



OPENING REMARKS

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Legal and Policy Perspectives”
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Madam Administrator, Excellencies,
Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to open this gathering of distinguished diplomats, experts, and scholars assembled to examine legal and policy perspectives on irregular migration -- that is, human mobility that takes place outside the norms and procedures established by States.

IOM takes pride in co-organizing this event with our close partner, the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS), and I am grateful to the staff of the CMS, and its Executive Director, Mr. René Manenti, and Research Director, Mr. Joseph Chamie, for the time spent working on this important event with IOM’s Permanent Observer to the United Nations, Mr. Luca Dall’Oglio and his staff.

I am particularly honoured and pleased that the UNDP Administrator, H.E. Ms. Helen Clark, could be with us today to deliver the keynote address.

This audience will be familiar with the latest *UNDP Human Development Report (2009) Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development* -- an impressive volume that documents the role of human mobility in the attainment of human development.

The Report’s core message, and one shared by IOM’s latest *World Migration Report*, is that the vast majority of human mobility is about humanity’s unrelenting search for what the UN Charter describes as “social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

The renowned economist John Kenneth Galbraith described succinctly the inherent interrelation and tension between migration and development, in his 1979 treatise entitled *The Nature of Mass Poverty*:

“Migration,” he said, “is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good?”

I. Public Misperceptions about Migrants

My remarks today are focused on irregular migration within the larger context of global migration --- one of the most important, yet contentious issues of our time.

Few subjects elicit stronger reaction than does the subject of migration --- on the floors of Parliaments to the streets of cities --- in heated debates about the pros and cons of migration’s impact on national identities, security, employment, social benefits, culture, and the very fabric of our societies.

A sampling of newspaper headlines on Monday of last week alone documented migrants fleeing mob violence in Europe; migrants threatened with registration or expulsion in Asia; the construction of a barrier wall



along a state border in the Middle East to thwart irregular migration; and the deportation of thousands of irregular migrants in the Americas.

The plight of migrants, especially the undocumented, has never been met with much compassion. But today, this plight would appear to attract even less sympathy as the economic crisis bites deeper into industrialized societies, hardening public opinion against migrants and migration.

At a time when the positive contributions of migrants to society are increasingly being called into question – and when many Governments are adopting short-sighted attitudes towards migrants, including criminalizing migrants, it is evident that migration is one of the most deeply misunderstood issues of our time.

All of this notwithstanding, we are entering into a new millennium that is destined to be, in sheer numbers, the age of the greatest human mobility in recorded history.

This of course makes this conference and others like it, all the more important to correct misperceptions about migration, and to help us to heighten recognition of migration as an integral part of the global economy – and a vital element in State efforts to emerge from recession.

Let me turn to my first point, which I have titled “Little known facts about migration.”

II. Little Known Facts about Migration

A. Demographic and Labour Market Dynamics

First of all, it's important to know that the decline of populations in the world's industrialized countries -- expected to drop by nearly 25 percent by 2050 (according to UN estimates) -- will significantly increase the demand for migrant workers. This includes European countries, Canada, the United States, Japan, Korea, and China.

In all of these countries, migrant workers -- skilled and unskilled -- will be needed in some cases for knowledge and innovation, but in far greater numbers to do the jobs for which there are simply not enough people in these countries -- caring for children and the elderly, cleaning houses and offices, driving buses and taxis, repairing vehicles, working in hotels, restaurants, construction sites and farms, and so on.

In the same way that it is “often cheaper and mutually beneficial for us to buy computers made in China or use call centres in India,” journalist Philippe Legrain argues that, “it often makes sense for us to import services that have to be delivered on the spot... from foreigners.”

On the supply side, most of the world's expected population growth will be concentrated in today's poorest and youngest countries, which equates with surplus labour seeking out too few employment opportunities at home. Would-be workers will be increasingly attracted to the labour markets of the aging and population deficient developed countries of Europe, North America, and Northeast Asia with negative birth-rates.

Jack Goldstone predicts in “The New Population Bomb” in the latest edition of *Foreign Affairs* that, “Current levels of immigration from developing to developed countries are paltry compared to those that the forces of supply and demand might soon create across the world.”

B. Human Mobility Principally South-South

A second little known fact is that about 80 percent of all human mobility is South--South or between and among developing countries. Despite the public focus on the supply side of the migration debate, most of the nearly 1 billion migrants on the move -- an estimated 740 million people -- are internal migrants who move within



their own country, usually to an urban centre, or to a close neighbouring state. The demographic trends just discussed will of course have an impact on migration patterns in the future.

