



Remarks

by

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High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development

Opening Plenary

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Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am deeply honoured to be here with you today, at the beginning of this important two-day dialogue on international migration and development, to discuss a topic that affects virtually every country in the world. And the recent tragedy in Scilly serves as tragic reminder of why our discussions on migration, particularly about the protection and well-being of migrants, is both critical and urgent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to begin my remarks today with a reference to my own country, the small island developing State of Antigua and Barbuda in the Caribbean, where migration is both a bane and a blessing. As a country of origin, migration deprives us of the skills we need for our development – teachers, nurses, technicians etc. But the flip-side of this coin is that some of our citizens who live and work overseas invest, engage in trade, and create businesses back home. In 2012, we received \$22 million US dollars in migrant remittances. At the same time, these persons leaving our shores also make important contributions to their countries of destination, providing much needed skills there and so enhancing growth.

But we are also a destination country, welcoming thousands of immigrants from many of our sister islands in the Caribbean. They contribute to our national development, and work to build better lives for themselves and their families.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

Over the next two days you will focus attention on these individuals and many others from all over the world, who leave their homes in search for better opportunity.

Intuitively, we know that such a journey to a new land offers potential for great reward – most, if not all, of us have also ventured from our own homelands – but how can we ensure that migrations benefits the individuals, as well as the societies and countries involved, while minimizing the downsides?

As you may recall our the General Assembly decided, at its sixty-seventh session, to hold this high-level dialogue with the overall theme of [quote] “Identifying concrete measures to strengthen coherence and cooperation at all levels, with a view to enhancing the benefits of international migration for migrants and countries alike and its important links to development, while reducing its negative implications”. [end quote]

This decision marked a turning point in a journey that began seven years ago with the First High Level Dialogue in 2006.

We agreed that migration, which for so long had been deemed too sensitive an issue, deserved—and indeed required—our collective attention and efforts. We also agreed that migration was not a zero-sum proposition, but that all could benefit, provided that migration was properly managed. And such management, I hasten to add, is a joint responsibility of countries of origin and countries of destination.

Seven years later, our progress has been significant.

First, at the United Nations, we continue to make progress, agreeing on many aspects related to international migration and development and the protection of migrants, while raising international awareness about the importance of the issue. A number of resolutions have been adopted in the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly and migration-related work is ongoing in our Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Second, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, established after the 2006 High Level dialogue, is serving us well as a venue for informal dialogue, exchange of good practices, and inter-state cooperation.

Third, civil society is working ever more closely with Member States in our quest to find practical solutions to concrete challenges. At the informal hearings held last July 15 in preparation for this Dialogue, civil society presented us with an action-oriented agenda for the next five years.

Fourth, the United Nations system is better coordinating its work on migration through the Global Migration Group and there is now enhanced collaboration with the International Organization for Migration.

Fifth, inspired by these new developments and in response to the realities on the ground, many of you are experimenting with innovative migration policies.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 25 June, my predecessor Vuk Jeremić organized a panel discussion on International Migration and Development, which clearly indicated the progress we have made so far. Panellists reminded us about the potential of migration as a force for development, the many hurdles migrants still face, and they acknowledged the progress made since 2006.

Learning from our experiences in the past seven years, we should now take the next step. In line with our overall theme, the focus of our meeting should first and foremost be on practical measures and responses. This means setting realistic targets, committing to implementation and monitoring progress.

In short, we must hold ourselves accountable in following up our dialogue; otherwise, our dialogue will remain just talk.

Excellencies,

Since the first High-level Dialogue, held in 2006, the face of migration has changed.

The overall global migration patterns have shifted. In parts of Europe and Northern America, migration rates have slowed, while new destinations have emerged in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In some areas, intra-regional mobility is on the rise. Agreements such as the “CARICOM Single Market and Economy” are removing obstacles to the free flow of skills, labour and capital. The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) has introduced measures to promote the free movement of its citizens. In addition to open mobility for citizens, the European Union has also developed standards for portability of health care and pensions.

Globally, the international community has experienced a series of crises related to food and fuel prices, and economic and financial markets, which impacted countries around the world. Some countries have bounced back with impressive growth rates, while others have been slow to recover. The impact on migrants has varied; some migrants were forced to return home when their jobs abroad disappeared, while new waves of migrants were created.

Backlash from the crisis has led to the resurfacing of racism, discrimination and intolerance. During economic downturns, migrants become easy scapegoats.

We must take a strong stand against this. We need to redouble our efforts to ensure that the contributions of migration are not only apparent to us, but also to the public at large. We have an important responsibility to get the message right.

Protecting the rights of all migrants must be the cornerstone of our migration policies. We have a special responsibility towards those migrants who are most vulnerable, especially undocumented migrants, women, children, youth and migrants stranded in humanitarian crises.

The equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. These words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights apply also, and in particular, to the more than 230 million international migrants.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

This Dialogue about migration and development comes at a critical time for the United Nations, as we are embarking on what may be the organization's most far-reaching and an ambitious task to date – defining a global development agenda to pick up where the Millennium Development Goals left off.

These past seven years have confirmed that well-managed migration reduces poverty, improves human capital, and contributes to global development. In 2012, migrants sent over \$400 billion in remittance flows, compared to \$126 billion in official development assistance. They also contribute to the transfer of knowledge, skills and technology. As our Assembly debates the contours of the new development paradigm, we must ensure that migration receives its rightful place in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.

This High-level Dialogue is an important opportunity to make vital contributions.

Over the course of these two days you will bring national experiences to the table. You will share your perspectives and your good practices. You will agree on many things, and you will no doubt disagree on some others.

I trust that our deliberations will be informed by:

- An acknowledgement of the joint responsibility of both countries of origin and countries of destination to manage migration in an equitable manner;
- Our commitment to uphold the principle of human dignity and celebrate the transformative power of human ingenuity, initiative and perseverance;
- Our shared belief in the rule of law and the need for people to abide by it;

-Our knowledge that societies that shut themselves off face stagnation and decline, whereas those that embrace diversity and opportunity reap the benefits; and above all by:

- Our determination to improve the lives of the millions of men, women and children who are “touched” by migration on a daily basis.

Yet, change is never simple. It requires patience, perseverance and a firm belief in the ability of all people to live together peacefully. We will need to listen to each other, work together, forge consensus and break new ground. And I am confident that we will rise to the occasion.

You now have before you the text of the Declaration, which I understand has already received your support. I wish to thank the delegation of Mexico for its valuable contributions in making this document a reality.

I wish you all very fruitful discussions.

Thank you.