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General debate: Australian intervention

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Policy Coherence

Mr Chairman, we have had a particularly stimulating series of presentations over the last two days on the theme of "Coherence in Migration Policy", a theme generated in the report of the Global Commission on International Migration.

A threshold question for me is, what is meant by "coherence" in migration policy? Where and how is this concept to be applied?

I was very taken by the words used by Mr Karlsson, Co-Chair of the Global Commission on International Migration who said that "coherence begins at home".

States are the main actors in developing and implementing migration policy. We fully endorse the concept that states should get their own houses in order by building coherent migration policies at the national level which balance the various elements of government into a single, integrated, unambiguous "whole of government" policy. Such policies of course are richer if they are based on an active program of consultations with stakeholders in civil society.

Coherence at the national level is also more likely to occur if there is a single agency with the authority and capacity to develop national policy and actually apply it in practice.

The end product of a well-developed coherent policy is likely to be that the benefits of migration are maximised for all involved -- the country which has such policy, the migrants affected by it and source countries.

Mr Chairman, the debate has also touched on the question of coherence at the regional and international level.

This is a little more complex. In this context, I think the meaning of "coherence" changes. It is not necessarily desirable to seek uniform and integrated policies at the regional and international level. The needs of states are different. It is to be expected that policies will be different from state to state and from region to region according to those needs.

The kind of coherence that we should seek at the regional and international level, involves discussion, debate and exchange on hopefully transparent and coherent national policies. This kind of exchange offers the prospect of adjustments to national policies on a bilateral, regional and international basis to allow for the smoother operation and interconnection of those policies.

Capacity

However, Mr Chairman, coherence will not be achieved if individual states do not have the capacity to develop coherent policies. Coherent policies will mean nothing without the capacity to properly implement them. Therefore, finding ways to build the capacity of states which need assistance is fundamental to progress in this area.

Australia's Approach

Australia believes strongly in the benefits of coherent managed migration policies. This belief underpins our continued commitment to a permanent migration program of over 140,000 skilled and family migrants per year, supplemented by a refugee resettlement program of some 13,000 humanitarian entrants per year.

These policies are supported by comprehensive integration programs and early access to Australian citizenship, to ensure, as far as possible, that migrants are able to become full participants in a harmonious multicultural society.

We work on a bilateral basis with neighbouring countries, and provide modest funding to those who need it to assist them in building their capacity.

We also work closely with countries in our region in forums such as the Asia Pacific Consultations on Refugees Displaced Persons and Migrants, currently under distinguished chairmanship of China.

The role of IOM

Mr Chairman, there is no better organisation than IOM to work with States to help develop coherence in migration policies at the national, regional and international level. Its broad charter gives it the flexibility to respond to the wishes of states at all of those levels, and in new and innovative ways. It is now "on the ground" in more places than ever around the world.

The fact that IOM depends on States to fund particular projects before it can proceed with them provides an unparalleled governance discipline that ensures that its activities are focused only where member states want them. We should take care not to upset this successful formula and overburden IOM with more layers of governance.

We have seen over the last few days the high-quality of the policy dialogue organised by Mr Appave and the Migration Policy and Research of Division IOM. We have no doubt that this can be even further developed.

We endorse the decision of the UN to pursue the recommendations of the Global Commission on International Migration by building on the Geneva Migration group, centred on IOM, rather than developing any new institution. We are interested to hear more of what is proposed for the terms of reference and expanded membership.

We also see IOM as the institution best placed to help states build the capacity on which coherence in policy and effectiveness in administration entirely depends. Australia will continue to be a significant purchaser of IOM's services in this and other areas.

Thank you Mr Chairman.