

**EXPATRIATES AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF  
YEMEN**

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## **EXPATRIATES AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my pleasure to attend and take part in this global workshop in Geneva on migration issues. I am very excited to highlight the experience of Yemen as one of the major exporters of labor that has had an extended experience with migration since the dawn of history. There is no doubt that Yemen, although having a rich, diversified and deeply rooted experience, remains short of modern successful experiences in terms of migration structures, legislations, programs and techniques as well as the boundaries of relations, jurisdictions of official agencies in Yemen and of organizations and migration authorities and expats outside it. Yemen needs to benefit from these and adapt them to suit the Yemeni peculiarity. The determinants and requirements of the importing countries of Yemeni labor are diverse due to the diversity of cultures, languages and political and social systems. We are going through a critical and troubled time in most parts of the world with the spread of a culture of hatred among nations producing extremism, violence and terrorism. Large numbers of irregular migrants have been flocking from the poor south to the rich north placing yet extra complexities and restrictions on migration routes with the increasingly widening economic gap between the poor exporting countries and the rich importing countries.

Increasing the restrictions and complexities of regular and irregular migration against the backdrop of bombings and acts adopted by extremist or terrorist groups is not the solution. We have to look forward, from this workshop, to having an insightful and impartial vision. Migration is an old human phenomenon that has contributed to mixing cultures, bringing nations closer and the fusion of identities and races in the social tissue of the receiving country. Restrictions and hurdles shall be taken out of the way of those messengers of peace, ambassadors of their country and pioneers of exchange and rapprochement of cultures. Restrictions can only result in raising violence and extremism rates. Poverty has no religion, nor a regime and stands as the prime motivator that leads a person, any person, to look for illegal income sources when the legal ones run out, especially in the countries that suffer from increasing unemployment. We believe that migration is a means to eliminate violence and create some sort of balance or at least narrow or bridge the current economic gap.

Revolutions and crises witnessed by the countries of the Arab spring, particularly Yemen, were not the result of lack of legislations or unawareness of rights and duties. Rather, they were basically an expression of the discontent of unemployed youth and impoverished population against their national government that had failed to achieve the minimum level of well-being as in the neighboring GCC countries. Movements and uprisings broke out under various slogans and purposes such as the Southern movement, AlQaeda, youth movements, rights-based movements, religious and regional factions and so on. Different names but poverty is the one common thing. Moreover, there are over one million irregular migrants from Somalia who were classified as refugees. Those refugees can neither go back to their home country nor cross to the neighboring countries so they became a burden exhausting the remaining already limited resources. In the midst of the political transition in Yemen, we re-emphasize here that economic solutions are the entry point to solving the other problems, on top of these solutions is allowing more Yemeni migration, regulating and granting more facilitations and privileges to migrants to curb the growing and accumulating unemployment and contribute to solving the economic crisis. This is in addition to devising successful solutions to the irregular flow from Somalia and east of Africa towards the Yemeni shores almost every day.

The Republic of Yemen is looking forward to having useful outputs from this workshop and the subsequent activities and to making use of the successful experiences of other migration exporting countries in order to make the desired progress in Yemeni migration welfare and development, make the rights decisions and update the communication techniques between Yemen and its expats throughout all phases of planning, implementation, follow-up and evaluation.

The Republic of Yemen appreciates the efforts of the International Organization for Migration and the parties involved in planning for and implementing this workshop. It further hails the positive cooperation between Yemen and IOM which has yielded several institutional projects and rehabilitation and stimulation courses for the Ministry's staff. This active participation in the workshop is an indicative sign of such cooperation. We look forward to conducting more activities and projects during this important phase of the life of the Ministry of Expatriates.

## **The phenomenon of Yemeni migration and its key waves**

Dear audience

Yemeni migration is a distinct civilizational phenomenon and a unique Yemeni feature that originated from the onset of humanity on this planet and added to the human history a track record of success stories. The Yemeni migrants set foot on most parts of the old world and constituted an integral part of its social tissue to date becoming a source of pride to every Yemeni. Besides being a basic tributary to development in their homeland, migrants have also contributed to the development and building of the states they migrated to not only in the physical and constructional aspects but also in the civilizational elements including the principles of policy, democracy, the behavioral and value system and human thought. Their effects remain bright, firm and influential in the countries to which Yemeni ancestors traveled and lived in to date.

