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STATEMENT  
BY

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AFFAIRS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
ALBANIA

AT THE HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL  
MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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**Madam President  
Your Excellencies  
Distinguished Delegates**

Let me extend my warmest congratulations to you Madam Haya Rashed Al Khalifa on your election as President of the Sixty-first Session of the United Nations General Assembly and wish you the best of success in this leading position.

Albania welcomes the organization of the HLD on International Migration and Development, and believes that it will have a strong impact in the future efforts and policies for the management of migration internationally.

As presented by the report of Secretary General, more than 191 million persons are international migrants, a fact that shows the huge dimensions of the phenomenon and its influence on international balances. As such, it cannot be considered as a phenomenon of developed or of developing countries only.

The global policy on migration management, for the benefit of both the states and the individuals, is highly reflected in Albania. Since the year 1991, the country has experienced significant flows of migration, with a rate up to 20% of the population<sup>1</sup>. Albanian migrants are found mostly in the EU, especially in the two neighbouring countries, Greece and Italy but also in Germany, USA, Canada, and Australia. Until 2004, Albania was one of the main transit routes of the South East Europe towards EU. As a result, migration from Albania was a major concern not only for the country itself but also for the relations with the EU, in particular with the neighbours.

In this framework, management of migration is considered as one of the top priorities of the Government of Albania. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) and other international partners have consistently provided Albania with assistance to frame and develop its policies in such a complex area as the management of migration. Under the coordination and expertise of IOM, and with the funds of EU Program CARDS 2001, Albania developed a National Strategy and a concrete Action Plan on Migration, which were approved respectively in November 2004 and May 2005, for a period of implementation until 2010.

The aim of the National Strategy on Migration is to provide Albania with a comprehensive policy on migration, from one that has reacted mainly against irregular flows, towards a more holistic policy based on the management of migration through development. The Strategy and the Action Plan represent the first attempt by Albania and constitute one of the most advanced policy documents in the region, directly connecting management of migration with development. The document puts the emphasis in the creation of adequate environment for the potential migrants to stay and work at home and for the actual emigrants to return and invest their savings in Albania. Both the strategy and the action plan are fully in line with the orientation of the EU Common Policy on Immigration.

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<sup>1</sup> See the National Strategy on Migration.

I would like to emphasize that the main pillars of the strategy are: mobility, development, protection and integration, all interlinked with each other. Regarding the development, the focus is put *inter alia* in two main components:

1. *Channelling the remittances as a tool for development*
2. *Mobilizing the Albanian Diaspora in the development process*

Albania is developing a specific matrix for action for channelling remittances into investments, based on a study carried in 2005<sup>2</sup>. The study finds that remittances from Albanian emigrants amount to 17% of the GDP and that the emigrants are willing to invest, but are waiting for better conditions and opportunities.<sup>3</sup> This implies that sound policies will stimulate remittances and channel them to productive investments. In this framework, Albania is trying to attract the migrants by providing facilities for investment, lobbying with the financial institutions for creation of secure channels for transmitting remittances, and shortening the procedures for establishment of private enterprises.

I would also like to share with you a new approach that the Government of Albania has proclaimed recently: "*Albania: 1 Euro*", aiming at attracting investors in poor areas with high unemployment rates. The initiative is *inter alia*<sup>4</sup> addressed to Diaspora and emigrants, as the need for their contribution is high, taking in consideration that they bring with themselves not only the financial capital but also the human one. In this way, they share with the community a new mentality, culture and technological advancements. As noted in the Secretary General Report '*after working in Greece, Albanians bring home new agricultural skills that enable them to increase production. By promoting the exchange of experience and helping build partnerships, the international community can do much to increase and to spread these positive effects of migration on development*'.

International cooperation is crucial in minimizing the costs and maximizing the benefits from migration. Through joint initiatives, the states can create opportunities for cheaper and secure channels to transfer the remittances and cooperate for the protection of the rights of migrants.

One of the problematic points in dealing with migration and which requires concerted efforts from both the receiving and sending countries is the portability of pensions. Albania is trying to lobby with neighbouring countries for a mutual solution regarding the pensions of the migrants, however, more work needs to be done. We think, that such issues that involve several countries are better dealt in forums similar to the one we are in today.

While migration creates possibilities for the migrants to have a better life and contributes both to the host and sending countries, it has a negative impact regarding the highly

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<sup>2</sup> The matrix is based on a study carried out jointly with IOM experts and will be the Action Plan of Government of Albania for the coming years.

