

# **Globalization, Migration, and Human Security: Challenges in Northeast Asia**

United Nations University, Tokyo

Monday October 6, 2003

Session 1

Globalization, Migration, and Human Security

## **Globalization, Migration, and Human Security**

**Ramesh Thakur, Senior Vice Rector, United Nations University, Tokyo**

Globally, people are on the move. In Northeast Asia, as elsewhere in the world, this flow of peoples in large numbers is having an impact on politics, economics, culture, identity, and even security. In other words, globalization, migration, and human security have become intertwined. And in turn, we must consider them in an integrated manner, in order to understand the implications of these human flows, to maximize their benefits, and also to respond to their challenges. Looking outside Northeast Asia provides us some interesting insights. Today, one in five Canadian workers and one in four Australian workers are foreign-born. Over one million Indians in the United States comprise a meager 0.1 percent of India's population, but earn the equivalent of an astonishing 10 percent of India's national income and are beginning to flex their muscles in domestic US politics.

If you think back to the impact of the IT sector during the decade of the boom economy in the United States and then think of the extent to which Chinese and Indian immigrants in particular underpinned the IT sector and still do in the United States, then the question may well be asked: "What would have been the shape of the U.S. economy today and therefore even the role of the United States as a global power today without these large numbers of immigrants in the IT sector over this period of time. In contrast, at the other extreme, only one in five hundred Japanese workers, one in five in Canada, one in four in Australia, one in five hundred in Japan were born outside this country. As we know Japan is an Asian society, it is likely to experience a shortage, sometimes severe and critical, in some sectors of the employment market in the years to come. Yet successive governments have chosen not to open up the labor market to outside workers. Partly as a result of this, the country remains insular and those immigrants that have

arrived in this country have triggered a debate on the impact of foreigners in Japan. We just have to be here for one week to see that in the papers, in this city.

Can migration from countries with a bulging young population and an excess of labor force solve the problem of graying society and worker shortages in other countries, including but not limited to Japan? A special survey on migration in The Economist ten months ago noted that the potential gains from liberalizing migration “dwarf those from removing barriers to world trade.” Yet we know from the experience of Japan and other Asian countries that human flows are not and can not be treated simply as a market commodity. The movement of people raises questions of security and cultural integration. Some societies are more open than others to human inflows. Some societies are taught to fear outsiders and blame ills that befall them on foreigners. Even in advanced and developed countries, like Australia and Japan, the media and some political leaders exploit or incite the fear of foreigners sometimes for political gain. They reflect, articulate, and in turn, feed upon deep-rooted paranoia, based on ignorance and prejudice about the other, of human nature that is homogenous by instinct, seeking solace and comfort in sameness.

Population movements have been taking place since the beginning of time. If human beings were not genetically programmed to travel vast distances, then according to the best scientific estimates of where we all originated from, we would still be living in Africa. Whether our restlessness is routed in curiosity, about lands on the other side of the hill or the ocean, or whether we seek to escape destitution and persecution at home, or even whether we simply go astray, large scale movements of peoples have been intrinsic to human nature and an integral part of the human story. Mostly the journeys produce happy endings; sometimes they end in tragedy.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the border of each state and to leave any country, including his own and to return to his country. Orderly international migration has positive impacts, both on the communities of origin and of destination. Migration also can facilitate the transfer of skills and does contribute to cultural enrichment. Today however, the sheer magnitude of the phenomenon is creating social strain and political stress in many regions.

International migration with its web of demographic, social, economic, and political consequences, is therefore increasingly at the forefront of national, regional, and international agendas. From Europe to Oceania, the entry and treatment of migrants and asylum seekers has become a battleground for elections and raw emotions. The question of refugees from North Korea arouses similarly strong feelings around East Asia. In one U.S. poll taken in December 2002, a public divide arose on the subject of immigration. Three to four times as many ordinary

(as opposed to elite) Americans, considered immigration to be a critical threat to U.S. interests and wanted its level reduced. While the elite favor amnesty for illegal immigrants, the extent of public hostility to the idea has produced a political stalemate. In the same month, in December 2002, another report showed that the arrival of almost 40,000 immigrants in the first 11 months of 2002, mostly from China and India, had fueled New Zealand's economy by pushing up demand for new houses and goods to furnish them. Yet in New Zealand too, anti-immigration politicians have done well in recent elections.

The number of people living outside the countries of birth is estimated to have jumped from 70 million three decades ago, to 185 million today, an all-time high in human history. The large majority of migrants are lawful residents making meaningful contributions to their host countries. At the same time, international migration entails the loss of human resources for the countries of origin and creates political, economic, and social tensions in the many countries of destination. The phenomenon is complex and unambiguous, and comprehensive answers are yet to emerge. But it is clear that the international community must address the issues involved with a sense of urgency and seek multilateral, development-orientated solutions that can benefit all parties in these transactions.

