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UN Commission on Population and Development

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Agenda Item 4: National experience in population matters: new trends in migration - demographic aspects

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(Check against delivery)

Mr President

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in this forum and to provide some reflections on Australia's own experience with migration.

Immigration is a defining feature of Australia's recent history. More than 7.2 million people have migrated to Australia since World War II and one in four Australians is born outside the country.

The contributions migrants have made to Australian society, culture and economic development have shaped our nation.

The language skills, cultural knowledge, business networks and knowledge about foreign markets migrants bring have been invaluable to our development.

We also recognise that many migrants in Australia have strong ties to their home countries and send money home via remittances.

Since the launch of the G20 development agenda in 2010, Australia has made reducing the costs for migrant workers to send remittances a priority.

With Indonesia and Italy, we have led efforts to lower global remittance costs including securing G20 leaders' commitment in 2011 to reduce the global average cost to five per cent by 2014. Every reduction in costs has massive benefits for migrants and their home countries.

Since G20 leaders set the target in 2011, reductions in remittance costs have delivered about US\$1 billion more to poor families each year. Achieving the five per cent target would deliver an additional US\$15 billion each year.

Australia has taken concrete steps to reduce remittance costs and is urging others to do the same. In 2011, we contributed \$3.5 million to the World Bank Remittances Trust Fund to help developing countries reduce their remittance costs.

Australia has also submitted itself to a World Bank assessment of our remittance market against international best practice. We are now using the outcomes of this assessment to further reduce the remittance costs in Australia. For instance, the average cost of sending remittances from Australia to the Pacific has halved from 18 per cent in 2009 to nine per cent in 2013.

This is just one practical way we are supporting our migrant communities, and in turn their home countries.

Mr President

Increasingly, our understanding of the benefits of migration to Australia, to migrants and to source countries is framed in terms of the role of human mobility in economic connectivity.

And to the dissemination of knowledge, technology and innovation which are so central to a country's development.

We know that more market and semi-market economies are integrating into a more globalised economy.

That the costs and risks of international travel are lowering. And that ICT connectivity is becoming increasingly pervasive.

These developments are key drivers of contemporary social and economic restructuring processes that are also changing the dynamics of migration.

More people are moving from more places, through more places, and to more places, more often. So the migration story is one not only of permanent immigration, but also one of mobility.

Last December, Australia had close to 1.75 million temporary entrants. These entrants comprised international students, working holiday makers, temporary workers, tourists and visitors.

In today's increasingly connected and mobile world, a person may visit Australia as a working holiday maker, a seasonal worker, return for further study, find work as a temporary migrant, and then move on to a third country.

Or immigrate and become a citizen, then start a business in their country of origin. And these patterns of people movement also apply to those born in Australia.

This flow of people, goods, services, knowledge, technology, finance and investment capital, strengthens inter-country links and enables development.

Mr President

In an increasingly connected world, the global effects of migration need not be considered only in zero-sum national terms.

With many migrants not necessarily staying permanently in countries of destination, concerns about the outflow of talent from developing countries may now need to incorporate the idea of return benefits to countries enabled by human mobility from connectivity and flows that foster development.

This was a point highlighted by Professor Graeme Hugo in his keynote address during the Commission's opening session.

Migrants may travel abroad but then return home with new skills, expertise and an ability to build their home society in ways not within their capacity prior to migrating.

And they may assist the development of home communities even while

overseas, not just through remittances but through ongoing civic, economic, family and political engagement.

In conclusion, Mr President, the global flow of people is intensifying.

The world is increasingly connected.

It is important that people movement between more and less developed countries is seen as a mutually beneficial and dynamic mechanism for integrating countries into a globalised world.

Our responses to the challenges and benefits of people movement can be guided by sharper attention to the opportunities for win-win-win outcomes for sending communities, receiving communities and migrants themselves.

Thank you.