<sup>3</sup> See the Albanian National Strategy on Migration.

<sup>4</sup> The initiative is directed to the strategic investors, foreigners, emigrants and Diaspora in order to attract them to invest in the country.

skilled workers and the phenomenon of brain drain. Albania is trying to work towards the trend: from brain drain to brain gain, by introducing some strategies for attracting the highly skilled workers and excellent students that have studied abroad to effectively contribute in the country. Albanian government has supported and welcomed cooperation with Civil Society and student organizations that provide financial incentives for the return of the professionals and students.

Increased efforts in this area are needed. Many highly skilled and experts tend to work abroad in international institutions rather than in the same institutions in Albania because they do not get the same financial package in the country due to their '*national status*' regardless of the expertise. As a result, discussion and cooperation is important that the international structures in Albania provide commensurate financial packages to Albanian nationals with the similar education and expertise as the international ones. This will give the possibility that instead of working abroad, they contribute with their expertise and talent at the home country.

“UNDP is supporting an initiative of the Albanian government through a Brain Gain Programme seeking to maximize the role of migrants and Diaspora in academia, public administration and business. The programme supports the Albanian government’s efforts in creating the necessary conditions and incentive structure for the engagement of Diaspora in the country’s development.

International cooperation is essential for combating trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants. As a transnational phenomenon, it cannot be dealt by one country only. The common initiatives and projects in the area, initiated by the Stability Pact, such as MARRI initiative, serve mutual cooperation and strengthen the capacity of the states to deal with such issues. Albania has benefited a lot from these projects, especially regarding capacity building, common procedures, data exchange and data collection etc.

When dealing with migration, specific attention should be paid to its social dimension, especially regarding the trafficking of children and the unity of the family. Migration affects a great number of children, however, their situation remains largely unrecognized, because very little is known about the immediate and long-term impacts of migration on children. Data is needed on children’s living conditions in general as well as on the impact of the “family migration” on the development and well being of children. Further emphasis should be placed on protection of children’ rights both in the sending and receiving countries.

Albania has signed recently a bilateral agreement with Greece for the protection and assistance of children who are victims of trafficking. The document serves as a model of cooperation and may be used as bedrock for expanded discussions on the protection of *children migrants*’ rights. UNICEF is assisting Albania for projects in this area.

Another successful joint effort of the Albanian Government and international organizations is establishment of a system, called “pre-screening of asylum seekers & migrants”, which was fully handed over to the Government of Albania by the end of

April 2006. "Pre-Screening System" was initiated by UNHCR in 2001 & developed as an operational tool to identify and channel asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking and irregular economic migrants into the appropriate system and procedures, in collaboration with IOM & OSCE.<sup>5</sup>

We think that international migration management and development can be achieved only through establishment of adequate structures and legislation. For this reason, in parallel with the process for alignment with the EU Acquis on Migration, Albania has ratified several international instruments for the protection of the rights of migrants. Albania thinks that any initiative for the migration management and development should be in parallel with an increased protection of migrants. In this framework, Albania calls for the ratification of the basic international conventions on the rights of migrants by both the receiving and sending countries.

Concluding, Albania welcomes the report and the initiative to promote the dialogue on migration at a higher level. Being a country of origin and, potentially, in the near future a country of destination, we highly appreciate all the efforts in the international level to treat migration in a holistic approach. Albania has witnessed that without the support and expertise of specialized international agencies in the field, in particular IOM, UN, World Bank, UNICEF, UNCHR, EU and without the cooperation between the countries, it is not easy to deal with migration in a coherent way. As experience shows, without a consolidated cooperation between countries of destination and those of origin it is not possible to fight illegal migration and manage migration for the benefit of all. Albania agrees that while framing policies or establishing structures, the perspective of emigrants and civil society should be taken in consideration and not only that of the countries of origin and destination. We believe that the results of this debate will be followed up by concrete actions, resulting in a better management of migration internationally.

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<sup>5</sup> The 27 months project (01 April 2004- 30 June 2006) was jointly implemented by UNHCR (Project coordinator), IOM, & OSCE in close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior. EU contributed 2 million Euro to the Project under CARDS-2003. Under this project, among other activities, over 2,000 senior border police officers, guards and government officials involved in asylum and migration activity were trained, 11 transit and reception facilities at major crossing points & in Tirana were established or rehabilitated, and required office equipment and vehicles were provided to the relevant government departments, in particular, the Border and Migration Police Department at the Ministry of Interior.