

Migrant representative Speaker

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Good Morning,

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Bijaya Rai Shrestha a returnee migrant, the Founding Chair of Aaprabasi Mahila Kamdar Samuha (AMKAS) meaning Returnee women migrant's Group from Nepal. AMKAS Nepal is a member of Migrant Forum in Asia, Migrant Women Forum, Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women and Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

It is a great honor and opportunity for me, a returnee women migrant to be here standing side by side with the opportunity to speak after the opening speech from the **Director General of IOM and Coordinator, Mr. Antonio Vitorino in this Annual Meeting of UN Network on Migration Network**. Therefore, I would like to first thank the UN Network on Migration for this opportunity. I assure you that, I'm here not as an individual from Nepal but as voice of millions of women migrants around the globe because the problems and the discriminations that we face as women are similar and thus, we need to fight together.

It has always been good to hear strong declarations, outcome documents and commitments in high level forums but situations of migrants are still the same especially women migrants. Therefore, its high time there is need of more coordination and collaborations. There need to be improvement in the tools and strategies as the Director General mentioned in his opening speech.

When I started my journey as a returnee migrant trying to organize returnee women migrants to fight for the rights of women migrants in Nepal in 2002, migration was never an issue though huge number of women were being trafficked in the name of migration for foreign employment, especially to the Gulf countries as domestic workers. They were abused, and exploited sexually and physically due to their undocumented status with many other reasons like lack of information, unskilled and language problems. The discriminatory travel restrictions/bans for women in the name of protection was one of the main reason women migrants were forced to migrate as undocumented workers which made them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation later denied to Government initiated facilities on their return.

Even our migration policies and acts were very gender discriminatory. It was UN Women who came up with the program 'Empowering Returnee women migrants in Nepal' in 2002. Almost all stakeholders including media portrayed women migrants in a very negative way or were stigmatized. We started uniting ourselves through this program collaborating and networking with likeminded organizations and Trade Unions. The Global Compact on Migration has come up to support the gender-responsive implementations for example, the Progress Declaration of the First International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) this year specifically which calls for:

- The protection of the human and labor rights of migrant women, particularly migrant women workers
- Gender-responsive national implementation of the GCM
- The participation of women in policy making which is still very rare

Our work taught us that working through networking is the strongest strategy to achieve our goals. We slowly started being heard nationally and internationally. With our collective work we have proved not only to our government but internationally that we women migrants are also the contributors to the national economy. Government of the CoD also have to know that we women are equally contributing to the CoD with our cheap labor leaving behind our families to look after their family. We also have been successful in several policy changes nationally and internationally. Now we can see lots of changes happening all around the globe, Government of CoO and CoD are coming together to come up with laws to improve the lives of migrants.

Recently I attended a Asia Gulf Interregional Dialogue in Doha, Qatar as a panelist in a session with the Government of Kuwait which I felt that it was my biggest achievement to be interacting and urging directly with the Government of CoD. An MOU has been signed between MFA and MOL of Qatar allowing MFA to collaborate with the Ministry in facilitating access to and effective use of complaints mechanism in Qatar. Here, I urge the UN Network on Migration that we need such forums to improve the lives of migrants.

However, women migrants are still more vulnerable than men especially from Nepal, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka where laws has been introduced but implementation is still very weak with still existing discriminatory policies that restrict women's migration, perpetuate harmful cultural attitudes, and inhibit women's access to employment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Therefore, to conclude I have some recommendations to the UN Network on Migration:

I. Pressurize CoO to lift legal restrictions on women's migration for work, and instead focus efforts on promoting safe channels for migration and fair recruitment practices.

II. Ensure that foreign labor migrant workers are registered and have full access to comprehensive social security schemes whilst overseas and upon return and make dedicated efforts to reach out to and include those with an irregular migration status.

III. Support and promote the self-organizing of women migrant workers both in CODs and COOs

IV. Invest resources into a public awareness campaign at the grassroots level that highlights the valuable contributions of migrant women workers, and tackles harmful stereotypes and the stigma facing returnee migrant women workers.

V. Establish access to employment schemes for all women workers regardless of their status and implement a skills certification process for returning migrant women workers as part of this scheme.

VI. Migrant Women Domestic workers being the most vulnerable facilitate both CoO and CoD to ratify ILO C 189

VII. The UN Network on Migration to continue providing spaces with grassroots organizations and governments for the implementation of the GCM