Fourth Global Meeting of Chairs and Secretariats of Regional Consultative Processes on Migration

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Lobna Azzam
Migration and Arab Expatriates Department
League of Arab States
Your Excellency Eda Rivas Franchini, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Peru,

Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General, International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour to have this opportunity to participate with you in this important meeting, which I believe will allow us to learn more about the experiences of the other RCPs regarding methods of organizing themselves, carrying out their work and achieving their goals, and I would like to thank the organizers for their hospitality.

Migration is a constant and dynamic phenomenon increasingly requiring diversified policy intervention in order to maximize its potential benefits and minimize related costs for both countries of origin and destination as well as migrants themselves.

Being aware of this fact, the League of Arab states (LAS), since its establishment, has been focusing on the issue of international migration and Arab Expatriates, in an effort to: develop more effective policies for utilizing migration in favor of Arab regional development, integration and international cooperation, and to communicate with its expatriates, build bridges of dialogue and cooperation with them for the benefit of both parties. This has been reflected in issuing many resolutions at both the summit level and the ministerial level in this regard since 1955.

In the past decade, the Arab summits’ declarations and announcements always included some paragraphs concerning International migration and Arab Expatriates, among them: the declaration issued by Tunis summit in 2004 on the process of development and modernization in the Arab world, Brasilia declaration
issued by the Summit of Arab States and the countries of South America in May 2005, Khartoum declaration in 2006 and Doha declaration issued by the second Summit of Arab States and the countries of South America in March 2009.

The Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, held in Kuwait in January 2009, also reflected the interest in the role of Arab Expatriates in the development of their home countries and stressed the importance of promoting it, besides defending migrants' rights, regulating migration of Arab workers abroad, giving attention to skilled Arab migrants, and strengthening their relationship with their home countries.

Migration is an extremely important issue to (LAS) because the Arab region is both a sending and receiving region at the same time. In 2010, it hosted almost 25.85 million migrants, over 10 million more than it hosted in 1990. Available data suggest that the majority of these migrants come from Asian countries to the Gulf Countries. Meanwhile, emigration from Arab countries is also high: the United Nations Population Division counted over 13.7 million migrants from Arab countries in 2010, with Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq and Sudan being the main countries of origin. Almost half of these migrants move to other Arab countries, while around 3.1 million moves to Europe especially from the Maghreb countries. Given data limitations, these figures are only estimates which are likely to underestimate the real scale of migration from, to and between Arab countries. It is therefore clear that migration in the Arab region is extremely important in terms of intensity.

The impact of this major movement on countries of the region whether they are countries of origin, destination, or transit, bringing both, challenges that have to be faced and opportunities that have to be utilized.
When we look at the opportunities to the Arab region, we find that Arab migrants can have a valuable positive impact on the development of the region. LAS believes they are a huge reservoir of skills, expertise and resources that is strongly needed by their home countries, thus focusing on engaging them in the development of the region.

Migrants also send remittances to their families and communities in their countries of origin. The Arab countries are estimated to have received more than US$ 47.3 billion in remittances in 2012, up from US$ 22.7 billion in 2009. Countries like Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon are amongst the world’s most important recipients of remittances in terms of absolute value. Remittances assist in funding development projects, reducing poverty, covering household expenses, improving level of education, health conditions and trade activities.

On the other hand, the socio-economic development of the Gulf countries as labor receiving countries has long been reliant on large-scale immigration of workers to fill skills and labor gaps in order to utilize the natural resource base of these countries.

But migration also causes some challenges to the Arab region that have to be faced. The emigration of qualified Arab skills known as brain drain, is a major challenge, as while demand for them is rising outside the Arab Region, their qualifications are not well employed in favor of national and regional development.

The continuous irregular migration is another challenge, with thousands of youth drowning, expansion of the activities of criminal networks and migrants’ trafficking is growing. Besides the wide movement of forced migration in the region triggered by the cause of Palestine, war in Iraq, the revolution in Libya then in Syria.
Therefore, not only is migration in the Arab region intense, but it also has major impact on the region.

In the long-term, the Arab spring, can be expected to produce overall effects on migration: on movements of people, on the perception of migration-related issues by opinions and states, and on policies in all migration-related matters, but no one can predict which direction and magnitude it will have.

The Arab Spring already triggered two major refugee crises in the Neighborhood of Europe, previously in Libya and currently in Syria. Out of more than one million which fled Libya, only 30,000 reached Europe; and out of 1.5 millions who are fleeing Syria, only 20,000 are today in Europe. A Regional Protection Programme has been launched to safely accommodate refugees in the vicinity of their homelands in North Africa. Thus the bulk of the burden was supported by neighboring Arab States and Turkey. Governments and international organizations also took their part, remarkably civil society and local populations played the biggest role.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

LAS and its specialized organizations offered a framework for the Arab countries to cooperate on issues related to migration and human mobility within the region, and with sending and receiving regions.

