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IOM Council 2005
Toward Policy Coherence on Migration

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Speaking Notes for Jan Karlsson

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to start by thanking IOM for the invitation to speak at this year's Council. Almost exactly one year ago some of my colleagues spoke to you, and since then the Global Commission has benefited from close collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration.

With the Chair's permission, I should like to say just a few words about the Global Commission and its work, before addressing the main issue for today's deliberations, which is policy coherence.

As I am sure most of you know the Global Commission launched its report on 5 October this year when it was received by the UN Secretary-General in New York. The following day we also presented the report to Paul Wolfowitz at the World Bank.

Since then, the Commissioners and members our Secretariat, have continued to disseminate the report widely. We have spoken at the APC annual meeting in Beijing, at the Puebla process, at the United Nations and many other fora. We will be addressing the SADC States in a few weeks in Johannesburg and continue to present the report to governments and other stakeholders, including last week at the European Commission. We are organizing specialized workshops on particular aspects of the report – one took place today in Brussels to discuss our recommendation on Temporary Migration Programmes.

Overall the Commission has been delighted by the attention our report has attracted, among a whole range of stakeholders – governments, NGOs, civil society, academics and the media – in all regions of the world. Aspects of the report have inevitably been criticized, but that is no bad thing. As I have always stated, we see our report not as the final word, but as the beginning of a process of consultation, discussion and debate.

Allow me now to turn to the focus of today's session, namely policy coherence. The challenge of policy coherence is probably the overarching theme of the Global Commission's report, and I am delighted to see that great minds think alike and it has also rightly been identified by the IOM as a critical issue.

In the course of its extensive consultations, the Global Commission has come across striking examples of policy incoherence in different parts of the world. Government representatives have openly acknowledged that migration is handled by a number of different ministries, with competing and even conflicting priorities. The result has been that all too often national migration policies have not been fully effective. In too many instances, national migration policies have also been excessively influenced by short-term considerations and by the influence of populist politicians and sections of the media.

The Global Commission strongly believes that policy coherence must begin at home. Incoherence at the national level inevitably cascades upwards, leading to ineffective regional and global cooperation on the issue. At the same time, the international institutions that are governed and funded by states can be affected by short-term and incoherent national approaches.

Coherence is one of three 'Cs' that the Global Commission has identified as essential for the formulation and implementation of migration policies at the national, regional and global levels. It is also inextricably linked with the issue of cooperation. The Commission has concluded that an inherently transnational issue such as migration cannot possibly be addressed by national policies alone. We believe that the time is now right to strengthen regional and global approaches, while recognising the right of sovereign states to control their borders and to protect their national security.

Our third 'C' refers to capacity. In the course of our consultations it has become clear that many if not most countries – rich and poor, South and North – lack the experience, expertise and infrastructure required to develop and implement comprehensive and coherent migration policies.

We have been informed, for example, that many officials are simply unaware of the obligations that their countries have assumed in ratifying various international human rights instruments. As a result, there is often a serious gap between the ratification of these instruments, and their implementation.

At a more operational level, the people dealing directly with migrants and migrant issues are inadequately trained, resourced and equipped. Allow me to stress again that this conclusion applies equally to countries in all regions of the world.

The Commission also concludes that if the international community is to address the issues of coherence, cooperation and capacity, then more effective institutional arrangements are required.

We are not calling for the creation of a new organisation, neither for the establishment of any new Conventions. But we are calling for better coordination between existing institutions. More specifically, what is required is more efficient use of resources, greater pooling of expertise and a more integrated approach to policy.

I am delighted that the UN Secretary-General has followed up on our proposal by calling for the reconstitution of the existing Geneva Migration Group with precisely these objectives in mind.

As the subtitle of our report indicates, it is time for migration policy to take new directions. We fully realise that this is a potentially divisive issue and that the time is not right for top-down or supranational approaches. Equally, there cannot be a single model for action that applies to all states.

Nevertheless, the Commission has concluded that if the benefits of migration are to be maximised and its adverse consequences minimized, then migration policies should be based on shared objectives and have a common vision. In accordance with this approach, our report proposes that migration policies at the national, regional and global levels should be guided by six principles for action, which are presented in the report.

We believe that these principles and the report's more detailed recommendations will receive sufficiently widespread support to form the basis for a more coherent and cooperative approach to the issue of international migration, which will in turn maximise benefits of human mobility.

I look forward to the debate later this morning.