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Submitted by: Sisters of Mercy, Dominican Leadership Conference and Sisters of Notre Dame non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

People on the Move: a need to include them where they are

There are an estimated 200 million external migrants, 16 million refugees and asylum seekers, and 26 million IDPs who constitute some of the groups who have moved for work, safety, or as a result of poverty, conflict or climate change. There is virtually no country that is unaffected by human migration. Leaving a marginal existence in countries of origin, migrants move to improve their lives by integrating themselves into a new society in the countries of destination, who most often benefit from migrants' contributions. Migrants are often disappointed when they are marginalized yet again.

Migration *can* be a rich source of cultural sharing, a source of development for the countries of origin (due to remittances), and a rich source of labor and cultural exchange for receiving countries whose populations are aging. When efforts are made to integrate migrants into the communities in which they live and work, everyone benefits.

However, where external migrants are criminalized by legislation which does not conform to the current reality of labor needs, there results increasing xenophobia. Xenophobia leads host country communities to alienate newcomers. Increased numbers of migrants moving internally puts pressure on urban areas. As it is difficult to absorb large numbers of people in already well populated city centers, these newcomers also experience, alienation and discrimination.

Cross cutting issues such as gender, organized crime, climate change, financial, food, and fuel crises make it clear that migration can no longer be ignored. To do so, would place societies in great peril, and would constitute an egregious violation of human rights. Indeed, both the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, particularly articles 13, 14 and 15, as well as the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* place migration within the context of human

rights. When migrants' rights are honored they are free to contribute to the communities of which they are a part.

Systemic Causes of Migration

A decision to migrate almost always implies a society's/ government's inability to provide for its people; migration is often not a freely made decision at all. Migration occurs where people feel forced to flee *from* something: armed conflict and genocide; crimes against humanity/human rights violations; inability to feed one's family due to rising food prices, food shortages, climate-change-induced agricultural disasters; inability to provide for the health and well-being of one's family. In short, society/government has failed in its responsibility to provide an enabling and inclusive environment for significant numbers of its members.

Poverty is the leading cause of migration worldwide. With the global financial crisis causing many to fall back into ever deeper poverty, worldwide migration patterns are expected to expand.

Many other factors result in people leaving their homes. Environmental refugees flee from disasters caused by climate change. Some migrants are recruited to fill jobs in other countries, either because the jobs are unwanted by host country workers or because the host country's demographics (for example, aging population, low fertility rates) require an influx of workers.

In all cases, whether they move within their own borders or internationally, migrants are frequently met with extreme forms of social exclusion and marginalization. Large groups of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources (education, housing, employment, healthcare, and democratic participation) that are normally available to members of society and which are key to social integration.

Social Inclusion

Dignity and justice for each and every human being is the promise of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Wherever people live and in whatever sort of society, one of their basic rights is to be allowed to take a full part in the life of their community. While the reality of migration makes this extremely challenging, it is nonetheless important and possible. Participation means that the voices of migrants who are so often excluded need to be heard and heeded, and not silenced by "borders."

Planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies by all segments of society, including migrants, are essential to any integral process of social inclusion. To be deprived of this level of participation, is literally to become "nameless" and lost to society. As a consequence the society is deprived of the rich contributions new groups of people have to offer to its own ongoing development.

It is, therefore, incumbent on the part of the host country, to address barriers such as the, cultural distinctions, racism, need for language acquisition and other educational issues, so that new migrants can not only be aware of and assert their human rights, but also contribute to their new communities. It is clear that the protection of migrants' rights will enhance the development gains to be reaped from migration. To quote Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, "Respect for migrants' rights actually contributes to economic and social development in sending and receiving countries. Migrants who have opportunities for decent and legal work contribute more to development than those who are exploited."¹

Two of the most essential elements in enabling people to lift themselves out of poverty and in advancing the overall development goals of any country, be it a sending or receiving country, are decent work and basic education. Serious investment in these both would reduce the conditions which force people to migrate and enhance their contributions to whatever society in which they find themselves.

Individuals and non-governmental organizations often reach out to assist migrants with their many needs. A practical way to foster their greater inclusion in the host communities would be to sponsor *inter-agency meetings*, perhaps on a quarterly basis. These would offer an opportunity for all organizations serving the residents in a particular area to come together to share information; to plan community gatherings for the well-being of the entire community – newcomers, as well as long-standing residents; and to analyze community needs with the residents, thereby fostering a sense of participation, and working together for the common good.

Recommendations for Governments:

- Since poverty is one of the leading causes of migration, governments need to address systemic causes of migration by eliminating discriminatory trade and economic policies, agricultural subsidies, and onerous debt conditionalities. These are counter-productive for poverty reduction and sustainable development and undermine economic stability, thus exacerbating outward migration. Honoring ODA commitments is essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This would alleviate the need to migrate.
- To fulfill their responsibility to ensure that migrants' rights are protected, governments should enforce the monitoring of procedures and practices of departments responsible for immigration, law enforcement, and social welfare agencies, against the benchmarks of human rights law, international conventions and national laws. Continuing the task of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the issues of documentation for work would decrease criminalization of migrants and the increasing tendency to xenophobia.

¹ International Migration & Human Rights, Global Migration Group, October 2008, p. 80.

- In order to promote the decent work agenda, governments also need to provide for the supervision of fair working and living conditions of migrants, working hours and provision of safety devices, including compensation for injuries and payment of just wages. This will free migrants to actively participate in community decision making for the common good of all.
- Governments need to ensure the necessary budget allocations to assist education departments and NGOs to create or enhance already existing programs for the following:
 1. In- school acquisition of the host country language for migrant children;
 2. Adult education language acquisition programs for men and women for social interchange, as well as for the workplace;
 3. Intercultural programs which foster the mutual appreciation by both the newcomers and local residents of the richness of one another's traditions and customs.

Statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council: