

INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION 2013

DIASPORA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

18 and 19 June 2013

H.E. Md. Abdul Hannan

Opening Remarks

Honourable Ministers,
Dear Director General,
Dear Deputy Director General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this opening session of IOM's International Dialogue on Migration which this year gathers more than 500 participants from 130 countries including 55 ministerial delegates. This is an important year for multilateral discourse on migration and development and I am naturally particularly pleased that this Ministerial Conference takes place during the year of my Council chairmanship.

Dialogue about migration issues is one of IOM's core functions, as expressed in the IOM Constitution and Strategy. It is on the basis of that core function that the IDM was established. Since its inception by the Member States of IOM in 2001, the IDM has provided a space to analyze current and emerging issues in migration governance and to exchange experiences and policy solutions.

The IDM has in recent years managed to bring to the international agenda themes such as migration and climate change, integration and social change, or – last year – the impact of crises on migrants and migration. As we prepare for the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development at the UN General Assembly in October, I would like to recognize the role the IDM has played over the last decade in contributing to laying the groundwork for multilateral dialogue on migration.

Allow to me underline another feature of the IDM: it is an inclusive forum which welcomes IOM Member and Observer States, international and civil society organizations, migrants themselves, academic experts, and on occasion the media and the private sector. The IDM

promotes genuine, substantive and constructive debate which allows all actors to make their voices heard. As I look around the room, I am happy to see that this conference lives up this ideal of a diverse audience.

This IDM sets a new record for IOM. For the first time an intergovernmental organization has taken the initiative to bring together ministers who are in charge of their nationals and their descendants living abroad.

The word “diaspora” is of course not fully adequate to describe the groups of persons that the ministers present in Geneva today and tomorrow deal with – and the variety of ministries represented pays tribute to this dilemma. Still diaspora is a widely used term for those who maintain a link with their homeland.

As there is no universally accepted definition for diaspora, definitions vary and two have been suggested by two key stakeholders: international organizations and states.

International organizations and other agencies propose definitions related to the links diaspora members keep with their homeland, mainly from a development point of view. In this sense, the definitions are quite broad in scope and potentially include several generations, insisting on the sense of belonging and on transnationalism.

States do not necessarily use the term diaspora, and refer to *nationals abroad, citizens of X origin, non-residents of X origin, expatriates*, etc. Their definitions are usually linked to citizenship and/or the eligibility to obtain it. They usually refer to the following criteria:

- Descent
- Marital status (citizenship obtained by marriage)
- Possession of another citizenship

As for a third important stakeholder - diaspora associations - they usually do not define diaspora explicitly, focusing more on self-identification.

In any case we all seem to grasp what diasporas are, and the large interest in this conference shows that we all consider it an important topic to discuss.

I am also pleased to greet so many sending country representatives but am equally satisfied by the substantial interest of countries hosting diasporas on their soil. Only by bringing origin and destination countries together – even if these distinctions become increasingly blurred in an era of global mobility – can we expect added value from our discussions. And this is what the organizers are aiming for: that the participants share with each other their experiences (positive, but also what might not have worked well) so that they might be applied for the benefit of other diaspora members in today’s inter-connected world of transnational communities.