



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations (OIM)
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)

Remarks

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“The moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration”

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Speaking time: 10 minutes

President Saber Chowdhury,
Secretary General Martin Chungong,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be invited to this 133rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. IOM, and I personally, are proud of our relations with the IPU and its distinguished President and Secretary General, my friends Saber and Martin. It was only when I first became an Ambassador in 1979 that I came to appreciate fully the role and key importance of the Parliament to diplomacy.

I am delighted that you have selected for your General Debate the theme, “The moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more human migration.” This topic is most timely. Daily, we witness migrants needlessly suffering and risking their lives to escape conflict, persecution and poverty. While media attention is focused on migrants arriving in Europe, the present-day phenomenon of large-scale forced displacements is a global phenomenon.

I would like to make three points:

- (1) that migration is occurring today in a world in disarray;
- (2) Parliamentarians’ critical role in “fairer, smarter, more humane migration; and
- (3) IOM actions to support you.

I. Setting the Scene: Migration in a World in Disarray

We live in an era of unprecedented human mobility – a period in which more people are on the move than ever before -- more than 1 billion in our 7 billion world. Of these, 250 million are international migrants, and 750 million are domestic migrants.

Migration is a “mega-trend” because of a half-dozen or so “drivers” or “root causes” of large-scale migration -- demography; disasters; demand for labor; degradation of the environment; growing North-South socio-economic disparities; and the digital revolution. As we speak, the world is experiencing the largest displacement and forced movement of people in recorded history: 60 million currently uprooted around the world. Some 600,000 migrants have arrived in Europe this year, and 3000 have died on the way.

Europe’s neighbours to the south and east are confronted with the direct or indirect impacts of war, internal conflict, political instability, economic collapse and, increasingly, the environmental effects of a changing climate. While focusing on the emergency in Europe, however, we bear in mind that Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are the generous but often unpublicized hosts for more than 4 million Syrians who have fled their homeland.

There are at present no viable political processes or active negotiations that might offer us hope that any of these numerous conflicts might be resolved in the short to medium term. And the “perfect storm” rages on.

We remember also that we, the international community, can respond most effectively to emergencies, if we have comprehensive, long-term migration policies -- policies that address all aspects of human mobility. This brings me to my second point: In what way can Parliaments help achieve the objective of fairer, smarter, more humane migration?

II. Parliaments Role in Ensuring Fairer, Smarter, More Humane Migration

Parliament’s role in achieving this objective is absolutely critical. And, I say so with reference to three areas of your activity – three legislative powers, if you will.

- A. **THE POWER OF POLICY.** Through your legislative authority to make laws and shape migration policy, you as Parliamentarians are primary agents for the protection of migrants. A rights-based approach to migration places the migrant at the center of migration policies and management, and pays particular attention to those who are most vulnerable or marginalized. Such an approach ensures that migrants are included in relevant (1) national action plans and strategies, such as plans on the provision of (2) public housing or (3) national strategies to combat racism and xenophobia, (4) access to health care and education.

It is you who have the power to pass anti-trafficking laws to protect migrants; or measures to de-criminalize irregular migrants. You can enact legislation to help migrants integrate smoothly into society; or to pass dual-citizenship provisions and the portability of social security benefits;

At the same time, Parliamentarians can help galvanize a comprehensive approach to migration policy-making -- an approach that views migration holistically and as an

inter-Agency and inter-Departmental responsibility – in other words, a “whole-of-Government” approach. You thus help ensure that your country’s migration policy truly serves the broader national interest. We cannot address only parts of the framework (border control, return, integration). Particularly timely in this context is the need to include migration and migrants in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The “Hanoi Declaration”, adopted by the 132nd IPU Assembly, marks a significant contribution by all of you to the comprehensive agenda as well as your commitment to the new sustainable development goals.

B. THE POWER OF PARLANCE. Parliamentarians can play a significant role in changing the presently toxic tone of public discourse on migration to a more balanced, evidence-based and historical -- accurate approach -- to an approach that counters widespread but false stereotypes of migrants and misleading “mythology” surrounding the public debate on migration. Growing anti-migrant sentiment, especially in Europe, is unnecessarily endangering the lives of migrants, while ignoring the overwhelmingly positive contribution that migrants continue to make. Unfortunately, people all too often take their lead from the irresponsible rhetoric of some politicians and parliamentarians. Rather than succumb to these negative perceptions and caustic discourse, we need to focus on migrants contributions to both host and home countries. A good example is that of one of our speakers today -- MEP Cecile Kyenge. While serving as Italian Minister of Integration, Dr. Kyenge supported an IOM poster campaign that graphically demonstrated migrant doctors saving lives of Italians.

