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IOM International Organization for Migration

## **Acknowledge the Benefits of Migration and Share that Vision, says IOM on International Migrants Day**

**GENEVA - 18 December 2010** - Governments need to open their eyes to the benefits of migration and share that vision with the public at large, says the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as it marks International Migrants Day.

All too often now, the positive contributions migrants make to society are being called into question as many governments adopt short-sighted attitudes, presenting them as a burden to convalescing economies or a drain on the welfare state.

Yet, evidence of migrants' contributions abound. A study published earlier this year by University College London showed that newcomers from Eastern Europe paid 37 per cent more in taxes than they received in benefits and from public services in 2008-09. Many more migrants helped to provide critical public services as doctors, nurses or cleaners in the National Health Service. Another recent piece of research highlighted the positive entrepreneurial impact immigrant communities have on the British economy.

In the United States, native-born Americans gain an estimated \$ 37 billion a year from immigrants' participation in the US economy, according to the President's Council of Economic Advisers. More than one in 10 self-employed business people in the U.S is an immigrant.

“Despite the evidence, few issues still elicit stronger reaction than that of migration. From the floors of parliaments to city streets to discussions around dinner tables, there are heated debates about migrants' impact on national identity, security, employment, health and social welfare systems – all those things that make up the fabric of a society,” says IOM Director General William Lacy Swing. “Unfortunately, many of these discussions are based on emotions and myths and not on social and economic reality. Migration now and in the future will be driven by global economic, social and demographic trends that can no longer be ignored.”

According to IOM's recently launched World Migration Report, international migrants could number 405 million by 2050 if migration continues to grow at the same pace as during the last 20 years.

One of the reasons for this steep rise will be the population decline in the world's industrialized countries, an expected drop of nearly 25 percent by 2050. This will significantly increase the demand for migrant workers at a time when the labour force in developing countries will increase from 2.4 billion in 2005 to 3.6 billion in 2040.

In many countries, migrant workers at all skills levels will be needed for knowledge and innovation as well as for jobs that nationals cannot or do not want to fill. These include health care, looking after children and the elderly, public services, the service industry as well as agriculture and construction.

The World Bank estimates that if countries with declining populations allowed their workforce to grow by only 3 percent by letting in an extra 14 million migrant workers between 2001-2025, the world would be \$356 billion a year better off -- with the majority of these funds flowing to developing countries.

"These numbers aren't just about economics. They need to be placed in a human context too. Economic growth equals human and social development and security," explains Swing. "In many parts of the world, migrants' remittances have already done much to lift communities from extreme poverty, put food on the table, given families a home and children an education. All these things mean a better future for them and as a result, for the rest of the world too."

Migration is here to stay and governments have to choose between adopting a "high road" or a "low road" scenario to manage migration.

The "low road scenario" is one of status quo based on stereotypes, fear, and short-term political expediency. It is characterized by restrictive migration policies and the paucity of dialogue on migration, at national, regional and international levels.

At the opposite end of the policy spectrum, a "high road" scenario would heighten recognition of migration as an integral part of the global economy and of migrants as vital constituents to any full recovery from the current economic crisis. It would implement policies that better meet increasing demands for labour migration, protect the rights of migrants, promote regular dialogue between countries of origin and destination and highlight the economic and social contribution of migrants both in home and host countries.

"The challenge is to find humane and equitable solutions that reconcile people's desire to migrate with the national sovereignty of States on population movements. Cooperation is not only essential to ensure the rights of migrants are respected but also to migrants respecting the culture and laws of host countries," Swing concludes.