



**STATEMENT BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
NAVI PILLAY TO MARK INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY,
18 DECEMBER 2008**

Today we are mark International Migrants Day, a week after we commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The close proximity of these commemorations reminds us that all migrants everywhere have the right to dignity and justice, just like anyone else.

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which was adopted in 1990, has its roots in the Universal Declaration and its core principle that all men and women are equal and cannot be treated differently on the basis of their nationality or country of origin.

Unfortunately, it took 13 years before the Convention attracted a sufficient number of ratifications to come into force, and the total number today, 18 years after it was adopted, has only reached 40. Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration, the notion that non-nationals enjoy human rights on an equal basis with nationals has still not been accepted by the vast majority of States.

Migrants are still discriminated against in an unacceptable manner in almost all societies, and are usually subject to working conditions and pay far below the standards enjoyed by citizens. Migrants are consistently denied entitlements to social security or housing, and excluded from employment and other opportunities. In short, it seems that States, while depending on their labour for a wide range of services, are still content to treat migrants as second class human beings.

Moreover, despite an impressive body of international standards designed to offer protection to all human beings, there is an increasing tendency to criminalize irregular migration. This criminalization is linked in many countries to an increase in anti-migrant sentiments, that are often reflected in policies and institutional frameworks designed purely to restrict migratory flows. Cross-border collaboration by police and other authorities have also resulted in increased violations of the human rights of migrants, including the forced return of people who may well be refugees. I fear that this phenomenon will only increase as the effects of the present financial crisis create pressures on employment in both countries of origin and destination.

For this reason, I call today upon all member States of the United Nations first and foremost to seriously commit themselves to the universality of human rights and to use the standards contained in the Migrant Workers Convention as guidance for their

policies and legislation. I also call upon those that have not yet signed or ratified the Convention to do so sooner rather than later.