



Address by Most Reverend Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
at the Diaspora Ministerial Conference
Geneva, 18 -19 June 2013

The Holy See Delegation appreciates the opportunity to address this Ministerial Conference. Pope Benedict XVI described migration as “a social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions” that requires “close collaboration” between migrant sending and receiving countries and “adequate international norms” to safeguard “the needs and rights of individual migrants and their families, and at the same time, those of the host countries.”¹ I applaud the States represented at this important gathering -- as well as our convener, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) -- for sharing this vision and for your commitment to rights-respecting migration policies that further the good of all the stakeholders in this process.

The United Nations (U.N.)-facilitated Migration and Development Dialogue likewise seeks to safeguard migration and to ensure that migration benefits sending and receiving communities.² In the past, migration too often was envisioned as a problem to be solved through economic development. Indeed, there remains a strong need to create conditions that allow persons to live secure, dignified and prosperous lives in their homelands, so that migration can represent a choice, not an imperative. However, when the issue is approached from a different starting point, a new perspective could emerge – that of the development gains *from* migration, rather than the mere use of development aid to limit migration or the

¹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate (In Charity and Truth)* (June 29, 2009). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html

² UN General Assembly. 2006. *International migration and development. Report of the Secretary-General*. A/60/871. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/353/54/PDF/N0635354.pdf?OpenElement>

need to externalize immigration enforcement. These gains come, in large part, from the contributions of individual migrants and from the collective interventions of diaspora groups.

Remittances

The Dialogue builds on the desire of migrants to lend their financial resources, expertise, and know-how to their communities of origin and of destination. Remittances represent a concrete expression of this desire, realized through the sacrifices of migrants for their families and communities. To provide a sense of scale, in November of last year, the World Bank projected that developing countries would receive remittances in excess of \$400 billion in 2012.³

In many nations, remittance levels significantly exceed Overseas Development Assistance as well as foreign-direct investment. Stable remittance flows also serve as a source of foreign exchange and, following economic downturns, can constitute a more reliable source of income than foreign-direct investment and private debt and equity. Despite their size, remittance levels only hint at the development potential of migration. According to a 2006 report by the UN Secretary-General, the migration of low-wage workers “has the largest potential to reduce the depth and severity of poverty in communities of origin”.⁴

On a negative note, remittances can lead to inflation and can reduce productivity and competitiveness in the communities that receive them. They also can serve as a disincentive to continued schooling and to work. States and non-governmental organizations, particularly faith-based groups, can counter the negative potential of remittances by encouraging young people to pursue their educations and by supporting the grandparents and guardians of children whose parents have migrated.

³ Ratha, Dilip, Gemechu Ayana Aga and Ani Silwal. 2012. “Remittances to developing countries will surpass \$400 billion in 2012.” *Migration and Development Brief 19*, November 12. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationDevelopmentBrief19.pdf>

⁴ UN General Assembly. 2006. *International migration and development. Report of the Secretary-General*. A/60/871. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/353/54/PDF/N0635354.pdf?OpenElement>

Diaspora Groups

Diaspora groups, including community-based organizations and home-town associations, serve as mediating institutions for immigrants in their new communities, offering services, contacts, leadership development, and a sense of belonging and acceptance. They also allow immigrants to pool their monies in support of infrastructure and other development needs in their communities of origin. In Catholic Church terminology, this work represents an expression of solidarity and often demonstrates a preferential option for the poor.

Diaspora entities sponsor a remarkable range of humanitarian, business, cultural, civic, professional, trade and other projects. They enjoy several advantages in promoting development, including knowledge of the needs of their communities of origin, direct lines of communication to local officials, and the ability to address structural and policy barriers to development through collective action⁵ Diaspora groups are often more willing to invest in migrant communities than those without knowledge of, or personal ties to, such groups. Furthermore, they have high expectations for their investments and often are in a strong position to demand accountability.

Disaster relief is a common activity by diaspora groups: in fact, it often leads to the creation or revitalization of these entities. The U.S. Agency for International Development now maintains a database that lists U.S. diaspora agencies that provide development and disaster relief throughout the world. Diasporas also invest in bonds that fund public work and infrastructure projects. The nations that have issued, or plan to issue, diaspora bonds include El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Israel, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Rwanda and Sri Lanka.

Diasporas also have contributed significantly to peace-making and reconciliation initiatives in nations depleted by war and civil unrest. As the Global Commission on International

⁵ UN General Assembly. 2010. *International migration and development. Report of the Secretary-General*. A/65/203. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/470/04/PDF/N1047004.pdf?OpenElement>

Migration found, many returning migrants have assumed leadership roles in their nations during times of democratic transition.⁶

Given the growing recognition of the importance of diaspora groups, states of origin and destination have increasingly made it a priority to engage them. The Migration Policy Institute has identified more than 400 institutions in 56 nations that formally reach out to their diasporas and 26 nations with ministries dedicated to this work⁷ In 2011, the U.S. Department of State launched its International diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA), which seeks to promote diaspora “entrepreneurship, volunteerism, philanthropy, diplomacy, and social innovation in countries and regions of diaspora origin.” IOM has developed and, during this gathering, will unveil a global database with information and guidelines on diaspora programs and policies.

Integration and Immigration Policies

Human rights can be viewed as a moral claim to a shared “good” that invariably carries responsibilities. Immigrants do not simply have a right to participate in the life of their new communities and nation; they also have a responsibility to contribute. Integration allows immigrants to participate and contribute fully to their new communities. It also strengthens the ties between newcomers and those born in the host communities. This complex, multi-generational process increases the financial well-being of immigrants, as well as their social and human capital, putting them in a better position to serve their host and ancestral communities.

Education, employment, and political engagement represent key building blocks to successful integration. Generous and just immigration policies also contribute significantly to integration and, as a result, to migration-related development. States should develop immigration policies that prioritize family unity, education, and job training, with the goal of

⁶ Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM). 2005. *Migration in an interconnected world: New directions for action. Report of the Global Commission on International Migration*. Switzerland: Global Commission on International Migration

⁷ Newland, Kathleen, and Dovelyn Agunias. 2012. *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute; Geneva: International Organization for Migration. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/thediasporahandbook.pdf>

allowing migrants to build knowledge, skills and credentials that will benefit them and enhance their contributions to whatever community in which they settle. Best practices to assist migrant workers include pre-departure orientation, freedom to move between employers, labor protections, portability of pensions, circularity, and the option to earn permanent legal status in receiving states. Designed properly, immigration policies can benefit migrants, their families, and their host communities without undercutting the wages or working conditions of native workers.

Conclusion

States and the international community should promote the development work and potential of diaspora groups. However, the contributions of the self-sacrificing immigrants constitute the foundation and the heart of this phenomenon. They represent a collective expression of the dignity and generosity of immigrants, of their aspirations and love for their families, and of their commitment to the good of their old and new communities. In closing, I wish to thank all here present for your commitment to extend this crucially important work, which serves the good of us all.