



STATEMENT

by

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Madam President,
Mr. Secretary- General,
Distinguished Delegates

The Commonwealth is pleased to have been given the opportunity to participate in the first ever high-level dialogue on migration and development. Much of the debate in 2006, including the UN panel discussions on migration has focused on improving the understanding of the complex relationship between migration and development. We know from the studies done at the national and regional level that migration is fundamental to development. Migrants, as agents of development, can benefit both the countries of origin and destination through their economic, social, political and cultural contributions. The challenge is to ensure that migration is managed and responds adequately to the needs of the international labour market. In this way, migration should be able to bring us closer to achieving the objective of widespread and balanced development.

This is most certainly the right time to consider how countries and their international partners can share bilateral and regional experiences and best practices in dealing with the multi-dimensional aspects of migration: its effect on the socio-economic development of both sender and recipient countries and its impact on the material condition of migrants, so as to eliminate its worst aspects.

The high-level dialogue also highlights the importance of mainstreaming migration into strategic development frameworks. Countries are beginning to address and integrate migration considerations in the National Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the Global Millennium Development Goals. Many national development agencies recognize the linkages between migration and education, migration and health and migration and business. Some countries already take into account the contribution that migrants' remittances make to their national budgets.

The growing Diasporas of populations across the world and their multiple identities and allegiances are a feature of globalization. This is reinforced by the fact that governments in the developing countries are reaching out to their respective Diasporas in the rich countries for investments and transfer of knowledge for human resource development programmes, thereby adding to and taking advantage of multiculturalism.

If the opportunities offered by the phenomenon of migration are exploited positively, it can play a vital role in reducing poverty and economic vulnerability and in improving sustainable human development.

There is a need to improve the understanding and implementation of existing legal instruments on migration, supplemented by voluntary and cooperative efforts, to provide capacity building, to foster dialogue between sending and receiving states and to make migration mutually beneficial to countries and migrants.

We also need to develop better indicators to measure the impact of migration on development, how it is contributing towards the achievement of the MDGs and the reduction of poverty. Managing migration means having the correct data for mitigating skills shortages in both sender and recipient countries. In this manner, the human capital of both countries of origin and receiving states can be enriched and the flexibility and productivity of all national economies can be enhanced. The orderly and selective management of labour markets can and will fill in the gaps between supply and demand and will, ultimately, eliminate the function of traffickers and smugglers who abuse the current situation.

The relationship between migration and development is not new, certainly not for the Commonwealth. The history of the Commonwealth is inter-twined with the movement of people; people who left their homes for education, trade, opportunities and even to explore the world and to discover new territories. Over the years, the Commonwealth has developed a rich political, social and cultural heritage with a common language, system of administration, education and legal structure. This achievement is in no small way unrelated to the reality of migration.

The Commonwealth recognized the value of such a close relationship, and of international migration as a means of achieving it, as early as 1960 when it only had 11 members. At a meeting held in London in that year, Commonwealth Prime Ministers encouraged the exchange of skills, experience and movement of professionals by asking Commonwealth governments, statutory bodies and private companies to allow their staff to undertake a period of public service abroad in order to facilitate skills transfer without prejudicing these people's employment prospects in their home countries.

Nine years later in 1969, Commonwealth Prime Ministers again discussed migration as an instrument of development. They requested the Commonwealth Secretary-General to examine the general principles relating to short and long term movement of people between their countries and to consider the possibility of exploring ways and means of studying migration on a continuing basis.

What is new in the context of migration today is the pace, volume and causes of global mobility. People move for a range of reasons – from the very pressing, i.e. fleeing conflict and war, to the most positive, imparting technical know-how and skills to others in response to specific requests or on a voluntary basis. Migration also has implications for local populations who can either benefit by allowing migrants to take up job opportunities in the low income services, or feel threatened by seeing their jobs taken away by those who are either more skilled or willing to accept lower wages for jobs that they still need.

What is also new today is that we have greater possibilities for gathering of information which allows us to systematically evaluate the impact of migration on labour markets, remittance flows and migration networks. This can help us to formulate effective policy to manage migration flows in a way that they make a greater contribution to global development.

A specific example of the value of migration is its ability to deal with shortages in skills in countries which are developed and abundant in natural resources. Although migrants fill this gap in the receiving country, they cause a shortage of skilled personnel in their home countries which are often less developed and vulnerable. These same developing countries have often invested heavily in fostering a small base of technical expertise for their key areas of development in the sectors of health, education and information technology. The remittances sent home by their nationals cannot substitute for the brain-drain caused by their dislocation.

The Commonwealth addressed this issue in 1990 when it developed a positive and yet balanced response to targeted recruitment campaigns which led to the loss of highly skilled personnel within countries of origin, specifically those in health and education. The Commonwealth was perhaps the first international organization to develop a Code of Practice for International Recruitment of Health Workers for its members. This was followed by the adoption in 2004 of the Commonwealth Protocol for the Recruitment of Teachers.

These instruments have received attention from regional organizations. They are also becoming a reference framework for non-Commonwealth countries confronted with similar challenges in preventing the large scale and unmanaged recruitment of highly skilled personnel from the smaller and most vulnerable countries, while at the same time protecting the rights of the individual migrant workers and the integrity of health and education systems of the countries of origin.

