

**Speech by the Director of the Movement of Persons, Migration and Alien Affairs
Department, Han-Maurits Schaapveld, on the occasion of the IOM International
Dialogue on Migration Workshop on “Enhancing the Role of Return Migration in
Fostering Development”, Geneva 7-8 July 2008**

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, Good morning.

Let me begin by thanking and congratulating our hosts, the International Organization for Migration and thereof the Department for International Development, on having taken the initiative to organise this workshop on “Enhancing the Role of Return Migration in Fostering Development.” The Dutch government is interested like many others in bringing about greater coherence between policies on migration and on development. We were however one of the first to publish a joint policy note on this subject. The Minister for Development cooperation and the State Secretary of Justice have, just last Friday, put before the Dutch cabinet a new policy coherence document which will be sent to Parliament this week. We think it is therefore important to use this opportunity to exchange views and experiences, which can be of great added value in developing national, European and global policy on the subject. I will take the opportunity to share some of our experiences with you. To end this introduction and to introduce myself I would just like to mention that before taking this migration related job, 2 years ago, I was posted to Burkina Faso and before that as Head of Development Cooperation in Bolivia. I try therefore to embody myself, as much as possible, the nexus between development and migration we are talking about. As you can imagine I feel personally very committed to furthering this discussion.

The Netherlands holds the view that it is important that migrants, who no longer have a legal status, leave the country, preferably voluntarily. Obviously, it is important for order and stability in the country. It is also necessary for creating and maintaining a broad social support for the government’s more general policy in the field of asylum and migration. In view of the link between migration and development, we want this return to be sustainable and returnees to integrate and contribute again to their country.

In recent years, we, in the Netherlands, have explored several approaches to voluntary return migration. The efforts of the Government in this field can be divided into three categories:

First: A programme providing purely a financial incentive, to the amount of approximately 1750 Euro, to stimulate voluntary return. It was hoped that it would also facilitate reintegration. The main objective of the programme was to stimulate the voluntary departure of (ex) asylum seekers either to their country of origin or to a third country.

Secondly we financed several small projects focusing on reintegration support in kind. This support comprised facilitation of study, labour-market mediation and enabling entrepreneurship, including the provision of micro credits. I will illustrate this point later on, on the basis of a concrete and innovative project called “Back to Angola.

Thirdly and finally, we started a small programme for specific groups, like under age asylum seekers.

In the field of return, but then completely outside the situation of return after a failed asylum procedure, we financed a number of activities geared towards the temporary return, from a few weeks to a few months, of successful migrants. We are now talking about migrants with a legal status in the Netherlands. They were selected for this programme on the basis of skills that were identified in their country of origin as being needed in a specific phase of its development. The most substantial activity in this respect has been the Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals project. It has notably supplied skills in post-conflict areas like Afghanistan, Somalia and Bosnia.

Back to a case of voluntary permanent return.

Between 2005 and 2007, a Dutch NGO, the HIT Foundation, carried out an innovative project called “Back to Angola”, that we partly financed. The project’s aim was to develop a new method for support to the return process. It tried notably to improve sustainable reintegration and the personal development of returnees. The basic idea of this project was that the future prospects of the asylum seeker improve if the returnee is provided with tailor-made support. It also helps if one single, so called coach, coordinates all details of the return and reintegration process with the different actors in the Netherlands and in the country of return. As part of the project, a local support centre was set up in Angola. The recent evaluation of the project yielded three major lessons.

1) A failed asylum seeker needs to be convinced that return is unavoidable before any support is given.

In the Netherlands, we have a limited window of opportunity in which the rejected asylum seeker must apply for the voluntary return schemes. Practice shows that, during their asylum procedure, asylum seekers have little or no interest in return at all. While they have the right to stay that is during the procedure and for a limited time thereafter (about 28 days), return is not regarded as an option. Once their application has been formally and definitely rejected, they undergo a psychological period of first denial and then something akin to 'mourning.' They do not take active steps towards return at once, but first explore other options. Should they stay in the country illegally, move on to another country, or hope for an amnesty? Under the current migration regulations, by the time they are starting to accept that return is perhaps the preferred, if not the only, option, it is often too late to take advantage of return support schemes. This is where coherence between policies comes in. On the one hand the ODA-ability criteria of the financing. on the other hand the objective of making this element of ones migration policy work To remedy this situation the state secretary of justice has decided that failed asylum seekers will be put, after those 28 days, in so called “ freedom limiting facilities” where they will be become more quickly convinced that voluntary return is their best and only option.

The second lesson is that limiting access to education and work during the asylum procedure reduces the economic prospects of returnees and thereby also the number of volunteers for return.

Returnees from the Netherlands do not distinguish themselves significantly in a positive way from those who stayed behind in the country of origin in terms of professional skills, knowledge and attitude. The main reason for this is that they have not been allowed to work or learn during the years of their procedure whereas the ones who stayed behind will have been able to profit from for example development programmes in their country. On the rapidly growing African labour market, the motto is 'business is business' and companies of course want the best candidates. Most returnees will, especially in comparison to those who stayed behind of the same age, be poorly educated and lack work experience. In the worst cases they even tend to have a passive and lethargic attitude towards work. Not because of any personal fault or character trait, but because the Dutch asylum system, in which they can have spent years waiting, has not been able to help them in this.

The third lesson is that Individual support is more effective and efficient if it is provided in the country of origin.

Tailor-made assistance is attractive if returnees and their coaches are fully up-to-date on the situation and opportunities in the country of origin. That is very difficult to do at a distance and is best done in the country of origin. The evaluation found that many coaches in the Netherlands did not have a realistic idea of the situation and that the highly detailed plans for return drawn up in the Netherlands often proved to be inflexible and of little relevance once the returnee landed on his own soil. Returnees need transparent and flexible support linked as much as possible to the local situation.

How do we go on?

The Netherlands will continue to search for better methods in the field of voluntary return. I already mentioned certain changes in the migration policy towards failed asylum seekers. We will also, on the development side, look at ways to supplement purely financial incentives with so called return assistance in kind. We are looking at an individual, tailor-made reintegration programme to be set up in the country of return.

Besides this program for the individual returnee, we also intend to start with a needs-assessment study for assistance on a national level to countries that are interested in developing or improving the current infrastructure for the reintegration of returnees in general. As these programs would benefit returnees from all over Europe, this will also offer us all an opportunity for multi country cooperation in this particular field.

A last element in the return and development nexus which I have not mentioned yet is Circular migration. I have purposefully left it till the end because we do not have any experience with it yet. Circular migration can in theory lead to quadruple win: win for the migrant, who gains experience by working abroad; a win for the employer, who can use the experience from the employee; a win for the receiving country, who's economy benefits, as well as a win for the country of origin, that benefits from the knowledge acquired by the migrant.

We are currently, as a follow up to the new policy document I mentioned in my introduction, looking at starting a pilot project to gain the necessary experience.

To conclude, I would like to wish us all a productive and inspiring 2 days. I look forward to our discussions and the outcome of this workshop, which, I hope, will lead to new insights for future policy.

Thank you.