

**Speech by the Minister of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia,
Mrs. Hranush Hakobyan,
on the occasion of
International Dialogue on Migration 2013– Diaspora Ministerial Conference**

18 - 19 June, 2013

**Honorable President,
Dear colleagues,
Your Excellencies Mr. Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Today is a historic day as the UN International Organization for Migration has gathered the Ministers of Diaspora and the respective officials under one roof for the first time ever. I would like to express my special gratitude to Director General of the International Organization for Migration, Ambassador Mr. William Lacy Swing for undertaking this initiative, which serves as a platform for policymakers to discuss issues and concerns related to the Diaspora, as well as share ideas and practices and help strengthen collaboration between the respective institutions to make policies on the Diaspora and carry out programs at the international level.

In 2010, the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia made a similar attempt by inviting my colleagues to Armenia to take part in the conference entitled “Perspectives of the Diaspora in the Globalizing World”, which was aimed at discussing the issues related to the Diaspora. As a result, we came to the conclusion that the issues on the future of Diasporas have to be solved under the umbrella of the UN.

We recorded that the causes of the Diaspora formation are different: wars, national ideologies, labor processes, revolutions and globalization that contribute to integration into all spheres of life. The world is getting smaller and is changing at a rapid pace. Humanity is facing challenges, is witnessing terrorist acts, wars, natural disasters, poverty and mobility of populations, which contribute to the “diasporization” of nations. The globalizing world is conveying a new quality to Diasporas and giving them a new role. They are constantly being examined as agents of conflict perpetuation or resolution, as forces for development or democratization. The numbers continue to grow, and today, communities of the Diaspora have become transnational communities in different stages of self-organization, bridging the traditions, customs, visions, and policies of the globe together.

The social and national virtual domains are growing on a daily basis that leads to the emergence of new problems concerning collective self-defense. The major ones are the improvement of relations among nations, the elimination or, at least, mitigation of discrepancies existing between states, as well as the exclusion of war and the dangers of terrorism in all parts of the world through combined efforts.

Dear colleagues,

In an age of globalization and transnationalism, when borders are less significant, Armenia has a comparative advantage. You are probably aware that Armenia has one of the largest Diasporas spread in more than 100 countries around the world. Armenian Diaspora has centuries –long history resulted in a considerable impact on both the preservation of Armenian identity and the development of various countries.

However, the main cause of Armenians’ “diasporization” is considered the Armenian Genocide committed by Ottoman Turkey in 1915, as a result of which 1.5 million Armenians were killed and deprived of their homeland, while hundreds of thousands were scattered around the world. They have become fully integrated into the societies of destination countries but have also stayed true to their Armenian roots.

Armenians have established schools, churches, cultural centers, newspaper editions, political parties, as well as youth, women’s, athletic and professional organizations by constantly enriching the historic and cultural heritage of countries worldwide and bearing the cultural influence of the countries of residence at the same time.

The Republic of Armenia has always acknowledged the significance of the Armenian Diaspora, considering it an inseparable part of Armenia’s defense and security. To use this tremendous potential, in the Soviet era, the Armenian government established a structure for liaising with the Diaspora.

After proclamation of independence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was granted a mandate to ensure the relations between the State and the Diaspora. Then, by the will of Diaspora Armenians, the Ministry of Diaspora was established in late 2008.

The President of the Republic of Armenia has set three strategic objectives for the RA Ministry of Diaspora included in the Concept on State-Diaspora Partnership:

1. Support the preservation of the Armenian identity in the Diaspora,
2. Identify the potential of all Armenians and use it for the benefit of Armenia and the Diaspora,
3. Develop programs aimed at promoting repatriation.

To meet the above-mentioned objectives and priorities, a number of mechanisms have been elaborated and implemented, starting from scientific, educational, cultural programs and cognitive youth visits and ending with the organizing of professional conferences, facilitation of Armenian legislation for Armenians abroad and the use of high technologies.

Moreover, we possess the following mechanisms in strengthening the collaboration with the Diaspora.

- The “Hayastan” All-Armenian Fund, headed by the President of the Republic of Armenia, has been established to coordinate the financial assistance to Armenia aimed at its further development.
- The leaders of thousands of organizations take part in the Armenia-Diaspora Conferences convened once every three years to discuss issues of national concern.
- Another mechanism is the cultural festivals that bring together participants of Armenian origin from dozens of countries around the world.
- Pan-Armenian athletic games are with the participation of nearly 5,000 young Armenians.
- Mechanisms are created by structures, foundations and individuals to make investments, and individual transfers make up 2 billion dollars.

