

18 December 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Panel Discussion on the Occasion of International Migrants Day**

*Delivered by H.E. Hugo Siles Alvarado, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Bolivia to the United Nations*

Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Representatives of Civil Society,  
Friends,

I am pleased to join you on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Father Miguel d'Escoto, and to present his remarks for this panel discussion on the "Rights of Migrants: Facilitating migrants' participation in national and international affairs". The President, who is traveling, extends his warm greetings to you all and regrets that he cannot join you in person. His text follows:

This expert panel discussion on the Rights of Migrants is a valuable follow-up to the growing body of international law and commitments that address the problems and challenges facing both the burgeoning population of migrants in the world and the countries that receive them. The issue of migrants' participation in the national and international affairs addresses a relatively new area where the rights of migrants can be advanced. We recognize that this vulnerable population – estimated at 200 million people globally – must not only be protected, but given every opportunity to integrate themselves into the communities where they have settled and participate meaningfully in the economic social and cultural lives of their adopted homes. We must ensure that their voices are heard at the national and international levels as well.

I am grateful to UNITAR, the International Organization of Migration and the UN Population Fund and the many academics and representatives of concerned foundations and NGOs among the participants today for choosing the United Nations as the forum for this discussion. As you all know, the UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1990 and we have marked the International Day of Migrants each 18 December since 2001. Your forum today brings needed international attention to the International Day this year.

The legislation, programmes, research and public awareness campaigns at the international level have provided UN Member States with valuable guidance in their efforts to protect and integrate immigrants. They have prompted valuable reports and investigations by human rights organizations,

including offices in the United Nations. These have served to highlight and mitigate the well-documented human rights violations, discrimination and marginalization of these people from the mainstream of societies. As the vast majority of migrants travel in search of employment, much of the emphasis has been on the rights of migrant workers and their families – and correctly so. The impact of migration on the economies of their adopted countries and the importance of their remittances in their countries of origin are very important.

For its part, the complex and infinitely varied issues of migration have increasingly been integrated into the work of the General Assembly. In 2006, the Assembly devoted two days to a High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. Member States emphasized their recognition that migration can be a positive force for development in receiving countries as well as countries of origin, provided it is supported by the right set of policies.

One outcome of the High-level Dialogue was the establishment of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, which is providing a valuable platform for policymakers to share information on ideas, good practices and policies regarding migration and development, and to explore new initiatives for international cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The Forum has already gathered twice, in Brussels and Manila.

There has been widespread support for incorporating international migration into the new United Nations development agenda and for integrating migration issues into national development strategies, including poverty-reduction strategies. This has been part of the work of the Global Migration Group established by the Secretary-General in 2006, which brings together UN offices, Funds and Programmes engaged in a range of international migrations and development issues.

Thanks to the increasingly concerted efforts of the United Nations, governments, the media and civil society organizations like those represented here today, the issues of migration and rights of migrants are seen in much more positive terms. The economic benefits and opportunities created by this dynamic flow of people are undeniable. As well, their contribution to the cultural diversity of the recipient countries is increasingly recognized and celebrated.

Certainly, we cannot minimize the continuing xenophobia, discrimination and ethnic conflicts that are also part of the migrant experience. We cannot underestimate the abuses of trafficking or the serious impact on the families and economic development of those countries that are left behind. But we are definitely seeing the flow of people through a more positive prism.

The international community, led by the United Nations, is broadening its focus from economic aspects of migration to include the challenges of the integration migrants in host countries. Migration is an enormously stressful and disruptive experience for most migrants and their families. The disruption of education for children, the issues of health and language and the alienation caused by the marginalization of migrants and migrant youth can have a devastating impact for years and even generations if they are not addressed. And there is ample evidence that these issues have not been sufficiently addressed in many countries.

Your panel here today is evidence of the evolving and maturing discussions that are now possible around these sensitive issues. The right of migrants to full participation in the affairs of their adopted country is certainly a challenge that will require the guidance of concerted and innovative policies. We look forward to hearing your debate and receiving the valuable conclusions and recommendations that you will undoubtedly produce. As President of the General Assembly, I assure you that we are listening and we thank you.