

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

--

**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY
18 December 2008**

The world's more than 200 million migrants are especially vulnerable to the financial downturn shaking the global economy. The crisis in markets has put them at greater risk of destitution, stigmatization, discrimination and abuse. Reports of layoffs and lower remittances only begin to tell the story of the human suffering that this crisis has wrought.

Moreover, migration policies are growing ever more restrictive. We continue to see the criminalization of irregular migrants. And all too often, migrants are being dealt with primarily from the perspective of security. There is a growing tendency in many parts of the world to subject them to mandatory or prolonged detention even though human rights law says that detention should be the exception, not the rule.

To save migrants from abuse, and allow them to contribute to development in their home and receiving countries, we must acknowledge them as human beings whose rights, like those of everyone else, must be protected. The best way to do this is to reaffirm the fundamental role of international human rights law as a framework to govern national and international policy.

We commemorate International Migrants Day this year while marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its visionary commitment to dignity and justice for everyone, everywhere, always. We can only fully give meaning to the Declaration if we recognize that regardless of an individual's immigration status, fundamental human rights are non-negotiable and the treatment of migrants, regular and irregular alike, must always conform to international standards.

I urge all member States to become parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, which is the most comprehensive international framework on this issue.

People will continue to move from one place to another to live and work. Only by ensuring their protection can we live up to the Declaration's recognition that "the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".