

Global Forum for Migration and Development

Regional Consultation: Abu Dhabi Dialogue

Closing Plenary; 13th of July 2020

***Remarks by Mr. Wilfredo B. Prilles, Jr., City Planning and Development Coordinator,
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Local governments and global governance of migration

- On behalf of my principal, Mayor Nelson Legacion, we are honored to have been invited to participate in the regional consultation organized by the GFMD and this year's host, the United Arab Emirates, especially Abu Dhabi
- We congratulate and appreciate the effort of GFMD to establish the Mayor's Mechanism as a means of giving a voice to city governments in the conversation and dialogue over migration and development.
- Sometimes, effective frameworks exist at national level, but they are not translated into local policy measures. But there are also good practices, especially at the city level, that need to be looked at. For instance, in the Bicol region, Naga City was given the opportunity to share its good practices to around 18 other local authorities, including the six other cities in the region. As a result, local and regional institutions for M&D were established, with strong civil society organization representation, to improve government and give migrants a voice in decision making processes.
- But not all cities and local authorities are equal. There are many others which need to recognize the value of improving migration governance, creating relevant institutions, developing responsive and rights-based policies. A system through which the sharing of good practices in M&D would be a good way to start.
- It is for this reason that spaces like the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) become critical and essential to achieve a coherent and effective global framework for migration governance that links it consistently with development efforts.
- And the establishment of the Mayor's Mechanism within GFMD, it bears repeating, is a truly wise decision. I am hopeful that in the next rounds, city mayors are given the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Mayor's Mechanism, represented by enlightened city governments like those from Ecuador, the Philippines, as well as other countries that have hosted the regular Mayor Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development.

Labour Migration breakout session

- Last Monday, I had to opportunity to participate in one of the breakout sessions, which focused on labor migration in the context of changing employment landscapes
- Michelle Leighton of the ILO has done a fantastic job of summarizing the key points that emerged from the session, and I do not have to repeat her excellent summary. However, there are two points that I need to underscore from the perspective of a city representative, based from the passionate discussion I heard, especially in the context of the ongoing Covid19 pandemic.
- One, I agree that once this pandemic is over, notwithstanding its huge impact on nations and their citizens, migration will resume. Nonetheless, we have an obligation to minimize the pain being caused by Covid19, especially to informal migrant workers that were forced to repatriate. Let me therefore reiterate the points made by CSO representatives from

Bahrain, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, among others, to make sure that these returning migrants are able to collect the pay due them from their employers. Receiving countries should take the necessary steps to make sure that this is carried out as a form of affirmative action in favor of these distressed workers.

- Secondly, if and when migration resumes after Covid19, it is incumbent upon both sending and receiving countries to make sure that migrants wanting to go back to the latter are given the necessary support to make it happen. A “fastlane mechanism” that will facilitate labour migration should therefore be instituted to make this happen.

But should the repatriated migrants decide that staying put is in their best interest, sending and receiving countries – especially the former – should ensure that they are given every opportunity to reintegrate themselves in the local society and economy.

- Which brings me to my third and final point: cities are bearing the brunt of the forced repatriation of returning migrants because of Covid19. In Naga City, for instance, our Covid19 dashboard shows that since the Philippines’ biggest island (Luzon) went into a hard lockdown, touted to be one of the longest in the world, around 1,500 former residents have gone home, including around 150 overseas Filipinos who were displaced and are now out of work.
- To mitigate the impact of that lockdown, we have to work with local CSOs to form a humanitarian group that provided direct food and other forms of assistance to the less well-off of the city’s 50,000 or so households, so that the limited combined resources of government and the private sector are maximized.
- Right now, our primary challenge is to revive the city economy. We have come up with a Covid19 post-quarantine action plan that precisely tries to do that. We have streamlined the list of interventions needed to support the plan. Only to find out that our city budget, already constrained by revenue shortfalls estimated at around 30-40% of the total, can only fund 10% of these interventions.
- In this respect, perhaps it is worthwhile to explore the possibility of international humanitarian organizations to work directly with city governments like ours, preferably through their local counterparts, if only to tide us over the end of this global pandemic.

Fostering partnerships

- In closing, allow us once again to congratulate the organizers of this regional consultation, specifically the GFMD and the Abu Dhabi emirate, for giving cities the space needed to articulate our aspirations, especially in the context of the Covid19 pandemic.
- It is said that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 10 which includes a unique focus on migration, will rise or fall in cities. The unique value of the GFMD resides on its multi-level and multi-stakeholder nature, and having city mayors within the dialog is truly a concrete positive step in the right direction.
- It is also said that united we rise, but divided we fall. It is therefore our hope that we will continue to work together towards the SDGs, including Goal No. 10, because given the problems we are facing, made even worse by this pandemic, there is no other viable alternative in sight.