Migration, to Yemenis, was more of a message, no matter what their reasons for were; political, economic or religious. To highlight the importance of this phenomenon in this workshop, we present an overview of the main mass migration waves in historical order;

First: archeologists insist that the Mesolithic age that dominated the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, extending between 16,000 and 8,000 BC, was a dry and an expeller age that led to the migration of many. Hence, this was the first wave of migration driven by economic reasons.

Second: anthropologists believe that Yemen was the home of Semitism and that a number of reasons had caused a series of migrations to the north and south that became the genesis of Semitic ancestries in the world. All the civilizational contributions of semitics either Akkadians, Babylonians or Arabs, and others throughout history, form a part of migration history and is evidence of their rich experience and contributions to old civilizations since the dawn of history.

Third: in the first quarter of the second thousand BC, some studies suggest that the Hyksos who conquered and ruled Egypt had come from east red sea, indicating south Arabia (Yemen). This is evident of the physical and military supremacy that left its clear traces in the history of old Egypt.

Fourth: a thousand years later, another confirmed wave of migration took place in the sixth century BC to east Africa in consequence of a military campaign led by king Karab il Watar from Sheba Kingdom against the kingdom of Awsan in the southwestern part of Yemen. The campaign managed to erase Awsan and exile its rulers and citizens through sea. Therefore, this migration involved military and administrative leaderships in addition to agricultural and architectural experts. They transferred their techniques and superiority to east Africa including writing, agricultural techniques like the plow, dams and irrigation systems. They established the kingdom of Aksum in Ethiopia and initiated a new phase of influencing their motherland in Yemen. A joint heritage was created with interlinked events and the east African nations maintained 5 Semitic languages that remain current to date.

Fifth: in the following eras, waves of Yemeni migrants continued involving all the Qahtani Arab tribes that resided central and north Arabia, Iraq, AlSham region and rural Egypt. They formed states up there including: the Ghassanids, the tribe of kenda and other settling tribes such as AlAwss, AlKHazraj, AlAzd, Bajilah and Jurrahum...etc. It seems that motives differed by the circumstances that engulfed each wave including the collapse of the Mareb's dam which had been neglected as a result of political conflicts over power. The dam is a symbol of the economic pillars destroyed by wars and internal conflicts that drive the people to migrate in pursuit of growth and settlement.

### **Gentlemen:**

When Islam finally emerged, Yemenis embraced it and answered the call of the Caliphs to join the Islamic conquests that reached the borders of France in the west, Constantinople to the north and China and Sind to the east. Yemenis, as per orders of Caliph Omar Bin AlKhattab, were charged with planning and building the new cities such as Basra, Kufa and Fustat in Egypt and maintained this trade in Morocco and Spain. Indeed, Yemenis excelled in urban planning, and building of mosques, palaces and citadels leaving behind captivating Islamic landmarks that marked the Islamic architecture.

Following the halt of conquests during the Abbasid rule, Yemenis turned to benefit from the vital role played by Yemen in commercial mediation between the east and the west. They moved further in eastern Asia as traders, teachers and preachers of Islam. The populations

in eastern Asia were greatly influenced by them and today they constitute over half the Muslim population in the world. Yemenis hold a superior spiritual status among the east Asian populations. There are domed shrines for Yemenis considered holy by the locals. The Yemeni diaspora receives much respect and appreciation from the locals to date.

Finally, the contemporary history has seen two waves of Yemeni migration; one was to east Africa and Sudan due to the colonial activity and colonists distrust of the indigenous people. The Yemeni diaspora continues to exercise trade and architecture and maintains bonds with the homeland, religion and Arabic language through the Yemeni schools that have not only took care of Yemenis but also shaped the cultural identity of those societies. Djibouti is an example of this fusion.

The second migration wave in the twentieth century took the form of temporary migration to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Countries, Europe and the United States. It was driven by the economic recession linked to insufficient oil resources in the time of oil boom. This boom has imposed new patterns and luxurious styles of life based on overspending and increasing demands in the neighboring countries. Nevertheless, Yemenis clung to the values and ideals of their ancestors. They left historical and magnificent prints in Europe and the GCC countries in the areas of construction, services, industry, trade and transport. They people of the GCC countries remember those contributions with much appreciation.

### **The magnitude and map of Yemeni expatriates' dispersal**

Gentlemen;

This overview of the successive Yemeni migrations, with all the implications they carry, opens up an important historical literature and a human experience that is worthy of some study and examination. We only mentioned those migrations to emphasize the historical depth, the intellectual accumulation and the peculiarity of the Yemeni migration. Expatriates represented a cord with their homeland especially during the last two waves in the twentieth century.

