

International Organization for Migration

100th Council

General Debate

U.S. Statement - December 7, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, and Distinguished Colleagues:

To begin, I would like to extend my congratulations to Ambassador Strohal and the Council Bureau on their election. The United States looks forward to working with you during the coming year as we seek to consolidate the reforms IOM has recently adopted. I would also like to thank Ambassador Jazairy of Algeria for his leadership as chair of the council, for your candor and energy, and particularly for the impetus you gave to the budget reform discussions. You have demonstrated a welcome commitment to and appreciation for the work IOM undertakes around the globe.

This has been a truly remarkable year. The migration emergency in North Africa highlighted IOM's capacities and capabilities at their very best. Member states and the IOM administration should be extraordinarily proud of the IOM response and its ongoing work to support and advise governments and to promote the dignity of individual migrants.

We gather this week to celebrate an important milestone in the history of this organization and to look ahead to the future. In this context, I welcome IOM's 14 newest Member States. You are joining at a historic juncture; one which requires that IOM members take an active role in shaping the organization. This growing membership is a testament to the value IOM brings to states and to the international community.

Since 1951, IOM has resettled over 15 million refugees worldwide and helped millions of other migrants. IOM has worked tirelessly to reduce the risks to individuals and societies that result from poorly managed or irregular migration. IOM has repeatedly adapted to address emerging trends and challenges – such as growing mixed migration flows, trafficking in persons, and people smuggling.

The U.S. also welcomes the Director General's thoughtful presentation yesterday, in particular, your vision of a "high road scenario" for migration governance. We look forward to an opportunity for continued engagement with member states on these important issues, starting in early 2012.

With the release of the 2011 World Migration Report, IOM is once again in the vanguard on migration issues. The Report highlights the importance of communicating a more positive image of migrants. Tensions around migration issues are nothing new, particularly in times of economic hardship or during conflict, but they must not be used to divide or inflame. The United States supports IOM's efforts to promote a reasoned and informed global dialogue on migration issues.

As IOM adapts to meet new challenges, Member States must be there to help. Recent years have been a time of transition. IOM has implemented staff and institutional reforms and the reform of the organization's budget structure is well underway. We look forward to completing the budget reform process in 2012 and refocusing our attention on other areas where we can position IOM for the future.

Strengthening and reaffirming IOM's role in the global migration discussion is one such area. Migration appears daily on the front pages of the world's newspapers, and plays a prominent role in domestic and international political debates. Moreover, migration will remain a major social-cultural phenomenon for the foreseeable future. IOM is uniquely qualified to contribute to the global debate, but the organization needs Member State support. Member States should consider how to enhance the relevance of the International Dialogue on Migration, and how to enable IOM to effectively leverage its sixty years of experience on migration issues.

To position IOM for the future, Member States must also renew efforts to accept the amendments to the IOM Constitution. These amendments seek to build a more efficient organization, and we urge our fellow Member States to raise this issue with their capitals to accept these amendments as soon as possible.

Finally, we continue to encourage Member States to find ways that they can support the organization financially, including through increased unearmarked voluntary contributions.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States was built by immigrants, and we continue to be enriched by immigrants. In speaking of the impact of migration on the United States, President Obama observed that "the steady stream of hardworking and talented people has made [the U.S.] the engine of the global economy and a beacon of hope around the world." Immigrant business owners generate income, while remittances from the United States -- some \$49 billion in 2009 -- benefit communities around the world.

Given this history and the importance of IOM's mandate, the United States has supported IOM since its inception. We applaud the indispensable leadership of its Director General, Ambassador Bill Swing. We value IOM as a strategic partner in advancing our goals of legal, orderly, and humane migration, and we firmly believe it is in the interest of Member States to strengthen IOM's role as the preeminent global migration agency. We have made progress, but there is still much to be done. We look forward to working closely with all of you in this endeavor.