

15 July 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,  
President of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Informal Interactive Hearings on International Migration and  
Development**

Mr. Deputy-Secretary-General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the General Assembly, it gives me great pleasure to offer a very warm welcome to all of you to the United Nations.

Your presence at events such as this one shows how NGOs can provide a valuable service to society, by furnishing—in Stendhal’s memorable phrase—a “movable mirror” for decision makers to reflect on their deliberations in a truer light.

My Office will carefully prepare the summary of these Interactive Hearings on International Migration and Development. I believe it will provide valuable input for Member State delegations, as they work on their respective national positions on this critical topic.

Before proceeding with the remainder of my remarks, allow me to extend my sincere appreciation to my good friend, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, the UN’s Deputy-Secretary-General. During his tenure as President of the General Assembly’s 60th Session, he played an important role in raising the much-needed awareness on this issue. I would like to thank him for joining us this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is a story that the U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt once began a speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution by addressing them as “My Fellow Immigrants.” His aim was to remind his audience that they were all ancestors of individuals who left their countries of origin to seek better lives in a new land.

Migration is one of the few constants of human history. All of us trace our roots to somewhere else—some have to go back just one or two generations; others, further rearward. But virtually everyone’s forbearers, at some point over the course of millennia, took the courageous and difficult decision to give up everything that was familiar, in order to seek greater opportunity in territories unknown.

The phenomenon of migration is an embodiment of what the authors of the American Declaration of Independence defined as the “pursuit of happiness”—the quest by untold numbers of people since the dawn of time to overcome the constricting circumstances of place and birth.

The subject of migration has stirred passionate debates, because for all the good it can bring, it also generates social tensions. Recent arguments about how to integrate newcomers in a number of Member States have proven especially controversial.

Many migrants are victims of abuse and exploitation by smugglers and traffickers. Others find themselves trapped behind walls of discrimination, xenophobia and racism, as well as reprehensible labor, medical and housing conditions.

Nonetheless, the numbers continue to rise: globalization has resulted in the advent of a new era of mobility. Over the last decade, the total number of international migrants has increased from 150 million to 214 million, creating both challenges and opportunities for societies throughout the world.

This is the context in which I would like to raise four points for your consideration.

First, only a third of those who choose to emigrate end up in developed countries; another third move from a developing country to another; while the rest go from a developed country to a developing one.

Second, academic research unambiguously shows that immigrants significantly contribute to the economic development of their country of destination—confirming the words of the American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson that “a nation, like a tree, does not thrive [...] ‘till it is engrafted with foreign stock.”

Third, it can deprive countries of origin of its best and brightest—a harsh penalty for the affected nation, which gets no benefit from the costly investment it made in the projected contribution of skilled professionals.

Lastly, the total remittances migrants send back home are equivalent to “more than three times the size of official development assistance,” according to a recent World Bank study. However, the same report indicates that their income and education levels have an inverse effect on the maintenance of financial and cultural ties with the communities they come from.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Available evidence clearly suggests that the number of individuals seeking better livelihoods will keep increasing in the time ahead, that this will help raise the prosperity levels of destination countries, and that the resulting brain drain in states of origin will reinforce the perpetuation of their impoverishment.

If current trends continue, migration may enhance current inequalities between various categories of states. It could even result in what some demographers have called the “specter of ghost countries—of nations that will simply become devoid of necessary human resources to carry on in the longer term.”

The framework for sustainable development agreed by the world’s leaders last June in Rio de Janeiro laid out a vision for the post-2015 era. The General Assembly has been assigned with the responsibility

of converting into practical actions the global aspirations they proclaimed, at the heart of which was a solemn pledge to “strive for inclusive, equitable [...] approaches to overcome poverty and inequality.”

I would therefore strongly encourage you to discuss not only how you can shape preparations for the forthcoming High-level Dialogue, but also how to influence the way Member States could incorporate the issue of migration into their debate on how to bridge the gap between overall rich and poor countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decades, we have put in place intergovernmental institutions to regulate trade, stem inflation, facilitate currency flows, etc. The United Nations has created agencies to address many of the pressing global issues—from arms trafficking, nuclear power, and human rights, to telecommunications, intellectual property, and climate change.

But there is no international mechanism that seeks to regulate migration flows. No accepted criteria have been established; no universal guidelines endorsed. There is literally no global governance on an issue that will fundamentally affect the future of virtually every nation on Earth.

I hope today’s hearings can point the way forward, and help us “harness the unstoppable force of migration for the common good”—to use the words of our Secretary-General.

I believe that in the time ahead, Member States should begin their work on creating a basis for coordination on a topic that stands at the crux of sustainable development, as to ensure that migration does not turn into a zero-sum game, where the progress of any nation is held back by that of another.

Thank you very much for your attention.