WELCOME REMARKS

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International Dialogue on Migration 2010
Migration and Social Change
2nd Intersessional Workshop
Societies and Identities: The Multifaceted Impact of Migration
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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Officials,
Members of the United Nations Family,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I – Introduction

What an honour and pleasure to welcome you to IOM's 2010 International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) and to this, our 2nd Intersessional Workshop of the year, this time on Societies and Identities: The Multifaceted Impact of Migration.

Over the next two days, we will explore together the impact of international migration on the political, social and cultural make-up of societies in origin, transit and destination countries.

In doing so, we hope to identify best practices and practical solutions to strengthen and improve migration policies.

Migration is about the movement of people – migration also concerns the movement and evolution of policy to keep pace with this mass mobility and to promote legal, safe, and humane migration.

At no other time in recorded history have so many people been on the move – 214 million international migrants; if constituted as a single nation, migrants would constitute the fifth most populous country in the world. If grouped together with the 740 million internal migrants, including displaced persons – then one in every seven persons on the globe is a migrant.

To complicate matters, global phenomena such as climate change; demography and food, water and energy insecurity are coming together like never before to push and pull the world's population in new directions. As a result, societies are more and more inter-linked and connected.

The migration policies of destination countries will help determine whether the enrichment of migrants is a source of strength and a cause for celebration, or a source of bewilderment and a challenge to a nation's sense of identity.

But migration affects societies of origin as profoundly as it affects societies of destination. In addition, more and more, countries are becoming places of destination, origin and transit all at once.

II – Content

This morning, I had three thoughts that I felt important to share with you in the context of our theme.

First, migration is an enduring mega trend that will persist well into the 21st century.

Neither the global economic recession; nor restrictive Government policies nor quotas are likely to halt of even slow the inexorable pace of human mobility.

International migration is linked inescapably to globalization – the combination of distance-shrinking technology and cheaper travel with the free flow of goods, services and increasingly people to new or evolving markets and societies. Yet globalization thinkers and policymakers have paid scant attention to migration as an essential ingredient in our globalizing world. In a very real sense, migration is the "stepchild" of globalization.

The issue before governments is not so much a question of whether or not to accept migrants or to allow migration; rather the issue before us all is how to manage migration in a manner that meets societal interests while respecting migrants' legitimate aspirations, dignity and human rights.

Second, migration involves the movement of skills, knowledge and manpower – but first and foremost it involves the movement of people: men, women, children, and families; hence the importance of the "social dimension" which is at the centre of this year's International Dialogue on Migration.

IOM Member States acknowledged as much nearly 60 years ago when drafting the Organization's Constitution. They called on States to settle and integrate migrants, and I quote, "into the economic and *social* structure of the country of reception".

As migration dynamics change in destination countries, so too does the impact on countries of origin and transit. For example, we are seeing far more instances of temporary mobility. In many cases families are separated as one parent leaves the family to work abroad.

Efforts are needed to manage the relationships between those who move, the communities they move to, and those they leave behind.

Third, more needs to be done to debunk "migration myths" and harmful stereotypes about migration. Here more, much more, needs to be done – and done urgently – to inform and educate the public about migrants and their positive contributions.

Too often, and particularly during economic downturns, migrants are subject to unfair and misinformed labelling and scapegoating and in the worst cases to racism, discrimination and xenophobia. As job creation continues to lag far behind the beginnings of economic recovery, migration has become even more difficult to manage responsibly. There is a widespread tendency to think in a counter-cyclical manner, that

is, to send the migrants back – to see migrants as part of the problem rather than part of the solution to the economic crisis.

Raising awareness about the realities of migration and the immense contribution migrants make to all facets of social, economic, cultural and political life is a chief priority for IOM.

I say this, because even the most well-intentioned policies will fail if they collide with hardened attitudes and misconceptions.

Let me add one final footnote: Nowadays, membership in a society is an increasingly complex affair. Societies are comprised of a diverse body of individuals who may have dual nationalities, overlapping identities, and family connections or business interests that span more than one country. The very composition of many nation-states is evolving, with more and more having multicultural and multi-ethnic societies.

This new reality presents two principal options.

One, to maintain the status quo – what I call the "low-road" scenario.

Too often, the predominant approach is to resist or be in denial in regard to migration and its implications for societies.

The second option is a "high road" scenario of facilitating and managing human mobility and maximizing the many benefits that migrants and migration can bring to societies of origin and destination. This means availing oneself of all options including circular migration regional consultations, and integration.
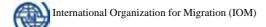
III – Conclusion / Welcomes

As we look to these challenges, it gives me pleasure to see such a diverse audience gathered in this room: governmental representatives from all continents, civil society, the private sector, as well as our partners from the Global Migration Group and the UN system as a whole.

I am particularly glad to see so many of our Geneva-based colleagues here today, given that the month of July typically provokes a great exodus from Geneva.

I would also like to extend a very special welcome to those of you joining us from further afield.

It is my great honour to introduce to you Peggy Levitt, Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College. With migration, integration, transnationalism and social remittance at the centre of her distinguished research career, her keynote address will no doubt make for a stimulating, thought-provoking overture to this workshop.

Let me also greet the representatives of some of our UN partner agencies as speakers at this workshop, including Ms. Florence Laufer of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations, a close partner of IOM.

A warm welcome also goes to all the speakers. Thank your for agreeing to share your knowledge and perspectives over the coming days, both at the regularly scheduled sessions and at two specially convened side events.

- The first, a selection of IOM's activities relating to migrant integration during the lunch period later today; and the

- Second, a presentation by the European Youth Forum (an IOM observer organisation) on practical ways to enhance the participation of young migrants in society during lunchtime tomorrow.

In closing, let me wish you all the very best for be two days of fruitful discussion and exchange on a topic that deserves our support and attention.

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