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IOM International Organization for Migration  
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations  
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

**Opening remarks**

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**Diaspora Ministerial Conference**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, what an honour, what a joy to see you all finally gathered here in a conference that has been under preparation for about a year. We are absolutely delighted to see so many of you here, at very senior level and in such large numbers.

2. It is also important to note the timing of our meeting, which is taking place in a very active and important period for migrant countries of origin and destination. We have three important events coming up. First, the United Nations second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which will take place on 3 and 4 October 2013. Second, the ongoing deliberations for the United Nations post-2015 development agenda, which identifies the priorities for the years ahead. We, of course, are hoping and urging that migration and development be among those priorities. Third, we look forward to the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the conference that took place in Cairo in 1994. All of this is going to bring us into greater contact and dialogue.

3. To support these processes, we have prepared with one of our valued partners, the Migration Policy Institute, a handbook on diasporas, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*. The handbook, available to you at this conference, contains a chapter of particular interest concerning the phenomenal growth of government entities for diasporas, nationals abroad and transnational communities. Responding to the interest clearly expressed by Member States, IOM dedicates this International Dialogue on Migration to the high-level, State-focused exchange of experiences to engage, enable and empower diaspora communities for development.

4. Together with an exponentially expanding interest in migration by governments worldwide, a growing number of governments have, over the past decade, established a separate ministry of diaspora affairs, variously named and designated. It has been my honour to meet many, if not most, of these special diaspora ministers. Based on these meetings, it occurred to us last year that it could be useful – especially in the build-up to the High-level Dialogue – to invite you to meet among yourselves, as ministers for the diaspora and others who head a department within a foreign, interior or labour ministry dealing with citizens living abroad, in order to share experiences; to create a professional community of interest; to allow us in the international community to benefit from your shared knowledge and experience; and, ultimately, to provide the findings and conclusions from our time together here in Geneva to the High-level Dialogue meeting in New York on 3 and 4 October.

5. IOM supports the concept of a separate ministry for citizens living abroad. One of its primary functions, however, should be, in our view, to coordinate diaspora affairs with other ministries who, alone or together, may have as much influence with diasporas as the diaspora ministry itself – in other words, a “whole of government” approach.

6. I would like to set the scene by addressing three key areas: (a) the magnitude and impact of diasporas; (b) diasporas in today's world; and (c) IOM's 60-plus years of experience assisting migrants.

## **II. RELEVANCE OF DIASPORAS: THEIR MAGNITUDE AND IMPACT**

7. I am not trying to define the term "diaspora": we have historical diasporas of several generations, we have new diasporas and we have diasporas in the making. One out of every seven persons in the world is a migrant in some form of the migratory cycle. There has been a feminization of migration and a qualitative change from the 1960s – more and more women now will follow career aspirations or job prospects. Another interconnected trend is urbanization, which is now at more than 50 per cent.

8. The following graphically illustrates the importance of the theme that we have embarked upon: if all of the migrants in the world today were to join hands in one country they would be slightly smaller in number than the population of Indonesia or slightly larger than the population of Brazil. The funds they send home, which are private flows, would be about the size of the GDP of Saudi Arabia and slightly more than that of Austria.

9. Human mobility is a megatrend that is almost certain to continue at least to mid-century and possibly longer. This development is in large part a function of population growth. The 20th century marked the first time in recorded history that the global population quadrupled within a human lifetime, a phenomenon unlikely to occur again. Other drivers of migration include labour shortages and demands; growing North–South economic and social disparities; the digital revolution; distance-shrinking technologies; personal dreams and ambitions; and persistent disasters – whether these are induced by wars or natural disasters.

## **III. DIASPORAS IN A MOBILE, CONNECTED WORLD**

### **“Brain circulation”**

10. Clearly, diasporas will become more important, not less important, in the years ahead. Diaspora contributions are many: the most often referred to are “brain drain” and “brain gain”; however, we increasingly discuss “brain circulation”. We need to develop policies to remove the obstacles to human mobility and facilitate the building of a “brain bank”, available to both countries of origin and destination. A well-educated and well-connected global diaspora gathers talented people from whom countries can receive remittances, know-how and contacts – and perhaps migrants who will return home. Ultimately, transnational communities and development actors are human resources with more possibilities and economic capital to serve both countries of origin and destination. These are, of course, only some of the ways in which diasporas contribute to development.