Intra-regional cooperation in the field of migration in the Arab region started in the 1950s with the 1957 Agreement on Arab Economic Unity issued by the Arab Economic Council. A set of follow up agreements, declarations, and charters have been issued. These agreements focused on freedom of mobility for Arab citizens to live and...
work throughout the Arab region in addition to giving Arab labor priority over non-Arabs and to simplify recruitment procedures.

As you may know, the main destination of Arab migrants, especially from North Africa, is Europe, while the main origin of migrants to the Arab region is South East Asia. So when we talk about cooperation with receiving countries, we are mainly talking about the cooperation between Europe and the LAS member states, which involves the countries of North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean countries. This may be attributed to the geographical proximity and the established migration streams between these countries and Europe, in addition to the fact that some of these countries are considered as transit migration between other regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia and Europe.

In the last two decades, the Barcelona Declaration, adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference 1995, was the founding act of a comprehensive partnership between the European Union (EU) and the countries in the Southern Mediterranean. LAS has been contributing positively to the objectives of the process through participating in all its meetings at all levels.

As part of the Barcelona Process, the EU concluded Association Agreements with some Arab countries and bilateral agreements focusing on cooperation on migration.

In the field of cooperation with sending countries the UAE held a forum with Asian labor-exporting countries in January 2008; this meeting is known as the “Abu Dhabi Dialogue”, it adopted the “Abu Dhabi Declaration”, which launched a collaborative approach to short-term labor mobility in Asia in order to maximize benefits for sending and
receiving countries. The Declaration identified partnerships between Asian countries of origin and destination to foster information sharing, promote capacity building, technical cooperation and interstate cooperation. And I believe we will learn more about this dialogue through one of the presentations tomorrow.

In the last few years, the work of LAS focused on:

**Reports and Publications:**

- Set of reports: "Regional Report on Arab Labor Migration". A committee is working now on determining the theme and contents of the forthcoming report.
- Studies: "A study on the Dynamics of Arab Expatriate Communities”, which focused on how to promote positive contributions to socioeconomic development and political transitions in the homelands” LAS-IOM (2012).
- Newsletters: LAS issues a non-periodic newsletter titled “The Arab Expatriate”.

**Conferences, Meetings, Seminars and events:**

- Conference of Arab Expatriate Scientists “When Arab Minds Integrate” LAS, December 2012.
- Meetings of the Afro- Arab migration working group April, October 2012.
- “The Arab Expatriates Day” on 4th of December of each year.
- Visits to Arab communities abroad.
- Organizing cultural and exploratory trips for Arab expatriates youth to strengthen their relationships with their countries of origin.
- Implementing a project titled "The role of German woman from Arab origin in transferring the Micro Project Management skills to the Egyptian woman "(2011).
Field visits to:

- Syrian refugees camps in Turkey, May 2013.
- Syrian refugees camps (Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan sides), a report was prepared and raised to Donor’s conference in Kuwait, January 2013.
- The Libyan Boarders (Tunisian and Egyptian sides) April 2011.

Upcoming events:

- Conducting a field survey on the conditions of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries.
- Implementing the programme of regionally coordinated Household International Migration Surveys in the Mediterranean Countries (MED-HIMS Programme), in cooperation with EU, World Bank, UNFPA and UNHCR.
- Organize a meeting for members of parliaments of Arab origins in the countries of immigration and a group of members of parliaments of Arab States in collaboration with the Arab Parliament, to take place in the second half of 2013, in order to exchange experiences and discuss issues of mutual interests.

According to different parties working in the field of migration, it was obvious that RCPs with geographical composition along common migration routes would be most interested in interacting with one another, as it was assumed that this would suit the purposes of those RCPs. It was also noted that RCPs having some degree of overlapping “membership” might have a particular interest in remaining aware of each others’ discussions and activities to avoid duplication and identify synergies. It was also suggested that RCPs could find value in exchanges on shared migration topics.

In this framework, LAS is currently preparing to hold a “Regional Consultative Meeting (RCM) for the Arab Region” in June 2013, in partnership with ESCWA and IOM, in preparation of the Second United Nations High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development.
It also has recently proposed establishing a “Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region”, in order to promote coordinated normative and technical work on international migration in the region; prevent duplication of efforts; and ensure a consistent, system-wide message and strategy for migration. The working group will be co-chaired by LAS, ESCWA and IOM, and opened for UN agencies, relevant international and intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs, and welcoming any interested organization working in the region to join this working group.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you every success in this meeting.