

**United Nations Commission for Social Development**  
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**Chairman's Summary of Panel Discussion on**  
**"International migration and migrants from a social perspective"**  
**10 February 2004**

At its 10<sup>th</sup> meeting on 10 February, under item 3(c) of its agenda, Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting social development, the Commission for Social Development held a panel discussion on "International migration and migrants from a social perspective". The Chairman of the Commission, H.E. Jean-Jacques Elmiger (Switzerland), acted as moderator. The members of the panel were Mr. Gerónimo Gutiérrez (Vice-Minister for North America at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico) and Mr. Jan O. Karlsson (Co-Chair of the Global Commission on International Migration).

The Commission welcomed this opportunity for an exchange of views on an issue that is widely recognized as extremely important for the international community and it greatly appreciated the scope and quality of the interactive dialogue that took place between the panellists, its members, and representatives of the civil society.

International migration is a complex phenomenon of a global nature and with many dimensions. It involves relations between sovereign states, while resulting essentially from decisions by individuals and families. It has demographic, economic, legal and social facets. It has a North-South dimension, but not uniquely, as the movements of people across the world are increasingly diversified. It has a strong regional dimension, notably when regions have embarked into processes of cooperation and integration. A prominent example is the European Union. And international migration is an inherent and critical aspect of the current process of interdependence and globalisation.

It was generally agreed that international cooperation in this domain ought to be reinforced. For some, as a matter of urgency. For others, in a very gradual manner. For all, by building on existing forms of cooperation, notably the various regional processes. The main objectives of this strengthened international cooperation would be to better manage migratory movements, to protect international

migrants, and, as part of the process of cooperation, to progressively envisage to establish a normative framework acceptable to all countries concerned. The notion of shared responsibility was evoked.

Means to these objectives include a change in the overall negative perception that currently marks migration in parts of the world, a great effort at communication on the positive role of migrants – notably their economic contribution to host countries. Regarding the countries of origin of the migrants and the benefits they derive from the emigration of their citizens, the question of remittances was mentioned. These remittances are definitely important from an economic and development viewpoint, but it was recalled that they are part of a personal income and that the main issue for bilateral and international cooperation is to ensure that they can be easily and cheaply transferred by the immigrants themselves. The question of brain-drain was also mentioned. Some developing countries are losing people essential to their development –for instance in the health sectors – without having the possibility to compete for retaining this personnel. Not all developing countries benefit in return from a “brain-gain.”

Besides improving communication and disseminating accurate facts, an equally great effort is needed to producing reliable information, data, and concepts adjusted to the changing realities of international migration. Moreover, an active involvement of governments and other national and international, public and private actors of the development process, is required in the various aspects of a strengthened cooperation on migratory issues. The role of the international and regional financial institutions was mentioned. As international migration is still primarily the result of income and resources differences and imbalances between countries and regions, the effects of international economic, trade and financial trends and policies on employment and income opportunities in countries of emigration should be carefully assessed. All forms of international cooperation are linked. Also, a strengthened and effective international cooperation on migration and the situation of migrants will depend on the quality and coherence of related national policies.

It was also generally agreed that a social perspective on international migration and the situation of migrants was a legitimate and useful facet of a more active international cooperation. This social perspective ought to be focused on the perceptions of the issue, on the well being of the migrants, and on the effects of migrations on the social fabric of the countries concerned. A clear and secure legal status, a decent job

yielding a sufficient income, access to social services and social benefits, are key elements of the well-being and personal security of immigrants. Their social protection is essential to their integration. The protection and enhancement of their rights remain fundamental and should not be seen in terms of the costs involved, but rather in terms of the building of a peaceful and harmonious world community. Exploitation, discrimination, xenophobia and racism towards immigrants are scourges that will be eliminated by forceful and coherent policies at all levels. The situation of women and children, often victims of exploitation and abuse, was emphasised as requiring determined forms of cooperation.

An important aspect of international cooperation on migration from a social perspective would be the establishment or strengthening of precise and efficient mechanisms and processes for a dialogue, exchange of information and knowledge, and exchange of experiences between governments and involving the other actors concerned. These exchanges would take into account the needs and prospects of the members of the international community. It would integrate elements such as the evolution of technologies, demographic trends, questions of security, and the various gaps, inequalities and forms of poverty that ought to be eliminated. During these processes, the involvement of the migrants themselves and of organizations of the civil society and of the private sector was emphasized.

The Commission was apprised of the launching of the Global Commission on International Migration. This Global Commission is co-chaired by Jan Karlsson and Mamphela Ramphele. The Secretary General of the United Nations views this Commission as a body that can help take international cooperation to a new level and whose final report he hopes will "help build a framework for greater cooperation among States to manage migration for the benefit of all." The Global Commission will produce its report in the summer of 2005.