### **Defining and counting diasporas**

11. One challenge we encounter lies simply in identifying clear categories of diasporas. Governments themselves have difficulties in quantifying diasporas, and definitions vary widely, reflecting various interests and institutional data-gathering capacities.

12. Owing to these constraints, it is difficult to estimate the size of all diasporas, or even to agree upon a common methodology. Some initial figures have been brought up, but these vary greatly, underscoring the complexity of this task:

- (a) A very conservative estimate for the population of diasporas worldwide is 295 million. This is based on figures produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for migrants plus their foreign-born children. Clearly, this figure is low, since one could include another generation or two in a reasonable understanding of diasporas.
- (b) Another approximate figure could be the total of governments' estimates of their national diaspora: the sum of the African Union, Indian and Chinese estimates alone gives 234 million. We know that this figure is low when we consider self-identification in major immigration countries: in 2011, the United States census indicated that 213 million people (92.3% of the total population) identified origins outside the United States.
- (c) At the behest of governments, IOM alone has resettled some 14 million since 1951. A very approximate adjustment for global net population growth indicates that these diasporas are now 17.76 million. A very high percentage of this population results from European emigration – principally to the Americas, Australia and New Zealand.
- (d) Some have recently cited much higher numbers, but their methodology is unclear.

13. I think we must not get lost in a debate over numbers or definitions: countries all have knowledge of their own diaspora and the numbers will probably be less important. I cite these calculations not to pretend that there is a definitive estimate, but rather to emphasize the importance of our working with you to gauge the size of the task of engaging, enabling and empowering these diaspora communities, to better protect them and to liberate their potential to help migration drive development – and help create mutually beneficial relationships between countries of origin and people who may never have lived there. We strongly believe that this will promote better migration for all.

### **The digital revolution and diaspora networks**

14. Migration is not simply a move from point A to point B, or from B back to A. Modern technology has made it possible for diasporas to contribute to both home and host countries without necessarily returning home. Distance-shrinking technologies seem to have erased physical distance in terms of transport and communications, yet governments have generally not matched this with the removal of barriers to mobility. Many of our government policies actually create barriers to shrinking that distance; however, modern technologies go beyond borders. The Internet has spawned a large and growing number of diaspora networks: countries as far apart as India, South Africa and the Philippines have such diaspora networks. These allow citizens living abroad to contribute their knowledge, experience and newly acquired skills to the development of their country of origin without being obliged to return home. Unfortunately, too few governments have realized, or used to the fullest, the potential of these diaspora networks.

### **Government incentives for diasporas**

15. Through proper policies, governments can offer their diasporas incentives to return home. There is no contradiction in my view between a sound diaspora policy and integration

policies: you can be fully integrated in a country and still contribute to your country of origin. This can be done, for instance, by offering returnees favourable living and working environments, research grants or career opportunities.

16. We have a particular interest in supporting you with what we refer to as “return of qualified nationals”. In Somalia, IOM’s Return of Qualified Nationals Programme enabled more than 120 highly qualified Somali diaspora members to return and help build government, civic and private-sector capacity. These and other incentive programmes, of course, need to be introduced and supported through a major public information programme that explains to the majority of nationals who stayed at home the basis behind and reasoning for such a special outreach programme and, most importantly, the benefits that will accrue to them through the skills and talent their returning colleagues bring with them.

17. We have also noticed the contribution of diasporas in migration crises. It may seem contradictory, because crises can generate forced migration and the forced migration can spark new crises, but well-engaged and empowered diasporas are an important resource for resolving crises and aiding recovery, and diaspora members are often among the very first responders to humanitarian crises – as we have seen in a number of recent crises.

#### **IV. IOM AND DIASPORAS – 60 YEARS OF ASSISTING MIGRANTS**

18. Since its founding in 1951, almost 62 years ago, IOM has had a continuous association with diasporas. This association has taken a variety of forms, as outlined below.

19. **Resettlement:** From the time when Europe was ravaged by the Second World War and we helped settle 1 million people – primarily to Australia, North America and South America – until today, IOM has helped resettle 14 million persons, mostly refugees from subsequent armed conflicts.

20. **Labour migration:** We have assisted many thousands in obtaining both permanent and short-term jobs.

21. **Facilitating migrant returns:** the return of qualified nationals and the assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes have been instrumental in rebuilding conflict-ravaged countries. Today, IOM facilitates a yearly average return of 35,000 to 40,000 stranded migrants, failed asylum-seekers and other vulnerable migrants.

