



INDIA
भारत

Please check against delivery

71 Session of UNGA
UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants

INDIA STATEMENT
Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs
Shri M. J. Akbar

New York

19 September 2016

Thank you for convening this meeting on an issue that has continued to make headlines over the last several months. Although much of the push for these deliberations comes from the more immediate impacts felt by the refugee crisis in certain parts of the world, these problems have been with us for a long time.

While the current plight of the refugees, be it from West Asia or parts of Africa, is a direct consequence of the armed conflict situations obtaining there; the discussion about migrants relates to the forces of the ongoing globalization. The two phenomena are very distinct. Migration is a voluntary process, while refugees flee their homeland due to war and destruction.

To put the issue of refugees in perspective, the number of people on the move globally is estimated at close to 250 million - one in every thirty persons. Refugees are currently estimated to be around 20 million - one of every twelve persons on the move. Three fourths of the refugees come from just 11 countries. Seven countries host more than half of all refugees. Almost 90% of all refugees are hosted in developing countries!

There is a long history of large communities seeking refuge in India going back several centuries. There have been several other instances too of large communities having come to independent India from our region over the past seven decades and continued arrivals from beyond in recent times. I recall vividly the time when our neighbour Bangladesh was fighting for independence, more than 1.2 million people took refuge in India from the genocide they were faced with. We have developed situation-specific responses in each such instance. People seeking shelter in India have never been turned back. Our record in this context is second to none.

We must work together, especially on the preventive aspects of refugee crises situations. Preventing armed conflicts, countering terrorism, building and sustaining peace through facilitating sustainable development and governance will help prevent people being forced to leave their homelands.

India engages regularly with the UNHCR. India also has partnered the UN Relief and Works Agency UNRWA for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East since long in the significant work being done by them, including by making financial contributions.

Mr. President,

In a way, all of us are migrants, having originated, perhaps, from Africa. More recently most of our nation states and societies have been built upon waves of

migration of various ethnic groups over the past centuries. Migration has continued to expand, now aided by the integrating economies over the last few decades.

Migration is a complex issue and means different things to different groups at different times. We in India are acutely aware of this complexity.

Migrants - professionals, unskilled workers, students - alike have an overall positive impact on economy both in the host and origin countries, as various studies have shown. However, from time to time, recent migrants in many societies face discrimination caused by narrow political considerations. Knowledge & innovation driven economy requires free mobility. India's priority is to work towards Trade Facilitation Agreement for Services.

India is a destination and a transit country for a very large number of migrants from our region. Also, a large number of Indians travel abroad as migrants. The Indian government and people, therefore, are no strangers to the entire range of issues, compulsions, opportunities, challenges and policy dilemmas associated with the issue of migration.

The Indian civilization has been built upon successive waves of migration throughout history comprising traders, soldiers, missionaries, communities escaping persecution, artists and academics and artisans seeking better opportunities. Indian traders and missionaries have also settled on distant shores on the spice routes. In colonial times, Indians were taken to different continents as indentured labour and officials. Indian traders followed them. In more recent times, Indian migrants, including a broad cross section of - professionals, small entrepreneurs and skilled and less skilled workers, have migrated to various countries around the world. Today India has over 20 million strong Diaspora contributing to the economies and societies in various ways in their host countries.

Our government focuses attention on the entire range of issues relating to Indian emigrants, especially those with lesser skills. These are primarily welfare oriented issues, including their ethical recruitment, safer working and living conditions, non-discrimination, preventing xenophobic or racist attacks on them, preventing trafficking, facilitating remittances and providing assistance to those in distress abroad.

India engages actively for the facilitation of the mobility of professionals under WTO's GATS mode IV and issues relating to equivalence of educational and professional qualifications to taxation and social security benefits.

We look forward to engaging with all partners beginning next year developing a Global Compact on ensuring a safe, orderly and regular migration that is in the interest of all.

We hope that the deliberations on this issue at the United Nations will help focus attention not only on the short term aspects but the more longer term management of these phenomena.

Ultimately, large movements of peoples across borders serve as reminders of our world being a global village. We can only prosper or perish together. It is best that we help each other live in peace and prosperity.

Thank You.
