

19 May 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the Informal Thematic Debate of the General
Assembly on International Migration and Development**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this thematic debate, which is the first that the General Assembly has devoted to the issue of international migration and development.

I am happy that we will have today an exchange of the views and experiences of experts, political decision makers and the representatives of migrants and their families on this very topical theme. I hope that, through the practical orientation of our debate, we will make a useful contribution to the preparations for the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development that will be held at the General Assembly in 2013.

The globalized world is becoming ever more interdependent and international migration, along with movements of capital, goods and services, is a driving force behind that increased integration. The number of international migrants, estimated in 2010 to number 214 million, is constantly increasing, and that trend has not been reversed by the economic and financial crisis. It is essential, in the four years that remain before the target date for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, that migration should be made a positive force for development and benefit the various parties involved: not only the migrants themselves, of course, but their countries of origin and countries of destination.

Against that background, and since the first High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development was held in 2006 and the call was made for international cooperation to be strengthened in order to maximize the positive effect of migration, several notable advances should be highlighted, including the following:

Collaboration between countries of origin and countries of destination has improved in many respects, particularly at the regional level. Procedures for consultation and dialogue have been put in place and free movement zones have been established.

Various funds, facilities and multilateral programmes have been created with a view to promoting the development potential of international migration. A total of \$240 million has been allocated for that purpose, testifying to the engagement of all donor countries with the question of migration within the framework of development.

Several countries of origin have reinforced ties with their nationals abroad in order to ensure that their rights are respected and that they are more actively involved in the development of their communities of origin. Programmes have been implemented with the aim of promoting the return to their countries of origin of skilled migrants, from whose expertise the country could benefit.

In some cases, the cost to migrants of repatriating funds to their countries of origin has fallen, having a positive impact on the incomes of migrants and their families and improving their nutrition and access to health and education services.

Such welcome changes have been, to some extent, facilitated by the activities of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, instituted after the High-level Dialogue of 2006. However, work does not stop there. We must continue to implement the recommendations of the Forum, and intensify efforts to find balanced, coherent and global responses to the issue of international migration, in order to maximize the positive impacts.

That will involve facing up to numerous challenges. The effects of the global economic and financial crisis are still being felt in many countries. Unemployment and economic insecurity particularly affect migrants. They also create a climate of anxiety and introversion and, sometimes, xenophobic excesses in the countries of destination, which has a negative impact on migratory movements. We must take into account the absorption capacities, that is: the social and economic capacities to cope with massive migration in countries of destination. But we must guard against the adoption of protectionist and isolationist policies: history has shown us the cost of those. We must make sure that we guarantee the rights of migrants and assure them of decent lives and working conditions.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that the two round tables of our debate today, because of the choice of themes and the superb quality of the speakers, will enable you to find practical means of reinforcing the contribution of migration to economic development.

During the first round table, which is devoted to the contribution of migrants to development, we shall be considering the policies which are best adapted to maximizing the benefits of migration, facilitating the remittance of funds by migrants and migrant access to health and education services. We shall also have to consider how cooperation between the authorities, unions, employers and other civil society actors can contribute to respect for migrant rights and to their full participation in the social and economic life of the country of destination.

The improvement of international cooperation over migration and development will form the nucleus of the second round table. This will be when we can exchange experiences and good practices, particularly on such specific questions as the protection of migrant rights or the recognition of qualifications.

I invite you all to share your comments, observations and experiences, in a concise and practical manner. Any delegation that wishes to do so will be able to publish their statements in full on the President's Internet site.

At the end of the day, I shall formulate a number of conclusions that will be available on our Internet site and serve as a reference document.

Thank you for your attention.