22. **Providing protection to expatriate/transnational/diaspora labour migrants in crisis:** This includes proxy consular assistance for countries that do not have representatives in crisis locations.

23. **Facilitating engagement through better understanding:** This has been achieved, inter alia, through the following:

- (a) More than 60 diaspora surveys in the last decade alone – increasingly conducted at the request of countries of origin.
- (b) The *World Migration Report 2013*, our flagship publication, will be devoted to the well-being of migrants, including diasporas of course.

(c) The ACP Observatory on Migration: a series of pilot projects funded by the European Union in 12 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, focused on South–South human mobility.

24. From all these activities, let me summarize IOM’s strategic approach to diasporas and transnational communities. Based on its experience, IOM uses its global presence in 470 offices on all continents to support diasporas in the ways outlined below.

25. **Engage:** We need to have knowledge of socioeconomic profiles, the level and range of interest in and contact with the country of origin and the issues of main concern in order to engage diasporas; and we need to develop specific and relevant outreach.

26. **Enable:** Together, we need to promote conditions in which individuals can acquire the skills needed to maximize their potential and contribute to communities. We must also assist you in promoting respect for migrant rights, which includes issues related to property and the access to essential services such as health care – both in the country of origin and residence – and in facilitating trade and investment in the country of origin. For example, a current IOM pilot project involves a public–private partnership between the Moroccan authorities and financial institutions to facilitate direct investment by Moroccan entrepreneurs in Belgium.

27. **Empower:** We need to support diaspora engagement in development and reconstruction activities – not doing things *for* migrants, but rather helping them deploy their specialized expertise in beneficial activities. Several examples of this are as follows:

- (a) MIDA (Migration for Development in Africa) is facilitating diaspora engagement in rebuilding and strengthening national institutions in Somalia and other countries.
- (b) African Great Lakes Region: The diaspora in Europe are supporting institution-building, training and humanitarian causes.
- (c) Facilitation of political engagement: IOM has assisted in conducting out-of-country registration and voting, most recently in eight countries for the South Sudan referendum. This is vital in creating political consensus and legitimacy and laying foundations for peace and prosperity.

## V. CONCLUSION: A “HIGH-ROAD” DIASPORA POLICY SCENARIO

28. In conclusion, to help unlock the potential of our citizens living abroad, it would be useful to think in terms of a “high-road” scenario whereby we pursue policies that facilitate diaspora mobility, in other words a policy that not only helps to remove obstacles to mobility and foster fluidity between societies, but also encourages our transnational citizens to stay engaged in both home and host societies. A high-road scenario requires a government to move from a policy of “controlling” its overseas citizens to one of “courting” them, consistent with IOM’s recommendations concerning this high-road scenario for policy and for discussions at the High-level Dialogue. A few elements include:

- (a) Appointment of a senior focal point within government – either an independent ministry or a major department, in order to map and maintain contact with citizens living abroad.

- (b) Political rights for diasporas: Progress in this area presupposes that the home country government accepts the reality that some of its citizens may have acquired an additional nationality, namely that they have dual nationality. For example, at last count, some 115 countries allow out-of-country registration and voting and IOM assists many of these, as in the recent South Sudan referendum. Another issue is designated or reserved seats in the parliament or national assembly for those outside national boundaries.
- (c) A government website devoted exclusively to diaspora matters.
- (d) Organization of actual or virtual diaspora trade and investment missions, facilitating a “bridging role” with the home country for foreign expertise, finance and networking.
- (e) Official meetings with diasporas in main countries of destination, annually or occasionally, to greet, brief and field questions and concerns.
- (f) Policies that encourage “social remittances” – ideas, skills, trade, investment, entrepreneurship, networking or bridging home countries with others, and so on.
- (g) Supporting diasporas in establishing a diaspora network.
- (h) A government matching scheme for remittances earmarked for development (e.g. Mexico’s hometown associations).
- (i) Engaging diasporas in social remittances, assisting, for example, with short visits to schools and hospitals, and generally supporting development in the home country.

29. There are, of course, many other steps that we can take to support our citizens abroad, and I am confident that our two-day meeting will identify a number of these. Let me once again say how delighted and honoured we are to have you all here. We look forward to abundant exchanges, both formally here in the auditorium and also during the coffee breaks, and I hope to speak personally to as many of you as possible. Thank you very much for your attendance.