In order to briefly highlight the contemporary Yemeni experience, we have to differentiate between the terms "migration" and " expatriation". According to the definition in the

Expatriates Welfare Law No. 34 of 2002, an expatriate is "a Yemeni who moves from homeland to a country of expatriation with dependent family members, and who obtains a residence permit for the sake of work". It is clear that the Ministry is specialized in expatriates who constitute a part of migrants and carry the following features:

- Yemenis having the Yemeni nationality including dual-nationals.
- Those who depart Yemen for the purpose of work and who obtain legal residence permits.

Based on this limitation, the size of the Yemeni expatriates is less than Yemenis abroad who have been neutralized, permanent residents or those subject to trafficking, infiltration, irregular migration or those who joined the political crops, patients seeking treatment, tourists or students. Despite the difficulties faced by the Ministry in conducting a comprehensive census of expatriates and updating it regularly, the confirmed approximate number ranges between 6 and 7 million divided over more than 70 diasporas in over 40 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and north America. The top ten destinations of Yemeni expatriates are: Saudi Arabia (the main home to Yemeni labor abroad) followed by USA, UK, UAE, Tanzania, Kenya, Djibouti, Bahrain, Sudan and India respectively. As for the qualitative distribution, Yemeni migrating brains are condensed in northern Europe with Hungary being host of the largest number.

### **Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare; Constraints and Activities**

Ladies and gentlemen;

Due to the importance of expats as a key contributor to development and active participants in the national movement, the first Migration Ministry was created in the first Cabinet after the 1962 revolution. The Yemeni migrants' remittances were channeled to build the Yemeni banking institutions including the first Bank for Reconstruction and Development which remained as Yemen's official state bank until mid 1970s. They also contributed in the establishment of commercial and industrial companies and national renaissance. The first public conference of Yemeni expats was held on 1975 and resulted in the set-up of the General Expatriates Union (GEU) which remained effective until the Yemeni reunification in 1990 and the creation of the Ministry of Expatriates. The creation of the Ministry wasn't due to expats' being the key human wealth to relay on in investment and development but to

absorb the senior officials from both parts of Yemen within broad and transitional setups. Therefore, the Ministry remained prone to development and activation relative to the degree of influence and enthusiasm of the Minister appointed more than being a tool and a means for productive administration and welfare. This ambiguity has led to a confusion in titles and tasks and instability of its institutional status. During the period from 1990 to 2007, more than five modifications to the title of the expats body were made. Likewise, the legislations continue to be pending amendment and completion to date. Such amendments in titles and legislations have confused and delayed the finalization of the structural and organizational setups and the capacity building and fixation of staff.

This is in addition to scarce annual budget that only covers 10% of the Ministry's operational costs. The Ministry hasn't been able to carry out the tasks and competences assigned thereto in investment and welfare which require exceptional potentials.

Gentlemen;

Expatriates are both a development objective and a means to development. They are a productive and active segment of the population enjoying rights and privileges to keep them attached to their country and preserve their cultural identity while enjoying the political, cultural, educational, social and economic rights.

In spite of the appreciated efforts exerted by the previous Ministry's leaderships that were based on the demands and ambitions of the expatriates themselves voiced repeatedly in their events; the last of which was the Third General Conference in 2009, and although the recommendations of this conference were turned into an executive matrix issued by the Cabinet in 2009, they were faced with hurdles that turned them into impractical wishes, no more no less. Thus, the Ministry of Expatriates in the National Unity government was forced to conduct a study and work towards regaining the tasks and competences of the Ministry while consciously planning for the implementation of the welfare programs and human development prior to migration, during it and after residing abroad as well as during the expats' temporary and permanent returns to their homeland. This is in addition to taking care of their families, rights and investments across all governorates. This requires completing the structures and setups thereto and providing the financial and human potentials to enable the Ministry to plan and exist in the destination countries and in the land, air and sea border points. The Ministry's offices in governorates shall be activated and

the institutional and structural setups completed. There is no doubt that the Ministry is waging a real battle to mature the Yemeni experience in expats' welfare. The Ministry also seeks to bear responsibility and implement its tasks optimally. We are pleased with what has been achieved so far although it remains short of the ambitions and objectives set against this timeframe. This is due to the troubles and smear campaigns we confronted. We are delighted to present the main accomplishments achieved over the past year and a half:

- Abolishing the illegal fees that used to be collected from expats arbitrarily mounting to over 17 billion YR per year.
- Restructuring the Ministry and creating a new Migration Regulation sector following the Cabinet resolution No. 210 of 2012 to assign all the migration-related tasks and competences to the Ministry.
- The attaches being created within the diplomatic delegations abroad.
- Representatives of the Ministry will be present in all the border outlets.
- The Higher Expatriates Council: a supreme body elected by the diasporas' leaders around the world.
- The Higher Welfare Council: a ministerial body led by the Prime Minister.
- The Expats' Bank: with contributions from migrant businessmen
- A database to be implemented using modern technologies.
- Preparations for the Fourth Expatriates Conference, held regularly every 4 years.
- Preparations for the launch of a satellite channel for expats with an improved media message.

### **Development and investment**

Ladies and gentlemen

Yemen is one of the first countries to export labor to all parts of the world. The heavy presence of Yemeni expatriates abroad and their broad and tangible contribution to all walks of life has made them successful businessmen. Expats constitute a key tributary to development and one of its major pivots.

The Ministry is working hard towards making use of this sector and positively reviving it to better interact with development and all sectors of investment through remittances not to mention the importance of development of expats themselves through pre and post migration capacity building to enable them to benefit from the available labor market opportunities.

As for the expatriates investments, they involve all the economic sectors; tourism, trade, industry and agriculture. The Ministry has conducted a partial survey in six model governorates in 2009; Aden, Hadhramout, AlHodeida, Ibb, Taiz and Shabwa. The projects in these six governorates were 213 at a cost of about 72,000,000 (seventy two billion YR). Adding the remaining 15 governorates not covered by the survey, the number will double and may even exceed the 500 projects at a cost of no less than 250 billion YR. This requires the Investment Authority and the Ministry of Expatriates to collect accurate data and statistics on this important aspect.

As for remittances through the Central Bank of Yemen, they accounted for about one and a half billion US\$ in 2008 alone contributing a 7.8% to the GDP.

These remittances make up only 10% of the total cash and in-kind transfers. Most remittances come either directly through the Central Bank or indirectly through the money exchange services around the country or even by passengers personally as some expats save their cash until their regular visit home. They may also make transfers through traders or in the form of in-kind commodities, cars and vehicles and so on. There are no data of these informal remittances in the Central Bank or with the border officials which calls for the creation of a mechanism to measure remittances and transfers both in-cash and in-kind.

Development and investment for expats has been always a major concern for the Ministry. For this sake, it has held several seminars and workshops including a workshop that gathered businesspersons in Sanaa in 2009. The recommendations of this workshop, which were approved and listed within the resolutions of the third Expats Conference and turned into an executive matrix issued by the Cabinet for 2011-2015, included:

- 1- Open a one-window model of business to encourage investments and provide extra guarantees for migrant investors while identifying investment areas for expats that are free of hindrance.
- 2- Develop a strategy to improve the border outlets and equip them with staff powered with integrity and sufficient potentials coupled with constant monitoring and basic services.
- 3- Prioritize the resolution of expats' cases in courts and set up a technical legal department in the Ministry of Expats to follow up their cases in a timely manner.
- 4- Support and encourage investments, deposits and remittances of expats through the establishment of the Expats Development Bank to build industrial zones and residential and tourist cities.
- 5- Apply international specifications and quality standards to industrial and agricultural products to open up external markets and protect local consumers.
- 6- Assign the General Investment Authority to provide more administrative facilities, simplify and expedite procedures of creating investment projects away from bureaucracy and prolonged routine measures.
- 7- Adopt serious remedies and real reforms to improve the investment climate to attract Yemeni capitals abroad.
- 8- Provide the infrastructure services for investment projects, particularly; roads, electricity and water in the areas earmarked for expats investments to encourage them in investing in grand projects as well as medium and small enterprises and across the promising sectors spectrum.
- 9- In the area of human development, call the expats brains of all disciplines to contribute by working within their area of specialty in their home country during their annual vacations. It is necessary to harmonize between the education and training inputs and outputs with the requirements of the investment projects and the labor market. Promote building and operating specialized institutes to train the needed human capacities to run the investment projects of expats. Engage the expats in human resource qualification and technology localization.

**Thank you all**