C. THE POWER OF THE PURSE. How you approve and allocate resources can have an effect on migration policy and on migrants themselves. Migrant policy needs to include a number of elements, all of which require funding.

1. **Integration policy.** Cultural orientation, often language training and other facilitative measures can help ensure that a migrant is able to integrate harmoniously into local society.

2. **Return Policy.** For those who, for various reasons, cannot remain and who are willing to return to their countries of origin, it will be important to have a voluntary return policy -- one that contains financial support so that migrants can return with dignity and have an opportunity to re-start their lives. IOM returns some 30,000 to 40,000 persons annually under just such a program, called “Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration”. From the year 2000 to date, European Union Member States spent 11 billion Euros to deport migrants. Under IOM’s AVRR program, these same persons could have been returned in dignity with several thousand Euros each to re-integrate in their home countries. This would also have avoided the risk of exacerbating relations with the countries to which these unfortunate migrants returned

3. **Access to Public Services.** The general view about migrants is that they are only coming to our country to take advantage of our free health and education services. There’s the reverse way of looking at this, however. Do we not want healthy migrants? Unhealthy migrants make unhealthy communities. Do we not wish migrant children go to school? Do we not want educated migrant children in our communities?

4. Diaspora policy. Our diasporas may be the most neglected and potentially greatest assets in migration policy. Do you have, e.g., laws and policies that encourage your citizens living abroad to maintain ties to their home country? Do you offer tax incentives? Out-of-country voting rights? Or, even dedicated diaspora representation in the Parliament? Other incentives to remain in contact and engaged? If not, then you have little basis to complain about “brain drain”.

III. IOM ACTIONS TO SUPPORT PARLIAMENTARIANS ON MIGRATION

IOM supports Parliamentarians at the national, regional and global levels.

A – Global level

In March 2015, IOM endorsed IPU’s ‘Common Principles for Support to Parliaments’, as a framework to enhance coordination and cooperation between parliaments and partners. IOM holds briefings with increasing frequency to parliaments at our HQ in Geneva and field visits.

Our International Development Fund (IDF) is a unique global micro-finance facility to support developing Member States. Since 2001, the IDF has helped strengthen the migration management capacity of Parliaments. This can include a comparative analysis on international legislations and migration policies, as was most recently the case in Ghana.

Parliaments need data and evidence for policy making, and I am pleased to announce that IOM opened its new Global Migration Data Analysis Centre in Berlin on July 1. The Centre is there to serve you.

B – Regional level

IOM is regularly invited to intervene during the sessions of regional and thematic organizations and networks of Parliaments. These include: the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), the CIS Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries (TURKPA), AFFPD and the Catholic Legislators Network.

Some of these regional parliamentary bodies have agreements or IOM Observer status due to their interest in the management of temporary and permanent migration, labour migration, measures for addressing irregular migration, and information exchange.

Given the growing need for expertise in the Mediterranean, the European Parliament LIBE Committee asked IOM for evidence on migration drivers, flows and trends, and for advice on issues related to “responsibility sharing”, integration and relocation.

Finally, IOM facilitates and supports organizing Inter-parliamentary exchanges. This is particularly important in large migration corridors – as, for example, the Ecuador-Mexico exchange on “Challenges for Human Mobility in the 21st Century”, in July 2015.

C – National level

At the national level, IOM takes part in hearings and round tables on a wide array of issues. These include human rights, economic and financial affairs, counter-trafficking, youth and labor issues, xenophobia, unaccompanied minors, family reunification, and post-conflict reparations.

Similarly, IOM holds policy development seminars, training and conferences for Parliamentarians and supports the development of more coherent legal frameworks.

IOM has long experience with diaspora, which can be a uniquely placed, skilled capacity-building resource. In Somalia, IOM’s MIDA programme facilitated the temporary return of 150 high-skilled Somalis; among these is one Somali expert at the Parliament, who contributes to the development of legislation and strategic plans.

Conclusion

Migration is as old as humankind. Migration is not a problem or issue to be solved, but a human phenomenon to be managed -- and to be managed in a fairer, smarter, more humane manner. People will continue to resort to migration as development agents or -- all too often -- as a coping mechanism amidst crises. Migration is the world’s oldest poverty reduction strategy. Turning the migration challenge into opportunity for all requires good migration governance; a broad, durable consensus among a wide constituency; and coherent, coordinated policies among partners.

I wish to reiterate IOM's gratitude to the Inter-Parliamentary Union for inviting IOM to this Assembly. I wish you a successful and productive Assembly.