

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL****ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

New York, 6 June 2006

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

In preparation for the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which this Assembly is to hold on 14 and 15 September, I have the honour to submit the report that you requested from me in resolution 59/241, reiterated by resolution 60/227.

The report offers a comprehensive review of recent trends in international migration, focusing particularly on the impact that it has on both countries of destination and countries of origin. It draws on many previous studies, including the very valuable one undertaken by the Global Commission on International Migration, which presented its report and recommendations to me last year.

In today's report, I focus on the aspects of international migration that are most relevant to development.

The report makes a strong case that international migration, supported by the right policies, can be highly beneficial for the development both of the countries they come from and of those where they arrive. But it also stresses that these benefits are contingent on the rights of the migrants themselves being respected and upheld.

It shows that, contrary to some received opinion, migration involves women and men in almost equal numbers. And it therefore considers the role of gender in international migration and its impact on gender-related issues.

Perhaps most important, the report explores many new ways in which Governments are seeking to manage the flows and skills of people, in order to make the greatest use of migration's development potential. It surveys existing intergovernmental cooperation in this field – including the normative framework, the various global and regional initiatives that have been taken, and the bilateral approaches that are being tried, such as agreements on the portability of pensions and health benefits. And it points out that international cooperation is also crucial in the struggle to protect people against the odious crime of human trafficking.

Member States will of course draw their own conclusions from the facts set out. But I have ventured, in the foreword to the report, to make some tentative suggestions, which I will summarise for you now.

First, I should like to congratulate the Assembly on its decision to hold a High-Level Dialogue on this subject, preceded by high-level panels, and a hearing with representatives of civil society.

The report shows very clearly that we are in the midst of a new migration era, and that international migration today is indeed a global phenomenon. Large numbers of people migrate in search of a better life, not only between neighbouring countries or within a region, but to and from the uttermost ends of the earth. If anyone harbours doubts on that point, a stroll through this city should quickly put them right.

There can be very few countries that are not affected by international migration in one way or other, and policy-makers are increasingly recognizing its importance for development. Thus a global discussion on international migration and development could hardly be more timely. To ensure that its importance is fully appreciated at the highest level, Mr. Peter Sutherland - who, as you know, was the founding Director-General of the World Trade Organization – has kindly agreed to serve as my Special Representative for Migration. He is already engaged in intensive consultations with Governments, and will continue to urge them to bring their best ideas to the Dialogue in September.

My second point is that evidence of the benefits brought by international migration is accumulating. It is no coincidence, and should be no surprise, that many countries which not so long ago were primarily sources of migrants – for instance Ireland, several countries in southern Europe, the Republic of Korea and Chile – have developed spectacularly, and now boast thriving economies which make them an attractive destination for migrants.

Benefits both to countries of origin and to countries of destination are highly relevant to development, since both categories include many developing countries. Indeed some developing countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand, are at this moment making the transition from one category to the other.

Yet – and this is my third point – it would clearly be naive to pretend that all is for the best in the best of all migratory worlds.

We are all too familiar with the abuses to which many migrants are subjected – whether in transit, where they fall prey to smugglers and traffickers, sometimes with fatal consequences, or in the countries where they settle, where they are often exposed to exploitation by unprincipled employers and also to xenophobic reactions from parts of the resident population, including sometimes even the representatives of public authority.

By the same token, we must all be aware of the social and cultural tensions that have arisen in many countries where there are large and recently established populations of foreign origin, especially when these populations have traditions or beliefs sharply different from those that long-term residents of the country are used to. The benefits that migrants bring to the country as a whole, and over time, are often eclipsed by more immediate and local grievances, whether well-founded or not.

And most of us must also now be aware of negative effects felt in some countries of origin, particularly when workers with badly needed skills, for instance in the health sector, are “drained” away by better conditions and higher salaries abroad.

For all these reasons it seems clear that few if any countries would be willing, so to speak, to “lie back” and enjoy the benefits of migration, without seeking to manage it. But it would be equally foolish to try to stop it altogether, since this could be achieved only by an application of State power so draconian that it would threaten the freedom, as well as the prosperity, of any country that resorted to it.

It is therefore not surprising, Excellencies, that more and more governments are seeking to channel the flow of migrants, whether out of or into their countries, in ways that maximise the benefits while minimising the adverse side effects.

Countries of destination seek, for instance, to select migrants whose skills are most needed, and have experimented with various policies aimed at promoting harmony and mutual respect between new communities and established citizens. Meanwhile countries of origin seek more and more to spread the benefits of remittances among their population, to work with communities of migrants abroad, and to give them incentives to invest their acquired skills and capital back home.

Many of these policies require, or can be facilitated by, cooperation between the governments concerned. Even where this is not the case, there is much to be gained from sharing experiences, both positive and negative, and exchanging ideas.

And that of course, Excellencies, is precisely the point of the Dialogue your Governments will hold in September. Those two days and the preparation for them – to which I hope my report will prove a useful contribution – promise to be a very rich learning experience for all concerned.

My only fear – and this is my final point – is that two days will not be enough. It seems to me that this topic will not soon be exhausted.

International migration is likely to be with us as long as human societies continue to develop. It has increased significantly in recent decades – as it did in previous periods of economic integration, such as the one preceding the First World War. In all probability it will continue to rise in the decades ahead. Both the opportunities and the challenges associated with this most dynamic phenomenon will continue to evolve. Humanity’s response will need to be constantly reinvented, in ways that will no doubt require governments to intensify their cooperation.

That is why in my report I have suggested that Governments may wish the High-Level Dialogue to mark, not the end, but the beginning of serious global cooperation on this issue.

I do not for one minute suggest, or imagine, that Governments would relinquish any control of their borders, or of their policies in an area so central to national identity and sovereignty. But I do suggest that, if they find the High-Level Dialogue as valuable as I believe

they will, they may wish to establish a permanent forum, of a voluntary and consultative nature, with a view to continuing the debate, the sharing of experience, and the exchange of ideas.

If they do so wish, it goes without saying that the United Nations is available as a venue, and that its staff are ready to give Member States whatever assistance they may require in organizing and servicing such a forum. Indeed, that would be a highly appropriate role for this Organization, dedicated as it is, by its Charter, to “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”.

Thank you, Mr. President.