INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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International migration has increased in magnitude and become considerably more complex with globalization and the convergence of multiple threats, including the global financial and economic crises, food insecurity, climate generated humanitarian disasters and displacements and identity conflicts. There is a growing realization that migration is potentially among the greatest global challenges of the day. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has pointed out, the plight of migrants, and particularly migrants in an irregular situation, is one of the most critical human rights concerns,¹ although the human rights issues tend not to receive the warranted attention. The UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council,² the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, the Treaty Bodies and the High Commissioner for Human Rights have drawn attention to different aspects of the human rights dimension of

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  The paper does not necessarily reflect the views and positions of the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights or the United Nations.

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¹ See statement of the High Commissioner on International Migrants’ Day, 18 December 2009 (Human rights of migrants remain out of sight).

² E.g., the Human Rights Council held a panel discussion on the situation of migrants in detention during its 12th session on 17 September 2009. See HRC Resolution 11/9 which outlines the objectives of the panel discussion.
international migration. These efforts demonstrate the need for a more coherent and systematic perspective that fully integrates human rights in public dialogue and policy framework and processes on international migration in order to promote sound, equitable, humane and lawful conditions of migration that protects the rights of migrants at all stages of the migration process. A framework in which rights are respected and protected will ensure the integrity of human rights but also contribute towards a sustainable global framework on international migration.

Estimates from UNDP and other organizations that have carried out extensive studies provide a glimpse of the trends and issues in migration flows. According to the Human Development Report 2009 (“HDR 2009”), international migration has substantially increased in recent years to a truly global phenomenon with more than 200 million people estimated to live outside their countries of origin. While discussions typically focus on migration from developing to developed countries, the Human Development Report indicates that the overwhelming majority of people who move do so inside their own country. The report estimates that approximately 740 million people are internal migrants – almost four times as many as those who have moved internationally. Among those who have moved across borders, just over a third moved from a developing to a developed country – fewer than 70 million people. Again, according to the HDR 2009, most of the world’s 200 million international migrants moved from one developing country to another, or between developed
