

Report on the Round-table Discussion on Africa and International Migration

UNHQ, New York

28 June 2011

I Introduction:

A round-table panel discussion entitled “Africa and International Migration” was held on 28 June 2011 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The discussion was organized by the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UN-OSAA) and the United Nations International Organization on Migration (IOM).

It was moderated by Mr. Patrick Hayford, Director, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA). The introductory remarks were delivered by H.E. Mr. Michel Tommo Monthe, Ambassador/Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Cameroon to the UN. The keynote address was given by Mr. Bernardo Mariano, Regional Representative for Southern Africa (Pretoria), International Organization for Migration, (IOM). The panellists included: Dr. Arikana C. Chihombori, International Chair, (AU) Diaspora African Forum; Mr. Abdulla A. Mohamoud, Executive Director, African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC); and Mr. Aderanti Adepoju, Chief Executive, Human Resources Development Center, University of Lagos.

The main objectives of the round-table discussion was to provide a platform to discuss and analyze the African dimension of international migration, in line with OSAA’s mandate, which included, *inter alia*, raising awareness of critical issues of importance to Africa’s sustainable development. The UN-OSAA believes it is very important to ensure that the African dimension of international migration is thoroughly discussed within the UN system, and in this regard organized the panel discussion with the hopes of enriching the discussions and proposing possible ways forward, especially in light of the upcoming High-level Dialogue on International Migration to be held in 2013.

II Opening session:

Mr. Patrick Hayford, welcomed the panellists and participants to the panel discussion. He stated that the United Nations had come a long way in dealing with issues related to international migration and development. Mr. Hayford informed the meeting that in 2003, Mr. Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, launched the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), which ultimately led to the 2006 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration, the creation of the State-led Global Forum on Migration and Development, and the establishment of the Inter- Agency Global Migration Group (GMG). He commended the current Secretary-General of the United

Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the President of the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Joseph Deiss, and Member States for their continued efforts to improve the lives of migrants.

In particular, Mr. Hayford recalled the recently concluded debate on international migration and development, held in New York on 19 May 2011. He acknowledged the good work being done by the GMG which provided important analytical support to the on-going global discourse on international migration at the UN and at the Global Forum on Migration and Development. Mr. Hayford also applauded the valuable contributions being made by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s support to the global migration debate.

In his introductory remarks, H.E. Mr. Michel Tommo Monthe, Ambassador/Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Cameroon to the UN, noted that the topic was timely and important, considering the recent economic and financial crisis, which had a major impact on the welfare of migrants. Ambassador Monthe added that the world was becoming more and more globalized and inter-dependent. In this regard, he stated that the current approach of international discourse, in the multilateral setting, was quickly changing to a more mini-lateral (micro) approach where bilateral engagement was becoming the norm. Ambassador Monthe mentioned the emerging bilateral relationships between Africa and the People's Republic of China, India, Republic of Korea, Brazil, Turkey, respectively, as a case in point. He added that this new approach resulted in the eroding of solidarity for the welfare of the most vulnerable as decisions were no longer being made at the multilateral level.

Ambassador Monthe further stated that the plight of the more than 300 million migrants, in particular those from Africa, resulted in brain-drain which had negative consequences for the continent. He also noted the distressful living conditions migrants faced when they emigrated. In this light, Ambassador Monthe stressed the need for the panellists to discuss the impact of international migration on the lives of the migrants. He further stated that it was the responsibility of the United Nations, being a multilateral organization, to help reduce the negative impact of international migration and find ways to harness the positive attributes of international migration.

Ambassador Monthe informed the meeting that remittances to the tune of about \$15- \$20 billion were being sent to countries of origin, and this did not factor in informal transactions. He added that total remittances from the formal and informal sectors exceeded official development assistance, showing the positive aspects of international migration when managed well. Ambassador Monthe further noted that Africa's emerging partners were assisting African Governments to put in place mechanisms/frameworks to help migrants return to their homelands through their respective Regional Economic Communities (RECs). He added that once migrants returned home, they could substantially contribute to the socio-economic development initiatives and eventually help reduce poverty. Finally, Ambassador Monthe stated that African migrants were rich in culture, an attribute well cherished by Africans despite leaving their homelands.

In his keynote address, Mr. Bernardo Mariano, Regional Representative for Southern Africa (Pretoria), IOM, expressed his hope that the meeting would be fruitful and that the outcomes of the discussions would assist African countries to collectively mitigate the challenges posed by international migration. Mr. Mariano added that international migration was an old phenomenon which would most likely continue for generations to come. It was therefore important for States and non-State actors to address the associated challenges in a manner that would allow them to maximise the benefits, while mitigating the associated risks. He stated that the panel discussion created an opportunity to bring together best practices of how migrants have helped boost the economies of their home countries, what he called the realized potential of migrants.

