



The Berne Initiative

Berne Initiative Regional Consultations for Africa
25 - 26 March 2004
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The Berne Initiative Regional Consultations for Africa were held 25 - 26 March 2004 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These first regional consultations of the Berne Initiative explored the concept of developing an international agenda for migration management and provided both unanimous endorsement of this idea and a firm commitment to the Berne Initiative process. Participants stressed the timeliness of developing a process for dialogue and consultation at the international level on migration, as migration has become an issue of prime importance at the national, regional and global level.

While migration is not new, a turning point has been reached for two principal reasons: (1) the reality of a mobile world, and (2) the fact that most countries are no longer exclusively countries of origin, transit or destination but more often now all three simultaneously. This new acknowledgement that migration is a fact of modern life and that all countries are in it together, brings new possibilities for the development of a common platform on migration based on cooperation between states. The central challenge, therefore, is how to work together most effectively to manage migration so as to reduce its negative impacts and maximize its positive and beneficial impacts. In this vein, participants stressed that the Berne Initiative complements efforts at the regional level to promote more effective management of migration and can serve to draw the lessons learned from regional experience together for a comprehensive whole.

The participants of the Berne Initiative Regional Consultations for Africa explored what Africa would like to see included in the International Agenda for Migration Management. They validated the proposed structure of the agenda, based on a set of common understandings on migration, followed by a set of elements of effective practice in a comprehensive approach to migration management. The participants identified the need to develop a common language on migration and came to the conclusion that the common understandings of the International Agenda for Migration Management help in finding that common language.

Potential polarization of the migration debate along North-South lines quickly gave way to the recognition that nearly all states are states of migration, even as they continue to be informed by their previous perspective as countries of origin, transit and destination, and now share many concerns and priorities. The participants stressed the importance of taking an approach that focuses on management of migration. In Addis, a genuine discussion has begun about the management of migration; a discussion among equal partners in this effort.

The participants emphasized that dialogue is the key to effective management, and dialogue is at the heart of the Berne Initiative. The importance of dialogue, confidence building and cooperation for the management of migration at the national and international level cannot be overemphasized.

As examples of some of the substantive themes discussed, participants:

- Highlighted the positive role of migrants and contributions they make to receiving countries;
- Identified the need for a managed approach to labour migration, particularly through bilateral or regional agreements that address market needs, as well as better information about legal migration channels, to help reduce the incidence of irregular migration;
- Emphasized the central importance of respect for basic human rights of migrants. This applies to African nationals abroad as well as to the treatment of foreigners in African countries. Throughout, it was underlined that the dignity of migrants must be respected, regardless of their legal status;
- Highlighted issues of security and the need to control who enters and remains in national territory;
- Noted that root causes of migration, and in particular its link to poverty, conflict and other forms of deprivation, while outside the sphere of the migration manager, nevertheless need to be borne in mind;
- Recognized the need to strike a balance between the basic rights of individuals & sovereign rights of any given state;
- Recognized the vulnerability of migrants in an irregular situation to exploitation, especially when smuggling and trafficking organizations are involved;
- Emphasized the importance of integration -- social, cultural, and economic -- particularly to reduce the incidence of racism and xenophobia;
- Stressed the need for more collaboration and cooperation between states and engaging other relevant stakeholders; and
- Highlighted the potential richness of migration for development as migrants bring skills, investment and resources back to support the development of their countries of origin.

These are just a few of the many important points raised in the rich, two-day consultation. Throughout, the participants stressed that as migration is a complex issue, it requires a comprehensive and cooperative approach to address it effectively. A full report will be sent to all participants in the coming weeks.

With regard to next steps in the Berne Initiative process, based on the many expressions of support for the Berne Initiative expressed at the African Regional Consultations, it was decided to create an open-ended support group of interested governments. A number of governments already volunteered to participate, and others will be invited to do so when the full report of the consultation is received. The participants at the African Regional Consultations will be kept informed of further developments in the Berne Initiative process, including regarding the results of the consultations planned in other regions and of preparations for the Second Berne Symposium on International Migration.

The active contributions of African governments will be reflected in the further development of the Berne Initiative process and the International Agenda for Migration Management.