The number of refugees, internally displaced peoples, and asylum-seekers jumped from under 15 million in 1990 to over 22 million in 2000, a fifty percent increase in just one decade. Refugees are a symptom of a deeper malaise in the polities from which they have fled. The failure to establish satisfactory coping mechanisms is a symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting the world. At the same time, the institution of asylum is under grave threat. Many politicians in receiving states see refugees and asylum seekers in negative terms, as a threat to social cohesion, employment, or even as posing a threat of insurgency and terrorism. In both developing and developed countries, governments have for some time been constructing legal and physical barriers to the influx of asylum seekers or those displaced by war. Individuals are effectively precluded from asylum, through visa regulations, carrier sanctions, shifting the burden of assessing and processing claims to adjoining territories, physical closing of borders, detention of asylum seekers, and withdrawal of welfare support. These have all been employed to interdict and deter asylum seekers.

The image of economic migrants and bogus asylum seekers overwhelming developed societies is a regular characteristic of media reporting on refugee issues. But the reality is that it is the developing countries that shoulder the social and economic strain of the vast majority of asylum seekers and people displaced through conflict and state failure. So contrary to popular and media-fueled perceptions in the industrial countries, approximately three quarters of the total

number of refugees in the world are in fact in developing countries. Where are the bulk of refugees from Afghanistan? In neighboring Pakistan and Iran, not in the United States, not in Europe and that is the norm. This imbalance must be recognized and acknowledged. In the developed and developing world alike, the reality is that violations of international refugee and human rights law occur on a vast scale. It also seems to me that the treatment of refugees by host societies, including the entire infrastructure of laws, regulations, administrative practices, and personnel, helps to separate a civilized society from an uncivilized one.

There is also a criminal element to the movement of people away from homes and into the black hole of international trafficking. The selling of desperate young women into sexual bondage has become one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises in the global economy. The U.S. State Department estimates that some 700,000 persons, especially women and children, are trafficked each year across international borders. The selling of desperate young women into sexual bondage represents a major threat to human rights and police enforcements authorities. The pattern is similar in most countries: young women attempting to find legitimate jobs are deceived by agents who specialize in trafficking humans. Upon arrival in a foreign land their papers are seized, their movement confined, and even if they have the opportunity, they are too frightened to seek help. The authorities in the country into which they are trafficked can be unsympathetic. Rather than being protected and assisted as victims, women in this situation can find themselves in trouble as illegal immigrants or prostitutes. Organized crime in league with corrupt police and immigration authorities often finds this to be the most efficient technique for getting rid of women who have reached their “use-by” date in as far as their age is concerned in terms of the market for these sorts of activities.

The demons of displacement include: too much government, leading to tyranny; too little government, leading to anarchy; civil, revolutionary, and international warfare; economic collapse; epidemics; and ethnic cleansing and mass expulsions. Humanitarian responses must be guarded by protection principles, not political expediency. Yet the refugee problem is political, as well as humanitarian, to the extent that the problem of refugees is exasperated by collapsed state structures. The solution is to strengthen the institutional foundation of fragile states.

As compelling as the stories of human drama behind the dry statistics of people flows might be, it is a deeply unsatisfying state of affairs that we lack reliable data for a full understanding of international people flows, the complex interrelationships between population flows and development, and national and global economic and political consequences of large scale shifts in population. Just to remind you, we do not even have internationally agreed definitions of such common terms as citizenship and residence.

Let me move onto human security because I think that a human security approach is needed to address the multiple dimensions of and implications of human flows. International security has traditionally been defined as military defense of sovereignty. Defending territory against and deterring external military threats, the means and vocabulary of achieving this will be familiar to all of you. But in fact, much direct threats to security for many people in the world come from internal conflicts, disease, hunger, environmental degradation, street crime, even domestic violence. In its broadest sense, human security is both freedom from want and freedom from fear. The greater mainstreaming of the concept means that the way in which we approach the subject of security, the way in which we conceptualize security and policy responses has changed. And as we tackle migration and trafficking in particular, through the lense of human security, it means that we must think of trafficking victims as victims, not as perpetrators of crime. We must look at the institutional and policy framework that helps us to help them as human beings, in terms of the universal declaration that helps them to live lives not just with respect to their human rights, but also with a minimum level of dignity. And we need to address the underlying social, political, and economic factors that lead to these human crises and human tragedies. We must focus on the human insecurities: economic deprivation, political persecution, ethnic cleansing, that cause people to flee their homes, rather than simply closing the door behind us in order to keep the less fortunate people outside. Let us all benefit from the diversity that comes with plural societies, while urging our governments to live up to their international human rights commitments.