it was put forth that a major step that we could take in this direction is the development of a comprehensive national and regional database and research of demographic trends, labour market demands and migration flows that would

provide the basis for policy coordination and coherence at the national and regional levels.

Taking this opportunity, Thailand would like to propose that the IOM consider how it could assist in facilitating the efforts to work towards such a much-needed comprehensive database. If possible, it would also be very useful if the IOM could provide analysis in order to come up with recommendations for policy formulation.

Mr. Chairman,

Thailand very much looks forward to the second *Global Forum on Migration and Development* scheduled to be held in the Philippines next year. We hope that such meeting will not only build upon the high level dialogue in Brussels, but also focus on issues of particular relevance to the region, such as South-South migration and labour mobility, both regular and irregular, in the context of the growing economic integration within East Asia.

Mr. Chairman,

In facing the difficult challenges posed by migration, Thailand has enjoyed the strong support and commitment of the IOM. Looking ahead, we therefore believe it is imperative that the IOM be guided by strong, able and experienced leadership that not only reaches out but truly understands the magnitude and complexities of the migration challenge in all regions of the world.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.
