

Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis
**Opening Statement for Helsinki Commission Hearing: “Crossing Borders, Keeping
Connected: Women, Migration and Development in the OSCE Region”**
April 24, 2008

Thank you, Chairman Hastings. As the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on Migration, I am very pleased that the Commission is holding this hearing on a topic that is very important to me — women and migration.

Today’s hearing is an opportunity to address both the challenges and benefits of migration for women. Migrant workers help provide aid to family members in their home country through remittances. According to the United Nations Population Fund, the money that female migrant workers send back home can raise families and even entire communities out of poverty.

The social remittances of migrant women, such as ideas, skills, and attitudes, can also boost socio-economic development and promote human rights and gender equality. Remittances would have an even greater role in poverty reduction and development if women did not face wage, employment, credit and property discrimination.

However, the recent economic downturn in the U.S. and around the world is limiting the remittances that support so many families around the world. This decline in remittances could lead to thousands more slipping into serious poverty and the additional migration of persons to other parts of Northern America. While there are significant burdens placed on women migrants, we must also acknowledge the benefits women can experience by seeking work abroad, particularly when there are few economic opportunities at home.

For example, financial independence can give women more power and security and while violence against women is widespread in Moldova, women who have worked abroad appear less willing to stay in violent situations.

Across the OSCE region, not just here in America, we hear anecdotal evidence of the toll migration takes on families and communities. For example, Latvian women have sought job opportunities in Ireland to support their family. One of the industries they work in is picking mushrooms. Their children, left behind in Latvia, were labeled “mushroom orphans.”

In Moldova, where over 42% of Moldovans working abroad are women, the families left behind struggle, forcing children, grandparents, and husbands to take on new roles and cope without the person who traditionally is the center of the family. Here in the United States we know that many of our migrant workers have left behind children.

While mothers often have a strategic goal in mind, to support the family and pay for schooling, the end result of many years of separation from their children may be negative. In addition, women migrants are at increased risk of abuse and exploitation and face wage, employment and credit discrimination.

We have seen such instances occur in Ciudad Juárez, where women migrated from other parts of Mexico to work in the *maquiladoras*. Not only did they face exploitation at the hands of their employers, but more than 400 have been killed.

Women migrant farmworkers in the United States face significant challenges. One of the concrete ways we can address these issues in Congress would be through passage of the Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits and Security (AGJOBS) Act.

The AgJOBS bill addresses the concerns of farm worker advocates, growers, and various organizations who believe we must reform our immigration laws particularly in regard to their application to the agricultural sector. I believe that the AgJOBS bill is a practical approach that would provide for a more stable, secure, safe, and legal American agricultural work force and food supply.

I want to thank Chairman Hastings for addressing the problems facing agricultural workers in the United States, many who are migrants and a growing number of which are women who face incredibly difficult work and living environments. I am also pleased that the Commission will focus more attention on the issue of migration, particularly at the May 9 hearing in my district in Los Angeles. Today's hearing is an opportunity to not only examine the facts about women and migration so we can respond appropriately with policies to address these challenges, but also gain a better understanding of the benefits of migration.

I look forward to addressing both these issues and yield back my time.