Mr. Mariano stated that when we talk about Africa and International migration, we often forget that we are actually talking about the unrealized potential of migration for development. He emphasized that the unrealized financial benefits of migration such as remittance flows, Diaspora bonds and migrant skills could be used to enhance peace, security and development in Africa. He further noted that one of the defining features of the global village was the increasing mobility of goods, services, financial resources and people. Mr. Mariano informed the meeting that many African countries had witnessed large movements of people for political, social and/or economic reasons. He reaffirmed the need for the experts at the meeting to take steps to rethink and forge the linkages between migration and development, and ensure that African migrants shared the positive gains made.

Mr. Mariano alluded to other initiatives such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the IOMs Regional Consultative Processes, stressing the importance of continued support by the UN and developmental partners to move the process forward. He informed the meeting that managing migration was a public policy challenge which required a paradigm shift from viewing migration as a nuisance, but instead looking at it as a positive force for development which could lead to an improvement in national and regional security, help deepen African solidarity and enhance the continent's diversity. Finally, he stated that roughly 23.6 million African migrants contributed remittances to the continent.

III Highlights of the presentations by the panellists:

Socio-economic implications of international migration on development:

Dr. Arikana Chihombori, International Chair, (AU) Diaspora African Forum, stated that due to rampant corruption, nepotism, unemployment and lack of good governance, people were forced to migrate in search of better opportunities. She categorized migrants as old migrants, who sought to return home, and new migrants, who decided to make there countries of destination there home countries. Dr. Chihombori informed the meeting that one of the major challenges of international migration was brain drain, noting that skilled labor migration (exceeding 50% for many African countries) was especially high in Africa, as compared to other regions of the world. She

added that this was primarily due to a low human capital base. Dr. Chihombori further stated that the consequence of brain drain resulted in the loss of critical mass in production, as well as fiscal losses due to forgone revenue from a lower tax base.

Dr. Chihombori stated that emigration of skilled workers could generate human capital gains to countries of origin through remittances, return migration and Diaspora network effects, adding that when migrants returned to their countries of origin, they brought with them a set of productive skills acquired abroad. She however emphasized that while individual households gained from remittances, States that heavily relied on migrant remittances often had little to show in the way of institutional development. Dr. Chihombori cautioned that remittances could also create income disparities, and in this regard stressed that more work was required to create clear objectives and strategies to harness the potential benefits of international migration.

The impact of international migration on peace and security:

Mr. Abdulla Mohamoud, Executive Director, African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC), informed the meeting that many African governments had started to initiate Diaspora-friendly policies which created an enabling environment for migrants to return home. He stated that by-and-large, the perception of African governments' was changing towards the Diasporas as they were now increasingly seen as countrymen who could contribute to the development of their home countries. He informed the meeting that there were currently over 30 African countries with Diaspora-oriented institutions and ministries established to specifically address Diaspora-led development related issues.

Mr. Mohamoud further stated that the African Diaspora had been more constructive rather than destructive in the resolution of conflicts in the continent. He stated that due to exposure to foreign political cultures, the African Diaspora was now contributing to the dialogue on conflict resolution in their home countries. He emphasized the need for the Diaspora to contribute towards capacity building and to organize themselves as peace-oriented activists. He also stressed the need for the Diaspora to assist in setting up peace-building projects, like in the case of Burundi, leading to a gradual transformation of the country.

Mr. Mohamoud identified four critical areas where the African Diaspora could make contributions to conflict resolution in their respective countries of origin; they include: (i) sending remittances to the country of origin; (ii) getting involved in political discourse in their homelands; (iii) participating in civic-oriented activities; and (iv) lobbying for sustainable peace. He added that the advantages of Diaspora involvement included promoting peace, bringing new ideas of how to deal with conflict, contributing to peace-building initiatives, and occupying a vital strategic bridge between the western world and Africa.

Mr. Mohamoud informed the meeting that the Diaspora channelled information, best practices, smart ideas, creative peacemaking tools, and had extensive transnational

networks and political connections for conflict resolution. However, he maintained that challenges remained, including the fact that the Diaspora lacked sufficient peace-building capacities and skills to contribute effectively in conflict resolution in their homelands. Moreover, due to limited access to well connected peace circles, the Diaspora was, in some cases, seen as part of the problem instead of the solution.

