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Spotlight Initiative – “Safe and Fair” project: Consultative Dialogue
Speech by EU Ambassador Kristian Schmidt
30 August 2018, Nay Pyi Taw

Dear Minister Win Myat Aye, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement,
Dear Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population,
Dear Mr Rory Mungoven, Myanmar Liaison Officer, International Labour Organization,
Dear Ms Smriti Aryal, Myanmar Head of Office a.i., UN Women,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Union, I would like to welcome you at the very first Myanmar event of the “Safe and Fair” project.¹

“Safe and Fair” is the very first programme launched in the Asia-Pacific under the Spotlight Initiative, a global partnership between the United Nations and the European Union to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls globally. In order to launch a movement beyond precedent, the EU has allocated 500 million Euro to this initiative worldwide – of which 25 Million will support this project.

"Safe and Fair" aims to support a very specific group of women: migrant workers in ASEAN countries. Across Southeast-Asia, women are increasingly on the move to find decent work that will allow them to create a better life and support their families. There are around 10 million migrants in the ASEAN region - half of whom are women.

Migrant women from Myanmar work in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in factories and construction sites, and as domestic helpers and agricultural labour. Along with men’s, their remittances make huge economic contributions to their families and communities back home.

We know that migration is often an empowering experience for women migrants. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that “there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women”.

But we also know that violence against women continues to play a significant role in migration – by driving women into precarious pathways.

Women migrant workers are amongst the most vulnerable people, because they are discriminated against both as women and as migrants. When migrating through regular channels, women migrant workers can face exploitation, abuse, violence and trafficking. Even more so when using irregular channels.

¹ Full name: Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers’ rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region (EU contribution EUR 25 million, total EUR 25.5 million)

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They may face violence from intermediaries, employers, partners, and strangers, as well as from exploitative labour conditions. In a study on violence against women migrant workers migrating from Myanmar to Thailand, 8 out of 10 women reported having experienced violence during their migration experience².

Difficulties often begin in countries of origin, especially when women have limited access to the information, skills, financial literacy and opportunities they would need to be able to engage with fair and regular migration options. As more women move around Southeast-Asia, we must ensure they are equally able to access regular migration channels, 'good' jobs with higher pay, and a full range of support services. The positive experiences and contributions of women migrant workers can only be fully ensured if their safety, labour and Human Rights are fully protected.

And this is precisely what the Safe and Fair Programme aims to achieve: to ensure that labour migration is safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region.

For the project to succeed, we hope our support will allow key Ministries to work hand in hand, to take concrete action. Also, Myanmar is obviously one piece of the migration puzzle composing Asia and the rest of the world. We therefore invite the Myanmar actors of this project to collaborate strongly with partners in other countries, in particular Thailand, where thousands of migrants originating from Myanmar are currently living and working.

Honorable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an important global challenge we face, including in Europe: Violence against women is one of the most devastating yet widespread violations of Human Rights in our world today -- affecting 1 out of every 3 women and girls at some point in her life. Both globally, in the ASEAN region, and in Myanmar – eliminating violence against women needs to be at the core of our work to foster real equality.

I want to thank our hosts today– our government partners: the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. I am also very pleased to see the many local and international organizations who are joining us in support of Myanmar's migrant women. We count on your advice today. I would also like to thank our implementing partners – the International Labour Organization and UN Women – for organizing this consultation and launching "Safe and Fair" in Myanmar.

I wish you engaging and forward-looking discussions over the coming two days.

Thank you!

² Source: Safe and Fair/Spotlight infographics