



UNITED NATIONS
UNCTAD

AD-HOC EXPERT MEETING
Contribution of Migrants to Development:
Trade, Investment and Development Linkages

Geneva, 29 July 2009

OPENING REMARKS

By

William Lacy SWING
Director General
International Organization for Migration

OPENING REMARKS

**William Lacy Swing
Director General, International Organization for Migration**

**UNCTAD Ad-Hoc Expert Meeting on Contribution of Migrants to Development:
Trade, Investment and Development Linkages**

Geneva, Switzerland, 29 July 2009

Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi;
Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

It is an honor to join Secretary-General Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi and Ms. Marielza Oliveira, the Associate Director of the Governance Unit at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), in opening this “Ad-Hoc Expert Meeting on Contribution of Migrants to Development: Trade, Investment and Development Linkages.”

I am particularly pleased with this opportunity given that among my first order priorities is to strengthen IOM’s partnerships with its membership, with the UN Family, NGOs and other civil society actors.

No single organization can address complex issues such as migration, trade and development alone. Therefore, if we are to succeed in maximizing the benefits of migration for all involved – States, communities, and individuals – we must work together in partnership.

I have three points that I would like to make today.

I. The Lagging Element of the Globalization Equation: Human Mobility

My first point is that migration is overwhelmingly about labor mobility in response to demographic, economic and labor market dynamics.

Labor demands and deficits are growing in industrialized countries due to ageing populations and dramatically declining birth rates.

At the same time, much of the developing world is experiencing rapid population growth, surplus labor and the search for employment.

New labor markets open and employment opportunities attract skilled and unskilled labor. Yet in many cases, economic growth has not been matched by the evolution of migration policies and abilities that are able to facilitate and satisfy this demand.

The dismantling of trade barriers facilitates the freer movement of goods, services and capital. Yet migration policies have not kept apace. On the one hand, liberalized movement of persons is predicted to result in greater gains to development than further liberalization of other forms of trade; on the other hand, however, rather than breaking down barriers to the movement of people, in a number of cases, migration policies have actually become more restrictive and rigid.

The existence of too few legal migration channels is one of the most significant barriers to realizing the benefits of migration in countries of origin, destination, and for migrants themselves.

II. The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Migrants and Migration

My second point is that the impact of the current economic crisis on migration is a source of grave concern.

Many high-income countries have been affected seriously by the economic and financial crisis. Labour markets have been hard hit; there are mass layoffs, for example, in construction and textile industries – traditional employers of migrants.

Migration corridors are also affected. We are seeing substantial declines in remittances — forecast by the World Bank to fall as much as nine percent in 2009 —

a prediction that does not bode well for countries in which remittances constitute a substantial share of GDP.

In reaction to the global economic and financial crisis, some Governments are inclined to think about migration in counter-cyclical terms. That is to say, the tendency is to harden attitudes towards migrants and send them home — whereas those same migrants will be needed if economies are to recover. Migrants are part of the solution--not the problem.

The serious world situation notwithstanding, structural fundamentals, including demographic and economic disparities, remain unchanged, and in their wake, produce labour market disparities.

Faced with these realities, countries of origin and countries of destination will increasingly find it in their interest to work together to arrive at a common solution.

We are also concerned that migrants will be singled out and stigmatized and that xenophobia will increase, as has occurred in previous periods of economic downturn. In this regard, we need to make a concerted effort to ensure that public perceptions of migrants are fair and balanced and that their many contributions – economic, social and cultural – are recognized and appreciated.

For its part, IOM will continue to monitor and analyze the impact of the crisis on migrants and migration. We stand ready to support Governments with capacity building assistance.

III. The Development Potential of Migration

My third point concerns the relationship between migration and development. We know that there is a two-way, positive and negative link between migration and development. Migration can result from lack of development. At the same time, underdevelopment can be alleviated or exacerbated by migration. Thus, migration is neither categorically an obstacle to development, nor is it a magic wand for its achievement.

The challenge is to develop policies that boost the positive potential of migration for development, while reducing potential negative repercussions.

In doing so, we must pursue a comprehensive approach --- one that takes into account all critical policy areas --- in particular global trade and protection of human rights, two of the most important issues. It is through transparent, fair and adequate legal migration policies and practices that these interlocking objectives can be met.

I believe that the major task ahead is to help governments improve their capacity to harness the potential benefits of migration. Without the necessary foundations --- comprehensive and coherent policies, fair and properly functioning legal and administrative structures, and well-trained personnel -- governments will remain ill-equipped to do so. This is of particular importance during these trying economic times.

I very much look forward to the outcome of your discussions here today and to the better understanding of the relationship between migration, development and trade that is certain to result

Let me close by assuring you that IOM remains committed to working with its partners in the international community to help realize the full development potential of migration. This meeting represents a significant step towards achieving that goal.
