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The statement of H.E. Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, the Hon'ble Adviser for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment

2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development

**Manila, Philippines
29 October 2008**

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of the Philippines for hosting the 2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development. We are confident that GFMD will find new impetus and direction here in Manila. The Philippines experience will offer us strategic insight on the linkages between migration and development. I am personally thankful to His Excellency Esteban Conejos, Chair of the 2nd GFMD for his tireless efforts to make this forum a grand success. This also affords me an opportunity to thank my esteemed colleague His Excellency Dr. Alberto Romulo, Secretary of State, for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

Excellencies,

As we all know, migration and remittances have strong developmental impact. Official remittance into Bangladesh exceeded USD 6 billion last year. This is close to 7% of our GNI. While remittances are an important source of income, it usually comes at a huge cost – the cost that we tend to ignore. Migrant workers spend amounts – often beyond their means – to find a job abroad. It takes two to three years, if not more, to recoup their initial investment. This marks a serious violation as employers usually bear hiring and relocation costs in standard employment practices. We must urgently address this issue if we are to maximize the development impacts of migration. GFMD offers us the platform to identify the steps to eradicate this malpractice in temporary labor migration. If migration workers should at all pay for their placement, we must agree on a ceiling rate, not exceeding their one month's salary, to prevent exploitation of migrant workers.

We must, at the same time, look at mechanisms to make the contracts of migrant workers fair, transparent and enforceable. Pervasive information gaps and false expectations often characterize employment contracts of the migrant workers. Among other reasons, this becomes possible in absence of a legally

binding minimum wage in the countries of destination. Recruiters can offer false promises of higher pay and benefits to unsuspecting migrants. Migrant workers - when they fall victims to such falsehood – can hardly afford a legal action, either in their own countries or in the countries they migrate to. It is critically important that labor sending and receiving countries work together – under the aegis of GFMD - to set realistic minimum wages for the migrant workers for all combinations of skill and experience. We must strive to ensure that migrant workers are fully aware of the minimum wage rates to prevent false expectations. There should also be concerted efforts to provide incentives for timely return and re-integration of the migrant workers. Host countries should consider offering them repatriation bonus to encourage and facilitate their timely return.

Excellencies,

It is equally important that the host countries uphold and practice the principal of 'national treatment' for migrant workers. In countries of destination, they take up jobs that the domestic workers often refuse to perform. In addition to meeting the shortage in labor supply, migrant workers often also support pension schemes and social security programs in the host countries. They seldom stay long enough to enjoy the benefits of their contribution. These are ample justifications that migrant workers deserve compensations at par with the domestic workers of the host countries. Both human rights perspectives and economic considerations would also support full 'national treatment' of foreign workers.

We must also uphold the 'principle of non-discrimination' in international labor migration. Destination countries must not discriminate among the source countries. Migration opportunities should not be linked to political considerations. We should pursue to create an even playing field in temporary labor migration to ensure that only skill and experience of the migrant workers and the forces of supply and demand determine migration flows. Ensuring equal opportunities for all prospective migrants will help us significantly prevent irregular migration and human trafficking.

Excellencies,

Irregular and illegal migration can gravely undermine the development potentials of a source country. Irregular migrants seldom manage to recover their migration costs and send remittances back home. Here in GFMD, we must fully recognize the nexus between regular and irregular migration. When the opportunities for legal migration become severely constrained or when prospective migrants of a particular country face discrimination, it often encourages illegal movement of people. It is therefore an imperative that we

enhance the opportunities for legal migration. It is also important that the living and working conditions in destination countries are favorable for the migrant workers. If migrant workers face discrimination or difficulties, they may look for opportunities to migrate to a third country, either through regular or irregular channels. Increasingly, traditional destination countries are becoming transit countries. We must pay due attention to this phenomenon.

Excellencies,

As you are perhaps aware, the Government of Bangladesh presented a number of concrete proposals at the 1st Global Forum on Migration and Development in Brussels last year. Our proposal considered the possibility of involving commercial banks, not just to offer loans to the migrants and their families but also to ensure that workers receive the right contract. Involving banks, we believe, will also help augment the flow of remittance through formal channels. One of our large commercial banks has already piloted a project on this. We had also proposed to develop rating and performance evaluation mechanisms to help migrants distinguish between good and bad recruiters. The challenge before us is to align the incentives, both in terms of carrots and sticks, so that recruiters do not engage in bad practices.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude by reposing full confidence in the deliberations of the 2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development. I am sure that the roundtable discussions, over the course of next two days, will yield concrete outcomes and strengthen the linkages between migration and development. We are also hopeful that the lessons learnt at the GFMD will encourage all of us to promote and protect the rights of the migrant workers everywhere.

Thank you.