



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Agenda item 54 [c]: International Migration and Development

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman,

Perhaps a good point to start in bringing a parliamentary perspective to this very important issue is with a quotation from the recent Report of the Global Commission on International Migration, which in page 10 states: "Migration has proved to be a politically explosive issue in a significant number of countries, to the extent that it seems to have played an important role in determining the outcome of several elections."

Recent experience at the IPU proves how apt this observation is. Just days ago, the IPU held a major debate on migration and development at its 113th Assembly in Geneva. The debate revolved around a report prepared over more than six months by two parliamentarians, one from Mexico and another from Switzerland. After a very lively and protracted discussion, our members could adopt a resolution only on condition that a number of reservations be attached to it. In short, our recent debate illustrates both the complexity of the issue, the difficulty in coming to a common approach to tackle it, and the fact that, like many development issues, this too is highly political.

Members of parliaments are at the front line of this debate if anything because in many constituencies around the world migrants have become a significant political factor in one way or another. Parliaments are regularly called upon to legislate on such issues as immigration law, welfare rights for immigrants, citizenship laws, labour regulations for migrant workers, and even voting rights for non-citizens. Issues like xenophobia, the social and economic integration of migrants, racial discrimination, and social isolation recur regularly on the agenda of parliaments around the world. It is difficult to reconcile the many tensions inherent to the phenomenon of migration. To add to the complexity, countries today are becoming both senders and receivers of migrants, as well as transit countries, so that at the national level all sides of the equation must often be addressed at the same time.

What comes across clearly from our debate on this issue and the ensuing resolution – available in the room - is the need for parliamentarians to take an active role in raising awareness of the many challenges of migration within their constituencies and the population at large. Indeed, an important role that parliamentarians can play with regard to this issue is to try to defeat the many facile stereotypes and misconceptions that surround it.

Mr. Chairman,

From the many policy recommendations put forth in our resolution, I wish to underscore three broad points.

First, migration is almost always a good thing that opens up new possibilities and enriches individuals and cultures when it is chosen freely, and not when it is a way of life that people are forced into for lack of economic means, social pressure, or political dysfunction. This is why our resolution focuses in the first instance on identifying the reasons for migration and the ways in which migration that is more forced than chosen can be prevented.

The lack of democratic institutions and the consequent feeling of disenfranchisement are often overlooked in explaining migration. When people feel that they do not count, and that they will never be empowered, they have every reason in the world to want to escape to freer and more democratic countries. When it comes to the political roots of this phenomenon in particular, the IPU is developing a host of technical assistance projects, seminars and publications aimed at supporting and strengthening democratic institutions and good governance. On the economic front, our efforts are primarily devoted to promoting fairness in trade relations so that workers in developing countries may gain a decent living and governments may be enabled to strengthen social safety nets.

A second point that comes out very clearly from our resolution regards the migration of women and children, clearly two of the most vulnerable groups. In view of the increasing feminisation of migration, new policy approaches must be designed to take into account the particular circumstances of migrant women as well as children. An important aspect of this is the plight of trafficking of women and children. Our members therefore call on governments to promote a gender-sensitive approach to migration and trafficking. Happily, there are many effective policy options to deal with trafficking, and the IPU has outlined them most recently in a Handbook for Parliamentarians on Combating Child Trafficking - published in cooperation with UNICEF.

The third and final point I wish to stress from our resolution on migration and development has to do with the increasing need for policy coherence. The multiple dimensions of migration and the conflicting interests that surround this issue have given rise in many places to contradictory laws and regulations as well as to situations in which government departments come to work at cross purposes.

One example of this confusion is given by the frequent challenges to the international refugee protection regime from migration policies that target migrant workers and others. To help restore conceptual clarity and practical order, our parliaments are committed to work to ensure that migration policies are coordinated at the national level between the relevant ministries and other governmental bodies and agencies. This is often easier said than done, as we know, but we must continue to focus on this until not only migration, but the entire gamut of sustainable development issues, are mainstreamed through all concerned governments programmes as well as all relevant parliamentary committees.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, let me stress once again that for the IPU, parliaments and their members should be regarded as key partners in implementing the solutions that do exist as well as in devising new policies to keep abreast of the ever changing reality on the ground. By its very nature, migration is an issue that is bound to evolve and give rise to hard choices which parliamentarians, in consultation with their constituencies, are ideally situated to address.

We are encouraged by the cooperation that has developed over the past year with the Global Commission with a view to bringing a parliamentary dimension to the process and interacting more with the parliamentary community. Most recently, one of the co-Chairs of the Global Commission was in Geneva presenting the Report before parliamentarians at the 113th IPU Assembly in mid-October, and building upon discussions held previously in Manila. We will continue to follow this issue and look forward to next year's High-level Dialogue as yet another opportunity to bring a parliamentary perspective to the deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.