The impact of intra-African migration on development and conflict:

Prof. Adepoju informed the meeting that there was a blurred distinction between internal migration and international migration. He stated that intra-regional migration was more dominant in Africa, with migrants moving to specific locations within their respective regions, for instance, in the ECOWAS region, migrants moved primarily to Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire (before the latest civil unrest); in the SADC region, migrants moved to South Africa and Botswana; in the EAC region, migrants moved to Kenya; in the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC) region, migrants predominantly flowed towards Gabon and the DRC; and in the AMU region, migrants moved towards Libya (before the latest conflict).

Prof. Adepoju added that the dominant intra-regional migratory configurations were cross-border clandestine labour migration, commercial migration, female migration, human trafficking, student mobility, brain circulation of skilled professionals, and forced migration through refugee flows. He added that destination countries benefited highly from intra-regional migration as migrants, especially unskilled migrants, performed dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs (3D) which the locals did not want to perform.

Prof. Adepoju stated that migrants helped to sustain services and production in the destination countries by helping to diversify their productive sectors and investing in the host countries economies. He gave examples of migrant labourers working in mines and plantations in Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Republic of South Africa, and Libya. Moreover, transnational movements of the Diaspora led to skills transfer, resulting in the modernisation of the societies of the countries of origin. On the other hand, some migrants faced xenophobic attacks, with local politicians blaming failure of policies on migrants, as was the case in South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire.

Prof. Adepoju stated that the volume of remittances for the countries of origin were relatively high and stable despite the recent economic crisis, noting that the use of remittances at the micro, meso and macro levels for development had overtaken ODA flows to the continent. In this regard, he requested the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa to support the establishment of the *AU/WB African Institute of Remittances* to help improve the legal and regulatory frameworks for migrants through research, enhancing capacity of financial institutions, and by developing price databases for remittances.

IV Main issues raised during the discussion:

In the ensuing discussions that followed, representatives thanked the panellist for the presentations and thanked OSAA for organizing the panel discussion. Specifically, the representative from Algeria alluded to the 2006 African Common Position on Migration and Development, noting that it covered a number of areas including migration and development, human resources and brain drain, remittances, migration and peace, security and stability, migration and human rights, to name a few. She added that the African Common Position on Migration and Development also contained a set of recommendation at national, continental and international levels, which were aimed at addressing migration and development issues.

Towards this end, the representative from Algeria informed the meeting that in recent years, migration had been making its way steadily towards the top of the continental and international agenda, hence the urgency for governments to put in place migrant friendly policies. She added that there was a need for a comprehensive and balanced approach to migration, taking into account migration realities and trends, as well as linkages between migration and other key economic, social, political and humanitarian issues, such as eradication of poverty and the link of migration to climate change. She also called for the establishment of the *AU/WB African Institute of Remittances*.

The representative from Niger noted that many migrants in the western world faced many challenges, especially in assimilating into their host countries. He asked whether there were entities available where migrants could seek help. He inquired what the AU was doing to assist the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa. The representative from Nigeria informed the meeting that of the 150 million migrants in the world, more than 50 million were estimated to be Africans. He added that given the rising number of migrants, which was unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, it was critical that efforts are made to manage them efficiently. He underscored the failure of the United Nations Joint Initiative on Migration and Development (JMDI), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The representative from Nigeria stated that the JMDI was supposed to finance a series of migration and development projects which would be jointly conceived and implemented by civil society groups and local authorities from the European Union Member States working in partnership with their counterparts in countries outside the EU. However, due to a lack of funding, the development projects were not being funded. He therefore called for a fund to be created, made up of stolen resources recuperated from corrupt politicians, to fund these projects.

The representative from Liberia stated that remittances to Ghana totalled some \$300 million annually. He stressed that remittances were considered private money and should not be seen as resources for development work. He called for the creation of an institute to manage remittance flows to the continent and urged African governments to rebuild their societies, create incentives for migrants to return, stem corruption, employ good governance practices and the rule of law. He wanted to know how the Diaspora could be better utilized and more involved in facilitating peace processes.

The representative from UN-DESA echoed the same sentiments, stressing that African countries should not rely on remittances for their development. He gave examples of countries such as the People's Republic of China and India, which had achieved great progress in pushing their development agenda forward, without relying on remittances. He noted that the 2006 African Common Position on Migration and Development coincided with the High Level Conference on Migration and Development held the same year. In this regard, he underscored the importance of African Governments coming together, once again, to build on their 2006 African Common Position, in preparation for the follow-up High Level Conference on Migration and Development to be held in 2013. He then requested for more elaboration on the concept of unrealized potential of migration.

