



United Nations Human Settlements Programme

**Statement of
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**Presented by
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**on the occasion of the High-level Segment of
the United Nations Economic and Social Council
(ECOSOC)**

**“Creating an environment at the national and international
levels conducive to generating full and productive
employment and decent work for all and its impact on
sustainable development”**

**Roundtable Discussion on
Globalization and Labour Migration**

United Nations Office at Geneva, Wednesday, 5th of July 2005

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here for this year's ECOSOC High-Level Segment and to participate in this Roundtable Discussion on Globalization and Labour Migration.

At the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government agreed that productive employment and decent work should be at the centre of economic and social policies to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving the global poverty level by 2015. Against this backdrop, the theme of this year's High-Level Segment - **Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development** - is timely and important.

Globalization means integration of national economies through the movement of people, trade, capital and information. Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It is a historical process. Globalization also means increased labour mobility across international borders. Today, more than 191 million people, including labour migrants, their dependents, refugees and permanent immigrants, live outside their countries of origin. According to recent estimates, there are 77 million international migrants in industrialized countries, 33 million in transitional economies, 23 million in East Asia, 21 million in the Middle East and North Africa and 14 million in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The growth in international labour migration is closely linked mainly to two factors. One is the decline in international travel costs. The other is labour shortages in countries experiencing rapid economic growth. We all know that globalization has greatly increased the movement of goods, services and capital across borders. But we must also recognize the fact that it has failed to bring down many barriers to the movement of people among countries. Goods, information, firms and capital can freely criss-cross international borders but people cannot.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Liberalization of international trade and structural adjustment programmes are also part of the globalization process. In many developing countries, structural adjustment programmes have imposed restrictions on government spending and state subsidies. These restrictions also meant significant drops in employment opportunities within the public sector. The formal private sector in most affected countries is simply unable to provide adequate employment opportunities. In many cases, structural adjustment programmes included termination of state subsidies that indirectly supported employment in agriculture and agricultural marketing. On the other hand, subsidies for agricultural production in developed countries making imports cheap at the expense of jobs for the poor. All of these factors have increased pressures for migration, both internal and international, because economic opportunities for survival at home have become less promising.

We must also recognize the huge economic potential of emigrants. Their economic role is important not only in receiving countries, but also in the sending countries, where remittances are one of the most significant and reliable sources of foreign exchange. Remittances are second only to oil in terms of the international monetary flows they create. Remittances, which totaled around \$232 billion last year, \$167 billion of which went to developing countries, contribute significantly to the GDP of many developing countries. For example, the 20 million people who constitute the Indian Diaspora spread over 135 countries sent back home nearly US\$ 15 billion in 2003. This exceeds revenues generated by India's highly regarded software industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A vast majority of migrants, both internal and international, are settling in cities and towns, because it is in urban areas, particularly in the urban informal sector, where they find any hopes of getting a job. Most migrants end up in informal settlements in cities that lack even basic services such as water and sanitary facilities. The urbanization of poverty is one of the most daunting challenges of the 21st century. An estimated 1 billion people are currently living in slums in cities throughout most of the developing world. This figure could easily reach 2 billion by 2030 unless urgent action is taken to improve the living conditions of existing slum dwellers and to prevent the formation of new slums. Recent studies show that the combined impact of high-density occupation and the lack of predictable income and access to decent shelter and water and sanitation render the urban poor as vulnerable as their rural counterparts to poor health, disease and malnutrition. In many cases, the urban poor are also more vulnerable as they depend on monetary income to access shelter, food, energy, water, health and education.

In most countries, central governments have transferred the responsibility of providing the basic services to municipalities, but without adequate financial support. Under these circumstances, growing flows of migrants are an additional responsibility on the already overburdened urban authorities.

Municipalities have no authority over national migration policies. Similarly, they have no capacity to control the flows of migrants into their cities. Housing and basic urban services are probably the single most important challenge new migrants face. Due to economic and social reasons, new migrants are kept out of the formal housing markets and as a result they end up in slums or other informal settlements in city outskirts.

Whether it is from rural areas to cities and towns within countries or movement across international borders, labour migration cannot be easily controlled, but it can be managed. In general terms, there is no doubt that the management of migration flows should not be unilateral. It should be inclusive. It should include international, national and local bodies. Migration policies are becoming increasingly important, particularly in receiving countries. We all agree that an important role of local urban authorities is to design and implement policies that raise productivity of urban economic activities. But

urban authorities should also recognize the importance of adopting policies that manage diversity and promote smooth integration of new migrants into the local communities. Representation of migrants in municipal councils should be a corner stone of such inclusive urban management strategies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Experience shows that pro-active immigration policies can mitigate the negative impacts of migration while maximizing the benefits. Labour migrants should be considered as development agents because of the potential they have for forging economic and social links between sending and receiving countries. Although immigrants also make a significant contribution to economic development in host countries, they are often denied access to urban services. They are often excluded from urban opportunities. They seldom have a voice in the decision-making process.

We need to see labour migration as an opportunity, not a problem. Collaboration between various levels of government is strongly needed in order to overcome the inconsistencies of existing legislation on immigration. In an age of accelerated globalisation, multiculturalism represents the future of urban life worldwide. It is therefore very important to adopt national and urban policies that are compatible with changing urban cultures. Like local residents, labour migrants should have equal access to education, healthcare, adequate housing, and these rights must be safeguarded institutionally. UN-HABITAT promotes policy development focusing on the key areas of urban governance, land planning and administration, urban environmental management, urban safety, housing and urban infrastructure, and water and sanitation. Policy guidelines and norms are reviewed by professional and local government associations and civil society organizations before they are presented to intergovernmental fora and applied at the national level. We, therefore, call on all Member States to adopt and ratify the 1990 United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of Their Families.

I thank you for your kind attention.