C. Migrants' Economic Contributions

A third little known fact is the considerable economic contribution of migrants to the global economy and human development. In terms of macro-economic growth, the World Bank estimates that if those countries with declining populations allowed their workforce to grow by only 3 percent by letting in an extra 14 million migrant workers from 2001-2025, the world would be \$356 billion a year better off -- with the majority of these funds flowing to developing countries.

That figure is marginally larger than the conservative estimate of migrants' combined annual remittances through official channels of some \$300 billion, which constitutes a combined GDP larger than many developed countries (or about the size of Switzerland, host to IOM headquarters).

This money that goes back to families and communities in countries of origin amounts to two times that of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and nearly two-thirds that of total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in developing countries.

Among the cases for more open migration is the argument, therefore, that freer migration is one of the most effective ways of assisting people in poor, developing countries.

In sum, if the forces pushing migrants to leave their countries are almost certain to continue -- and indeed are likely to increase with climate change; and the forces pulling them towards industrialized countries are expected to grow -- then it's clearly in everyone's interest to adopt migration policies that ensure humane and orderly human mobility.

Failure to facilitate human mobility through safe, regulated channels sends the wrong message to the developing world and to many migrants, who often turn to human traffickers and risk perilous journeys -- often crammed into the holds of unseaworthy vessels, or concealed in containers.

D. Migrants' Rights

A fourth fact is that all migrants, including irregular migrants, have rights. These include the right to human dignity, physical integrity, as well as safety and freedom from racism and discrimination. They also share with us all the right not to be exploited.

Today, virtually all States acknowledge that human rights are the *sine quo non* for safe, secure and dignified migration. And yet, there is much to be done to incorporate human rights into national and international migration policies, legislation and programming.

III. "High Road," "Low Road" Migration Scenarios

This brings me to third and final part of my remarks -- "high road and low road scenarios" that are available to Governments to manage the migration process.

The "low road scenario" is one of *status quo* based on stereotypes, fear, and short-term political expediency. Characteristics include:

- A univariate migration policy i.e. highly restricting and limiting immigration;
- Absence of a comprehensive legal framework;



- A single ministry or agency in charge of migration;
- No regular institutionalized dialogue on migration with neighbouring countries; and
- Little or no effort to inform the public about the benefits of migration.

The “high road scenario,” on the other hand, calls for a comprehensive, rights-based approach to migration management:

- First, Governments on the “high road” pursue all available options to manage the migration cycle through innovative policies and laws that facilitate the entire range of labour migration options, including integration in the host country, even if only on a temporary basis, in order to meet labour market demands.
- Second, is a ‘whole-of-government approach’ to migration, one which makes maximum use of inter-Ministerial collaboration to produce well-balanced, comprehensive policies that address all aspects of the migration cycle, including border control, migrants’ human rights, including health, and regular dialogue between countries of origin and destination.

No single ministry can manage migration effectively in isolation. Each has its own mandate, and it will take a number of relevant ministries to manage migration responsibly.

Governments also need to involve other interested parties – communities and businesses, for example, to contribute to sustainability and success, a “whole of society approach” to migration, so to speak.

- Third, under the “high road” scenario, Governments participate actively in one of the existing 15 Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) on migration; these cover the world and they work effectively bringing together destination, origin and transit countries regularly.

At the global level, States will find it in their national interest to support the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), chaired this year by Mexico, and to encourage the efforts of the Global Migration Group (GMG) – an alliance of 14 UN Agencies and IOM – currently chaired by UNDP.

- Finally, the ‘high road scenario’ calls for serious efforts on the part of Governments to do more to inform, educate and work with communities to abolish stereotypes, minimize discrimination and xenophobia and promote the economic and social contributions of migrants to the global economy and human development.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, let me summarise my main points:

One: migration is here to stay. The question confronting Governments is how to manage the migration process in a legal, regulated and responsible manner --- in the best interests of countries, communities and people, including migrants themselves.

Two: Human mobility is not just a matter of human rights and international solidarity; it’s in States’ self-interest to work towards more open migration policies.

Three, a “high road scenario” to migration management best serves national interests as well as those of migrants: one that addresses all options available to meet increasing labour migration demands; protects migrants’ human rights; promotes regular dialogue between countries of origin and destination; and highlights the economic and social contribution of migrants to our societies.

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