In response Mr. Mariamo stated that the unrealized financial benefits of migration, through remittance flows and Diaspora bonds, were significant. He stated that the transaction cost of remittances to Africa and within Africa were the highest in the world. In this regard, Mr. Mariamo informed the meeting that if the transaction costs of remittances were reduced to the levels seen in Asia or Latin America, and if part of these transaction costs were channelled for development purposes, we would be witnessing the realized potential of international migration. Moreover, he stated that Diaspora bonds were hardly used in Africa even though the World Bank had estimated that Africa had the capacity to raise \$5-10 Billion yearly on Diaspora bonds. Mr. Mariamo added that African governments had to put in place good governance practices, with functioning legal institutions and investment friendly environments to encourage migrants to return to their homelands.

Dr. Mohamoud, in response to the question on preparations for the 2013 High Level Conference on Migration and Development, informed the meeting that the AU Citizens Directorate (CIDO) was already working to update the 2006 African Common Position, in preparation for the 2013 Conference. He added that regional consultations would be carried out to formulate a proposal for the agenda of the Conference. In response to the question on the Diaspora and peace processes, Mr. Mohamoud stated that the way forward would entail fostering a process in which Diasporas and civil society peace activists in the homelands could join forces for peace-building activities on the ground.

Mr. Mohamoud stressed the importance of recognizing that Diasporas could be used as positive agents for peace process in their homelands. He emphasized the need for African governments to develop policy instruments to mainstream long-distance peace-building activities, initiated by Diasporas, into their existing peacemaking frameworks and processes. Mr. Mohamoud also stressed the importance of mainstreaming donor related activities, UN activities, and civil society activities into government processes to allow for a more harmonized and coherent approach in utilizing the contributions being made by the Diaspora. He also suggested that peace-building initiatives implemented by Diaspora organizations should be showcased and published to inspire others to participate and contribute to development and peace initiatives.

Dr. Chihombori stated that African governments had a lot of work to do to create an enabling environment to facilitate economic growth and development. She pointed to the fact that Western countries still dictated the selling price of primary commodities, which stifled the export industries in many African countries. Moreover, she stated that the terms of trade were against many African countries due to Western pressures. Dr. Chihombori further stated that corruption and bribery were inherent in the relationship between African countries and their development partners, noting that both Western countries and some African leaders benefited through the corrupt practices. As a result of this, many African countries struggled economically, leading to international migration to the West in search of better economic opportunities.

Professor Adepoju called for an African Institute to manage remittances, led by the AU. He further stressed the importance of good leadership in Africa in order to move the continent forward. Professor Adepoju noted that the onus was on African governments to improve the livelihoods of its citizenry, and not the donor community. He added, however, that despite the increasing remittance flows to the continent, donors had an obligation to continue investing and committing to their pledges to increase ODA to the African continent. Professor Adepoju emphasized that advocacy for an African Common Position on Migration and Development (migration and development, remittances, peace, security, human rights) was crucial.

Professor Adepoju stressed the importance of ensuring the institutional capability of RECs, while also promoting inter-REC labour mobility through bilateral and multilateral labour migration agreements. Professor Adepoju also called for fast tracking the integration processes of the African Economic Community, greater efforts to eradicate poverty, generate employment for the youths, establish a comprehensive, balanced migration management system, and the creation of an Advisory Board to facilitate policy dialogue on Migration and Development for stakeholders at all levels (national, sub-regional and regional).

In response to the question by the representative of Niger on what the international community was doing to assist migrants in countries of destination, and IDPs within Africa, Mr. Hayford pointed to the great work being done by the UN-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN-IOM, particularly for displaced persons.

V Conclusion - Recommendations and way forward:

The moderator, in summing up the debate, highlighted the main issues raised by the panellists and participants. Mr. Hayford summarized the discussions on the way forward as follows:

Need for Interventions on Migration and Development to:

- affect the volume of remittances: relaxation of stringent financial and monetary policies and regulations;
- affect remittance transfer mechanisms: reduction in transfer costs; formalising and promoting account-based channels;
- affect the management of remittance funds using the banking system;
- affect the uses and impact of remittances : matching communal remittances with government funds; promoting financial literacy;
- improve information; establish data base on remittances and Diaspora;
- explore Diaspora bonds and savings for productive use/domestic development;
- promote favourable working conditions for potential migrants to remain in their countries, and those in Diaspora to return home to contribute to national development.

Need for Interventions on Migration and Conflict to:

- showcase positive aspects of migration;
- engage the Media in constructive reporting on migration and migrants;
- promote integration of migrants in destination communities; traditional African hospitality;
- “catch the youth” as a future leaders strategy: promoting students’ exchange;
- promote peace and security as a precondition for sustained development;
- promote rights and obligations of migrants;
- promote dialogue among migrant/local communities;
- create early warning systems in potential flashpoint areas.