

## **Opening remarks at Policy Seminar on “Migrants and Cities”**

17-18 March 2016, Guangzhou, China

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Respected Mr. XIE Xiaodan, Vice Mayor of Guangzhou,  
Respected Ms. JIANG Qin, Counsellor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,  
Respected Mr. Ignacio Asenjo, Second Secretary, Delegation of the European Union  
to China,  
Ms. Jill Helke, Director, Department of International Cooperation and Partnerships,  
IOM  
Mr. Pär Liljert, Head of Office, IOM Liaison Office in China,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. I am pleased to be with you here today and tomorrow at this Policy Seminar on “Migrants and Cities”. I feel it is unique opportunity to learn from a distinguished set of experts on the connections between urbanization and development in China. I wish to thank the International Organization for Migration for organizing this seminar and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Guangzhou Municipal Government for their support, hospitality and insights.

My deep appreciation also goes to the European Union for supporting the EU-China Migration and Mobility Support Project, which is funding this seminar. ILO feels privileged to partner with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the project that is sponsoring this Conference. Promoting regular migration and combating irregular migration for employment is at the heart of the ILO’s mission to promote decent work for all men and women.

Globalization, urbanization, hope for better opportunities and livelihoods, demographic shifts, conflicts, income inequalities and climate change encourage ever more workers and their families to leave their home in search of employment and a better life. Migrant workers contribute to the growth and development in their destination countries and regions, while their home communities greatly benefit from their remittances and the skills acquired from their migration experience. Regular migration can benefit home and host countries alike – provided

migrant workers are fairly recruited and equally treated and host labour markets are not distorted by excessive inflows of migrant labour. Irregular migration is to be combated, keeping in mind, however, that irregular migrant workers are seldom solely responsible for their employment and do have certain rights that protect them against labour exploitation and local workers against unfair competition.

Recruitment agencies need to be regulated so that migrant workers do not end up in debt bondage to pay for their services.

The ILO is particularly happy to be a partner at this Conference in Guangzhou. The Pearl River Delta around Guangzhou has been the factory of the world ever since China's reform and opening-up policy took root. Its growth model, based on large, export-oriented industry driven by hardworking but rather footloose rural migrant workers is now adapting to a new normal of slower growth and higher value production. Transferring workers from low-productivity to higher-productivity sectors is a complex task that requires strong labour market institutions build on partnership: organizations of employers and workers who can forge the long-term bonds needed to make ever better products and translate it into ever higher standards of living; public employment services that promote job mobility but can minimize the time in between jobs and unemployment benefits and severance pay that secure family income and sustain consumption in between jobs; schools that provide the skills that employers need and are willing to pay for; preventive health and safety measures that protect life but also the investment made in valuable skills. The list is long.

China must undertake this journey up the value chain and up the income ladder now, now is the time for China to get rich before it gets old. The way upwards is not towards informality for the urbanized masses without access to education or health care; not towards precarious employment on short-term contracts; not towards wages that lag behind productivity; not towards workplaces without a sense of voice or belonging. The way upwards is for people from anywhere in China with the drive and the acumen to succeed towards cities that develop the right infrastructure to succeed in the quest for higher productivity: affordable housing; clean and safe public transport that reduces commuting time; safe drinking water; responsible entertainment.

Quality urban infrastructure also includes family support services that can take the burden of care for children or older or disabled family members off the shoulders of family members, often women, so that they can put the education or skills they have acquired to the full benefit of society and economy. This is where domestic workers come in. Domestic workers are often migrant workers themselves – willing to accept demanding but low-profile jobs in the hope of securing a better life for their families but in process providing a services without which modern cities and economies would stop functioning. They are workers – even if the standards of decency of their work were only set by the ILO in 2011. Prof. Liu Minghui from the Law School of the China Women’s University will present the initial findings of a study on the recruitment, employment and working conditions of domestic workers, and examines its coherence with international standards and good practices. The study is not only an illustration of the socio-economic impact of migration on development and urban development in particular. It is an expression of hope that domestic work may become a fully fledged urban labour market in its own right in China’s near future.

I look forward to an interactive and engaging discussion and exchange. Thank you for your attention.