

Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

Address by the Director General of IOM - Mr. William Lacy Swing

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CICG

I – Scenesetter -- The connection between migration, development, peace and human rights

Migration is a megatrend of the twenty-first century. If we count both internal and international migrants, 1 in 7 people on this planet is a migrant. But migration affects not only those who move, but also millions of people in the countries in which migrants live and work and the families and communities they leave behind. We can no longer think about our economies, societies or cultures without thinking about human mobility. How many of us do not have at least one migrant among our relatives, neighbours or colleagues? Which country can claim that migration has no role in its past, present or future?

The thesis of my remarks can be reduced to three words: migration is inevitable, necessary and desirable. Large-scale human mobility is inevitable in view of the demographic, economic, environmental and other challenges we face; it is necessary for the vibrancy of our economies and societies; and migration is desirable when governed humanely, fairly and in collaboration as a path to opportunity and the realization of human potential.

The realization of migration's inevitability necessity and desirability is taking hold in the international community -- and was best expressed in the coming together of more than 100 countries at the UN General Assembly's second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development last October.

Member States worked for months to agree on the text of a joint declaration which was finally adopted on the first day of the High-level Dialogue. The declaration marked a qualitative shift in the global conversation on migration: towards a greater convergence of

views; less acrimony; and greater recognition of the relevance of migration for all countries and in relation to many issues.

In addition, the UN Secretary-General and a coalition of civil society organizations, as well as IOM and the Global Migration Group -- each, separately proposed a series of action points -- which were nearly identical. The convergence amongst their objectives as well as the priorities expressed by Member States was remarkable. The key messages of the High-level Dialogue were:

- 1- The centrality of the human rights of migrants. Respect for rights of all migrants, whatever their status need to be respected – both (a) as an end in itself and (b) as a condition for harnessing the benefits of migration for the development of migrants and societies.
 - 2- The critical links between migration and development and the relevance of migration for the UN post-2015 development agenda. More than 50 delegations at the High-level Dialogue referred explicitly to the need to consider migration in designing future development strategies.
 - 3- The concern for stranded migrants and migrants caught in crisis situations, as well as the attention of the international community to the widespread hazards, distress and abuse suffered by migrants in transit and destination, including issues of human trafficking and smuggling.
- 2, 360 died in Mediterranean last year. Countless others died in the Sahara desert, the Red Sea, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean and South China Seas.
 - IOM evacuated and repatriated 250,000 stranded migrant workers during the 2011 Libyan crisis.
 - We are currently rescuing thousands of migrants caught in the ethnic- religious cleansing in the Central African Republic.
 - IOM has transported 400,000 Syrians from the Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq borders to safety.

These points clearly illustrate that migration cannot be treated in isolation. Migration is integral to issues of development, human rights, and peace and security. For example, the protection of the human rights of all migrants is a precondition for migrants' human development and their successful contributions to home and host countries. Humanitarian crises -- like the ones IOM is dealing with in Haiti, The Philippines or in Central African Republic -- force people to flee their homes and the prolonged displacement can set development back by years. Last but not least, effective and fair migration policies are crucial to fostering peaceful and cohesive societies.

Migrants and we need your help to formalise this interdependency in the new global development agenda. While the Millennium Development Goals are silent on migration, I believe that their successor -- the post-2015 UN development agenda -- cannot afford to ignore migrants and migration if it is to be relevant to the realities of the 21st century. I will give you a few illustrations of how indispensable it is to integrate migration into development:

- 1- The sheer scale of remittances – USD 410 billion to developing countries in 2013 (a low-end estimate), is 3 times the amount of Official Development Assistance. Migrant remittances are roughly equivalent to the GDP of a small to medium size European economy.
- 2- Remittances help people pay for food, education, health care, and help countries at the macro-economic level too.
- 3- Monetary remittances are only part of migrants' contributions, and to these one must add other benefits – so called social remittances. These are harder to quantify: social and cultural exchanges that promote innovation, and the trade and investment stimuli linked to diaspora networks.

