OHCHR INTERVENTION

Thank you for allowing me to make this short intervention on behalf of the UN Human Rights Office.

Approaching population and development in the Asia Pacific region through a human rights lens reminds us of the need to interrogate the structural sustainability of existing migration pathways. We are called to reflect on how to facilitate inclusive economies and safe, rights-based and dignified migration.

In addressing structural issues around migration, it is critically important to put in place human rights enhancing economies which centre people and planet in economic policies, investment decisions and business models. We know that there is a long-standing under investment in health and other public services in many of the countries from which migrants leave. Uneven outcomes in who benefits from wealth accumulation and decent jobs, stagnant economic growth as well a narrowing of fiscal space for social spending and limitations on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, these can all be factors that drive precarious migration.

The UN Human Rights Office has recently analysed the human rights basis of temporary migration programmes in the region, where millions of migrant workers move along these corridors usually to take up fixed-term, low-wage work in sectors such as agriculture, construction, care work or the service industry.

Our analysis revealed that the human rights challenges lying at the heart of low-wage temporary labour migration go beyond decent work deficits – though these are often themselves severe – to encompass the human rights vulnerability experienced by migrants

- who are unable to reunite with their family for years or risk losing their work contract,
- who are forced to accept substandard housing and sanitation services provided by their employer, agent or sub-contractor,
- who face reprisals and deportations for speaking out as human rights defenders.
Underlying this vulnerability is the challenge that migrants are often unable to petition for remedy because as non-citizens – particularly if they are undocumented - they cannot meaningfully access justice.

These inequalities and the precarious and extractive nature of many temporary labour migration programmes risk reducing people to disposable commodities by design or in practice.

Where do we go to find solutions to these complex challenges of contemporary migration in Asia and the Pacific?

As we celebrate its 75th anniversary this year, it is our belief that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a guide or a road map for a path away from inequality and towards justice and dignity for all. Perhaps most importantly, over these 75 years the UDHR has inspired vibrant, creative, activism and solidarity, empowering people – including all migrants regardless of their status or circumstance - to claim their rights and to engage actively in their communities and societies. It has called on governments to listen to, inform and meaningfully include migrants and their communities in policy and decision-making. Let us heed the call of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to address the interlinked, intergenerational and intersectional human rights challenges in our region.