

18 December 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on International Migrant's Day**

Three years ago, December 18 was declared International Migrant's Day by the United Nations General Assembly, in recognition of the role of some 150 million persons living outside their country of birth or citizenship. Through past decades, many states have experienced a large rise in the number of migrants and estimates by the International Migration Organization shows that the international community has to be prepared for a further huge increase in the future.

Migration is the manifestation of the very natural desire of people to exercise freedom of movement. It has, like all complex and crosscutting phenomena, positive and negative aspects. However, there is often very little recognition of the positive contributions of migrant workers to the development of home as well as host countries. The value of remittances of migrant workers to their country of origin plays a significant role in some economies. Also the transfer of knowledge and culture that the migrants bring, has not been given full recognition yet.

Nevertheless, migration, which is often driven by poverty, armed conflict or lack of human rights in some parts of the world, raises many questions and problems for the international community. Many countries have to deal with a situation where a large proportion of migrants are irregular and unauthorized. Under such circumstances, migrants often become victims of organized crime and traffickers. Women and children especially represent the most vulnerable group. It is therefore necessary to tackle the issue of trafficking in women and children and their sexual exploitation on international and national level. But even if the movement of migrants is legal, migrant workers face high levels of discrimination and exploitation. They are frequently subjected to abuse and violence, often simply because of their different cultural identity or gender or because of racism and xenophobic attitudes in host countries. Another issue is that migrants sometimes face severe obstacles concerning the right to leave and return to their home country.

Dialogue and cooperation between all the involved states is a necessary precondition of managing migration with dignity. The debate on migration should not polarize the international community since the protection of human rights of migrants is not incompatible with either the exercise of sovereignty by States or the practical implementation of national security. To see it happen, there has to be a legal framework. The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families provides one such example, which covers some of the aspects. Also, national legislation on this subject has to be strengthened and many countries have to formulate effective strategies to combat the spread of illegal migrant smuggling networks. Effective policies are needed to prevent illegal migration, starting in the countries of origin via

transit countries to destination countries. This is absolutely essential if we are serious about halting the spread of organized transnational crime networks.

We have a long way to solve all the problems in connection with migration. Let us on this occasion reaffirm our commitment towards overcoming the challenges on a basis that respects the right of migrants as well as the rule of law.