

# United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

6 December 2011

## **Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, at the Council of the International Organization for Migration**

His Excellency Mr. Christian Strohal,  
Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations Office in Geneva,  
Mr. Peter Sutherland, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Migration and Development,  
His Excellency Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General IOM,  
His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Director General of the United Nations Office at Geneva  
Madame Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General IOM,  
Mr Peter Schatzer, Chief of Staff, IOM,  
Mr Johan Rautenbach, Legal Counsellor, IOM,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to deliver this keynote address at this Council of the International Organization for Migration, and on this significant anniversary of your organization.

I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General IOM, for the invitation to join you today.

For the past 60 years, your organization has worked tirelessly to ensure that when people are on the move, they move with dignity.

I am pleased to celebrate this with you, well aware that this is not a moment for respite, but a moment that will serve as a mile-stone for the future work of this organization.

It is also an occasion to underscore our deep appreciation to the important contribution made by migrants and migration to development in countries of origin and destination.

The future of IOM is closely linked to the future of international migration. And migration is undoubtedly one of the major global issues of the 21st Century.

International migration has grown substantially in the last 20 years, and today some three per cent of the world's population lives outside of their country of birth. Add to this the almost 740 million internal migrants, and the more than 5 million people crossing international borders every year, and it is clear:

We truly live in a world that is on the move.

We notice that new migration poles are emerging in Asia, Africa and South America, amongst others, in response to the labor demands created by an increasingly mutually dependent global economy.

Migration provides a force for good, contributing significantly to human development.

When these international migrants return home, they bring their skills and expertise, and – not least – global perspectives.

Migrants establish businesses and create jobs in the countries that host them, and send millions in remittances as private capital to their countries of origin.

As we recognize the benefits of international migration, we have to recognize too that the discussion about it has reached a worrying imbalance.

The fear of the “other” has become more acute since the onset of the world financial and economic crisis. Migrants have increasingly become the targets of racist and intolerant attitudes and practices.

Recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa have highlighted the vulnerability of international migrants and the need for greater cooperation and coordination at all levels.

Furthermore, remittances have been negatively affected by rising unemployment and weak earnings growth among migrant workers in some countries of destination.

These are concerns we all must share and work in a dedicated manner to address.

Accompanying the growing movement of people in the world today is the increasing awareness that international migration has important implications for the work of the international community, including for the United Nations.

Solutions to problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and to international peace and security -- all of which are at the heart of the purposes and function of the United Nations -- cannot be considered complete if they fail to address the fact that people move.

The movement of people affects -- and is affected by-- all of the other major issues of our time, not least of which are the quest for peace, security, human and social development and sustainability.

Strengthening cooperation at the global, regional and bilateral levels is an essential component of any strategy aiming to enhance the contribution of international migration and migrants to development.

I am also pleased that these links are actively considered not only in the Assembly but also under the work of the Secretary-General.

In 2006, the General Assembly held its first ever High-Level Dialogue dedicated to international migration and development. Our task was – and continues to be – promoting international cooperation to maximize the benefits of international migration and to minimize its negative consequences.

In May of this year, under the stewardship of the General Assembly, UN Member States took stock of the advances made since 2006. They discussed recent policies and programs to harness the full benefits of migration. Others spoke of the projects they have developed to ensure that migration benefits all.

Furthermore, the subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly also regularly consider the human rights of all migrants and touch upon mobility as we speak about issues such as economic and social development, gender equality and humanitarian response.

As President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, today’s meeting is closely aligned with one of the four pillars I have identified for my Presidency: “Sustainable Development and Global Prosperity”.

As part of the preparations for the United Nation Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio in 2012, Member States are reflecting once again on the role of migration in the framework of sustainable development.

The movement of people will be one of the essential factors in realizing the objectives and outcomes the international community sets in these landmark arenas and frameworks.

Migration, in short, is and will continue to be, directly relevant to the international community’s concern and to our work at the United Nations.

While gaps in our understanding remain, it is clear that the international community is making progress.

The support of this principal inter-governmental organization working on migration, the IOM, will remain central in this regard.

As a keynote speaker, and President of the General Assembly, I have the responsibility to generate reflection and debate.

Thus, please allow me to leave you with some thoughts for your discussion.

First, IOM has made major gains in membership over the past decade. With over 140 Member States, representing each region and migration perspective, IOM has created a global network with more than 400 field locations.

As a global organization, IOM cooperates, and is in many cases fully integrated, with the United Nations, both at the central, regional and local levels.

Watching the crisis in Libya unfold earlier this year, and the groundbreaking work of IOM together with its partners in the humanitarian community in bringing hundreds of thousands of migrants to safety, it is clear that the world needs the IOM and that IOM's work is part and parcel of the international community's collective efforts.

I believe that there may be many gains to be made by further examining this partnership and how further cooperation between the United Nations and IOM could be facilitated.

Let me take this opportunity to recognize here the outstanding leadership of His Excellency Mr. William Lacy Swing. Under his leadership, particularly this year, the IOM has navigated a very challenging period in world history, and I commend Mr. Swing and the IOM for their exceptional work.

Second, I would like to reflect on the institutional structures that enable states to enter into dialogue and cooperate on international migration issues.

IOM has evolved and adapted as international migration has become one of the defining issues in the world today. As Mr. Swing has repeatedly stressed, no one government and no one agency can successfully address in isolation the complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that migration is today. Partnerships are essential.

Our discussion here today demonstrates IOM's capacity and role in offering a place and a means for states and other important migration stakeholders to come together and debate contemporary migration issues, with a view toward fostering deeper understanding and greater cooperation.

I would also like to commend the work of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, which has been a central arena in this regard. The state-led, informal, non-binding Forum has provided states and relevant partners with an important opportunity to discuss issues in the migration and development nexus.

With this in mind, I look forward to hearing the views of you, IOM's member states, who are also all members of the General Assembly, on how you see a potential role for IOM in facilitating the further development of dialogue and cooperation on migration, as well as possibilities for strengthening global institutional frameworks.

What contribution might you, IOM's Council, wish to make to the debate at the United Nations on migration, in addition to the contributions that you will no doubt make as individual UN member states and regional groups, including in preparation for the second high-level dialogue on international migration and development in 2013?

How would you suggest that we best ensure that cooperation is strengthened between your work here and our work together in New York?

Most importantly, how can we all best work to ensure that migration in the 21st century is a positive force for individual and society's development, and that migrants are treated with dignity and respect for their human rights?

It has been my pleasure, as the President of the General Assembly, to participate in your Council and to deliver one of its keynote addresses.

I thank you.