But mobility needs to be well-governed to benefit all – migrants, their families, for countries of origin and for countries of destination. IOM and its partners are therefore advocating for a new global partnership on migration.

To improve the quality and benefits of migration, the partnerships would --(a) establish clear targets to reduce the costs of sending remittances; -- (b) the costs of migration in the form of recruitment fees; -- (c) the tremendous human costs of smuggling, trafficking and exploitation; -- (d) the costs resulting from deskilling and non-recognition of qualifications which prevent migrants from working at the full capacity of their talents and qualifications, and -- (e) the cost of losing out on social security and pensions entitlements that cannot be taken across borders.

II - The main challenges and opportunities the DG sees

There is the cruel irony that – in this period of the greatest historical human mobility – many governments, even in traditional migrant societies, have adopted public discourse, restrictive policies and laws that reflect deep-seated anti-migrant sentiment. Migrants are perceived as the “other”, a drain on the national system, a scapegoat during economic crises, carriers of disease or worse – a security threat. Such discourse rarely has any basis in fact and often only fulfils partisan agendas. There is an appalling lack of national and global leadership on migration. This greatly limits the contributions migrants can make to development.

A fundamental shift in public perceptions of migrants and migration is needed. This is a cause about which I feel very strongly. Xenophobia, discrimination and hate speech put migrants at risk; deprive them of their rights and dignity; and prevent them and us all from benefiting from the contributions that migrants have historically made. We need better informed dialogue between migrants, host communities and origin countries. Anti-migrant sentiment, policies and laws are driven by several elements:

- 1) Global economic and financial crisis;
- 2) Post-9/11 security syndrome;
- 3) Fears of loss of personal and national identity;
- 4) False stereotypes and myths about migration and migrants.

A misguided belief that migration was either too insignificant or too sensitive to discuss has created a vacuum that was soon filled by myth-making, scaremongering and political opportunism.

There is very little potential leadership and an absence of political courage when it comes to migration. It's so much easier to win votes off the backs of migrants whose only aspiration is a job and a better life. No one claims that migration is devoid of social challenges, but the hostility of prevailing discourse in many countries and active misinformation are poison for social cohesion and effective, humane policymaking. Migration is a reality for all of us and we need a more constructive dialogue about who we want to be as 21st century societies. Over the coming decades, industrialized societies will need tens of millions of workers at all skill levels -- and in these aging societies, the vast majority of these workers will come from the "Global South".

III - How MPs and parliaments can help address some migration issues

I seek your support as parliamentarians in working for better migration governance and legislation -- and particularly for the integration of migration into development policies at all levels. As parliamentarians, you are key to this dialogue; you can connect your constituencies with the global policy discussions; you can channel local debates to the global level. In doing so, you can help generate a dialogue on migration that is better informed, more inclusive and that addresses legitimate concerns and combats harmful myths.

Furthermore, as parliamentarians you are continuously confronted with the full spectrum of policy issues. As I've discussed, one of the challenges of migration is that it cross-cuts an entire range of policy domains – labour markets and development, health and social policy, foreign relations, trade and law enforcement, to mention a few. The problem is: there is no point in having great policies on one aspect of migration if policies in other areas contradict or undermine them. There must be an "all-of-government" approach, with mechanisms to ensure all relevant government ministries and departments can have a say in policies on or affecting migration.

Ministries are often restricted by their policy silos from linking the various elements of policy that are important for good migration governance; on the other hand, you as parliamentarians are in a position to ask the hard questions: can we truly expect to attract more highly skilled migrants, if at the same time we don't make it easier for their spouses and children to access professional and educational opportunities? Is a policy on universal

vaccination coverage likely to succeed if another policy bars migrants without documents and their children from preventive health care? If we want to encourage migrants to circulate between their home and host countries to transfer skills and resources, would it not be important to reduce the costs of mobility, for example by promoting multiple entry visas and the portability of benefits?

These are just some of the questions that would steer us towards more coherent, logical approaches to migration; but we also need voices and leaders who will challenge those who pretend we can stick our heads in the sand about the role and relevance of migration in all our societies.

I know I can count on you, and I look forward to your comments and questions.