Through the adoption of the Protocols on the recruitment of teachers and health workers, the Commonwealth has introduced a model of good practice which can be examined for its value in other parts of the world. It can also be examined to determine if policies and programs from one setting can be effectively applied in different environments and sectors.

The Commonwealth today consists of 53 independent member countries, widely distributed over the globe and accounting for nearly a quarter of the population of the world. The Commonwealth is a cross-section of the world itself and as such it reflects global realities.

Within the Commonwealth, there are member states which are hosts to millions of refugees displaced by war and conflict in other third countries. There are also member states that are dealing with their internally displaced persons. Then, there are countries in the Commonwealth which are neither big nor rich in resources, but whose geographical location makes them an unenviable transit point for people who leave their homes for jobs and better economic opportunities abroad. There is also a need to maintain demographic and labour balance for economic growth within the developed countries of the Commonwealth.

Despite all these variations within our membership, and perhaps precisely because of them, the countries of the Commonwealth have an unparalleled experience that shows conclusively the value of widespread mutual cooperation. Across the Commonwealth men and women of many different races, faiths and national cultures have lived in peace and harmony and have worked together for the common good of all.

The Commonwealth's work on democracy and development contributes to peace and stability across all of its members. Such work ensures that migration for political and economic reasons is minimized by creating opportunities within the countries of origin for people to pursue happiness and realize their full potential at homes. More and more democracy brings more development, and the existence of both these conditions diminishes the pressure on outward migration from the developing world.

At their meeting in Malta in November 2005, Commonwealth Heads of Government underlined the need to deal with the challenges and opportunities that migration presents to countries of origin, destination and transit alike. In an interconnected world, growth and prosperity increasingly rely on the global flow of people, for travel, work and study. Heads in Malta agreed that when migration is managed effectively, it can have a substantial positive impact both for host and source countries and for migrants as well.

Commonwealth Heads of Government have urged better management of migration flows as a matter of priority. They have urged member countries to participate actively in the high-level dialogue to deliberate its multidimensional aspects. They have also reaffirmed their resolve to take measures to ensure respect for, and protection of, the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and members of their families, as enshrined in international law.

We in the Commonwealth recognize that the peace and prosperity of the free world cannot be assured while millions live in poverty. Our association therefore strives to build international consensus for improving the standards of life of people so that they do not need to leave their countries in search of livelihoods.

The development arm of the Commonwealth, known as the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation - or CFTC for short, has provided technical assistance to thousands of Commonwealth citizens – both men, women and young persons, and empowered them to start their own small businesses and train others in service delivery.

Commonwealth Governments which contribute to the CFTC have also benefited from this capacity building programme in building the skills of public servants, trainers and practitioners to become better catalysts of change, locally and abroad.

Effective development is promoted not just by aid and trade in goods and services, but also by expanding the exchange of experience and skills across countries and regions. Migration reflects the interdependence of the countries of the world as one of the most effective ways of promoting respect and understanding amongst communities and the elimination of causes of friction.

Some of the benefits of international migration: are exposure to globalization through study visas and short term work permits for skills' enhancement internationalization of production involving movement of labour and management; promotion of fundamental political economic and social values which are common to us all; increase in foreign direct investments and capital flows necessary for development; and foreign exchange earnings for cash starved countries in the form of workers' remittances.

These opportunities and openings provide an effective way of controlling and eliminating criminal activities in the form of terrorism, narcotics smuggling and human trafficking – which is probably the biggest challenge of globalization and international migration, and affects mostly women and children.

At their meeting in Malta last year, Commonwealth Heads of Government condemned human trafficking. They condemned the way which this affiliation deprives people of their human dignity, including their fundamental rights and freedoms. They acknowledged that the eradication of human trafficking requires a comprehensive approach which focuses on the prevention and protection of victims and the prosecution of culprits.

Heads in Malta urged member states to honour all obligations arising under international law and to support the full implementation of the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Heads of Government also affirmed the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing with regard to assistance afforded to refugees and to their host communities. By the conclusion of this high-level dialogue, we will have heard much about migration and its link with development. We will have also received messages from governments, civil society, the private sector, migrant associations, migration and development experts on how to realize the potential of migration for development. What we need to do next is to develop new approaches for deepening inter-state cooperation so as to promote the managed transfer of migrants from countries with adequate labour to those facing labour shortages. Our debate also needs to focus on how the countries of origin that provide this essential resource for the developed countries on a need basis benefit from human resource development, remittances and absorption of their skilled workers back in their home countries after they have returned at the expiry of their work permits.

An important area which should form part of the policy framework on immigration and development is capacity building. Migration can be managed properly if there is accurate information about labour markets. Both labour and immigration authorities need to be equipped with the machinery and technical skills to be able to provide accurate figures, when required, for planning and evaluation.

Gathering here at the UN we can make a historic contribution to this important matter, we must turn our useful dialogue into active cooperation and concrete action. In this endeavor, The Commonwealth of Nations is more than willing to share its experience and play its part. Let the work begin.

I thank you.