Dear colleagues,

The ministry has developed a state policy on Armenia-Diaspora relations, the key principles of which are:

1. Armenia is the Homeland of all Armenians around the world.
2. Armenians must integrate into the country of residence, become its law-abiding citizens and stay true to their identity (culture, language, religion, family, etc.).
3. The Institute of Dual Citizenship has been incorporated, helping thousands of Armenians become citizens of Armenia.
4. The formula for collaboration with the Diaspora is: Know-Trust-Cooperate.
5. Besides charities, Diaspora Armenians can and must make investments and gain profits in the Homeland (Today, more than 4,000 Diaspora Armenians have businesses in Armenia).

6. The peculiarities of every region are taken into account during the implementation of activities.
7. Efforts are made to assist the self-organization of newly established communities, (especially the communities in the CIS countries).
8. The set priorities of the nation are the strengthening of Armenia, a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide and elimination of the consequences, as well as the fight against assimilation and the consolidation around the Armenian Church.

Dear Colleagues,

Today, the entire international community realizes the uninterrupted connection of the Diasporas to their homeland and the impact that they have on political, economic, cultural and other spheres of life both in the origin and destination countries. A lot of work has been done to establish peace and stability, reduce poverty, transfer the connections, opportunities, knowledge, and know-how of national expatriates to their countries of origin, channel the financial diaspora resources, etc.

We acknowledge that the Diaspora is a phenomenon of our times, and the fact that it is not simply a collection of people or communities of scattered individuals bound by some shared history, race or religion. The Diaspora represents a huge potential for the states and the whole world, and I hope this Conference will serve as a starting point for the solution to diaspora-related issues concerning the Diaspora at the international level.

However, there is still a lot of work to be done. Taking into account the major objectives of the UN, it has to play one of the key roles in engaging Diasporas in local and global decision-making policies, developing collaboration between respective governmental institutions and providing recommendations to all member states in drafting Diaspora-oriented programs to ensure mutual economic, social, cultural and humanitarian development.

Once again, expressing gratitude to the UN for providing such an opportunity, we, the representatives involved in the Diaspora, have some expectations.

In my opinion, it is of utmost significance to define the term Diaspora at the UN level, to formulate its rights and obligations, its role in transnational, bilateral, interstate relations, as well as in the relations between the Diaspora and the Homeland. For this purpose, the UN can create a task force, and I think, in the nearest future, there will be a need for the adoption of the UN Convention or Declaration on the rights of Diasporas.

We, responsible authorities, must consider diversity, respect for different religions and cultural dialogue, especially through education, the major instrument in our efforts to

assist Diasporas in integrating into societies. It is obvious that these discrepancies are the power and wealth of the societies. We must advocate solidarity and tolerance, not hatred and the threat of war, which is advocated in some countries.

As a nation that has survived genocide with 100 years of historical memory who continuously fights for the restoration of its rights and establishment of justice, we call on the international community to recognize and condemn the crime perpetrated against the Armenian people, which is a crime against all humanity, to prevent it from happening in the future, thus preventing “forced” diasporization of nations worldwide.

Today, due to political instability in Syria, millions of people have become refugees. Armenia has been directly affected by the conflict too. The number of refugees in our country exceeds 10.000 people; the majority of them are women and children. The Armenian Government has spent more than 10 million dollars on programs aimed at solution of problems concerning education, health, employment, provision of shelters, promotion of business opportunities, etc. The Syrian Armenians has added new problems to already existed ones in Armenia: unemployment, poverty, migration, etc. Consequently, we call on the UN, donor states and other international organizations to assist Armenia in addressing ongoing shelter and job issues.

And finally, it is necessary for us to contribute to the development of democratic institutions as it will support Diasporas be more protected.

Dear Colleagues,

Taking into account the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on Protection of the Rights of All Migrants, We, the Diaspora authorities, successfully contribute to the integration of Diaspora representatives in societies, fight for elimination of all expressions of ghettoism, racism, xenophobia and intolerance to bring up our future generations free from hatred and enmity towards each other.

Moreover, the above mentioned provides Diasporans with the opportunity to avoid assimilation and promote cultural diversity, considering a person’s life, rights and liberties the utmost value, regardless of nationality, race and social status and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals worldwide. I am looking forward to meeting on a regular basis and discuss concrete issues of common concern.

A couple of days ago, Armenia joined the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and I have no doubt that in close collaboration with the member states, we will advance the integration process and make the lives of Diasporas and migrants more harmonious. I am certain that only peace and stability can contribute to the partnership between nations, the

mutual influence of civilizations, as well as the elimination of separating lines between cultures and religions and can build spiritual and cultural bridges for mankind.

Thank You.