

Statement by
William Lacy Swing
Director General, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Nagoya, Japan

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGN NATIONALS AND
THEIR INTEGRATION IN JAPAN:

Reflections on Japan's and Other Countries' Experiences and Practices in the Integration of
Foreign Residents as Community Members

Saturday, 28 February 2009

I. Japan / IOM partnership

This symposium is the latest initiative in a long history of collaboration between the Government of Japan and IOM that began nearly three decades ago with the resettlement of Indochinese refugees. By the time that programme ended in 2006, more than 3,000 newcomers had made Japan their home through family unification. Perhaps the best starting point for a programme to integrate foreign residents is the recognition of migrants contribution - both actual and potential to the development of host and origin countries.

Over the years, Japan has addressed other migration challenges, from labor shortages in manufacturing, agriculture, fishing and care giving sectors, to tackling human trafficking and refugee resettlement.

Japan increasingly recognizes the need of integration measures to facilitate the social participation of migrants as responsible and productive community members. This must be a two-way process where the members of the host society and the migrants both adjust to each other, while respecting cultural diversity.

IOM supports Japan's efforts to meet these challenges; this is done through direct assistance to the victims of human trafficking; Japanese Filipino Children (JFCs) and their mothers; and the newly launched refugee resettlement programme. Migration based on humanitarian considerations is a very important means for a country such as Japan to promote human security both internally and internationally. In the same vein the Government of Japan recently took an important step with its Pilot programme to resettle 30 Myanmar refugees a year for 3 years starting in 2009. This is an unusually comprehensive approach to resettlement, containing most if not all of elements necessary for full socio-economic integration of the migrants into Japanese society.

II. Response to the financial crisis

This experience will be important in the context of the current financial crisis, an economic downturn of historical proportions that poses significant challenges for migrant, as well as receiving and sending countries. As in many other developed countries, there are increased reports of displaced migrant workers in Japan.

We should all be concerned about the possible effects of the global financial crisis on migrants: loss of jobs, precipitous decline in remittances (which at present amount to 3 times more than all foreign aid); a reduction in foreign aid, and most seriously, the emergence of a sort of attitude “Human or local labor protectionism that borders on Xenophobia.

It is fitting that this year’s symposium in the Aichi Prefecture---host to the second largest migrant population in Japan after Tokyo; in active numbers the ratio of foreign residents in Aichi is approximately 3%, compared with the national average of 1.7%. In addition, Aichi is the first local government to start vocational training for foreign residents after the financial crisis began.

The current global financial crisis makes the issues of migrant integration more urgent and relevant than ever. In this regard, I am encouraged by ongoing efforts in Japan to enhance safety nets for affected, unemployed migrants.

At the national level, for example, the newly established Office for the Coordination of Policies on Foreign Residents under the Cabinet Office is working on the formulation of policy and assistance measures. We are pleased and honored to have with us today, a representative from the Cabinet Office, who will share with us the latest policy developments.

In addition to the national safety net measures, local authorities have been working hard to ensure that unemployed foreign residents and their families receive social security benefits, and that they have access to accommodations, micro credits, child allowance, and other social services.

This leads me to a third point,

III. Community Approaches

In Japan, common migration challenges have led to the formation of networks among local governments sharing migration challenges. One such organization is the Council of Cities with a Large Foreign Population (26 cities and towns) another is the Council for the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence (7 prefectures and one city).

Aichi prefecture and a number of cities in Aichi are active members of these initiatives. While the community-based approach plays a significant role in migrant integration, international experiences demonstrate the need for a comprehensive national migration policy covering the full spectrum of migration issues.

The latest declaration from the Council of Cities with a Large Foreign Population emphasizes this point. The Council of Cities declaration urges the national government to establish a new agency which can take strong leadership over different ministries in the formulation of comprehensive migration policy.

IV. The need for national migration policy

At the national governmental level, here and I dare say in many other countries, different aspects of migration are handled by different institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, to mention a few.

Coordination among different government ministries on multi-sectoral migration issues is a complicated but essential task in any country. In addition, political leaders, the business community, media, NGOs, and public opinions also have key roles to play in migration policy formulation.

There are increased and hopeful signs of the emergence of migration policy direction in Japan. Leading politicians, the business community (Nippon Keidanren, the Chamber of Commerce) as well as experts and academic experts have begun discussing and contemplating a national framework with implementing measures to manage migration to Japan in a more sustainable and humane manner.

For example, "Japanese-model Immigration Policy", proposed by the Parliamentarians League on Promotion of Acceptance of Foreign Human Resources, considers migrants as future Japanese citizen; promotes long-term migration by granting migrants the right for family-reunification; strategic human resource development schemes; and addresses the imperative of "humanitarian migration".

The IOM believes that respect for human rights is a key component of reasonable migration governance. Human rights of migrants, whatever their situation, status or classification, have to be fully respected and promoted if migration is to contribute positively to the development of countries of origin and destination. Protection of the rights of migrants is necessary at all stages of the migration cycle; all forms of discrimination, intolerance, racism, and xenophobia, must be firmly rejected.

The human rights of migrants featured prominently at the Manila Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in October 2008. Human rights of migrants will again be a key issue no doubt at this year's Athens GFMD in November - the site of the next Global Forum. Leadership and public diplomacy are required to support effectively the human rights of migrants.

Overall, successful integration benefits both the migrants and the host community. To benefit from migration, government needs to give high priority to integration policies and practices. As always, IOM will follow policy developments in Japan on migration and integration with great interest and with a view to assisting as appropriate. We stand ready to support you and the Government of Japan as you move forward to integrate foreign residents as community members.