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IOM International Organization for Migration

MIGRANTS TOO OFTEN OVERLOOKED DURING CRISES, SAYS IOM ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY

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GENEVA – Despite their critical contribution to the development of the global economy, migrants are often thought of last during times of conflict, says IOM as it marks International Migrants Day.

While the evacuation of Westerners from Lebanon through July and August captured the world's attention, there was little international concern over the tens of thousands of trapped migrant workers from countries unable to help their nationals and because they didn't have the means to flee by themselves.

IOM's humanitarian evacuation of more than 11,000 migrants from Lebanon – mainly women from Asia and Africa working as domestic servants – was the latest operation in the Organization's history helping stranded migrants escape from conflict situations.

Other recent examples include evacuating migrants who'd fled to Jordan from Iraq during the Second Gulf War and migrants fleeing the violence in Liberia and Côte D'Ivoire, also in 2003. Each time migrants are caught up in a conflict, IOM's ability to help is dependent on raising funds which takes time and which inflicts additional pain and anxiety on those requiring assistance.

IOM's emergency humanitarian evacuation from Lebanon funded by the European Commission and the USA highlighted yet again the necessity of setting up a permanent mechanism that provides rapid emergency evacuation assistance to migrants whose countries don't have the financial or logistic means to evacuate their nationals.

“There is no denying that migrants make a significant contribution to the social and economic development of the countries in which they live and work. Given that, equal consideration must be given to their safety and well-being,” says IOM Director General, Brunson McKinley. “Migrants have to be helped in a rapid, safe and well-coordinated manner.”

Several governments have already requested IOM to create an Emergency Evacuation Fund which would allow IOM, governments, UN partners and NGOs to also provide vulnerable migrants with food, medical, transit shelter, consular assistance and registration prior to their evacuation.

Although such assistance is critical, migrants can also need help when they arrive home. Often, they have lost everything they had on leaving the country and don't necessarily have something or

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someone to return home to. Psycho-social assistance is particularly essential, especially for those traumatized by their experiences.

“We need to do this quickly so that when the next conflict arises, we and others are ready to help from day one. But the support from the international community as a whole has to be forthcoming,” added McKinley.

Broadcasters please note there is a Video News Release available on this story which is downloadable in broadcast quality from the IOM website: www.iom.int or http://194.162.230.14/iom/cat_browseVNR.asp?catid=240 with a script and shotlist.

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