



STATEMENT

by H.E. Mr. Irakli Alasania

**Ambassador, Permanent representative of
Georgia**

Chairman of the Delegation of Georgia

**High Level Dialog on Migration and
Development**

**14-15 September 2006
New York**

Madam President,
Distinguished Colleagues,

The Georgian Delegation wishes to welcome the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development as a much needed step in putting the migration issues on the international agenda. With today's world of globalization and interdependency, to certain extent every country is implicated by different issues related to international mobility. Efficiently managed migration can be beneficiary for all – courtiers of origin, transit and destination, but there are many challenges and number of issues that have to be addressed urgently to avoid illegal migrations, trafficking, organized crime, terrorism, etc.

1. Introduction: International migration has significantly affected Georgia since independence.

- i. Experts estimate that more than 20% of the country's 1989 population—over 1 million people—have left Georgia since independence.
- ii. According to the UN Population Division, Georgia was amongst the top 20 countries worldwide for net emigration between 1995 and 2000.
- iii. The 1990s socio-economic realities in the country were the leading motivation forcing thousands to travel abroad for work and education. Our citizens have ventured to Russia, Europe, United States and Canada for skilled and unskilled job opportunities that offer higher incomes to better support their families at home. Conflicts in two separatist regions - Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia - were another torrential cause of migration. Ethnic cleansing and mass expulsion forced tens of thousands of our citizens to flee abroad.

2. The 2003 Rose Revolution sparked renewed hope and serious interest amongst all Georgians living abroad in our country's renewed prospects for the future, offering a window of opportunity to engage the diverse, far reaching population as partners in Georgia's development.

- a. We have already taken steps to begin the process—enabling dual citizenship, which almost 1,400 persons were granted in 2005 and also increasing the outreach of the president and top government officials.
- b. We hope to pursue a more comprehensive strategy, focusing on four main areas: engaging highly skilled migrants; maximizing remittances; leveraging and protecting economic migrants; and diasporas relations.

3. Engaging highly skilled migrants:

- a. Experts estimate that 40 to 55% of those leaving Georgia are highly educated, and believe this movement has resulted in a significant "brain drain."
 - b. However, as a result of rapid economic reform efforts, Georgia has become a more attractive place to invest and work, and ripe for reaching out to our highly skilled diasporas.
 - c. While we continue to encourage return, we are also looking to explore ways to engage our highly skilled diasporas where they are living by creating knowledge networks, engaging them in joint projects with host countries, and recruiting them to help promote investment in Georgia.
-

4. Maximizing Remittances:

- a. Remittances are an important source of revenue for many Georgian households and continue to grow as a percentage of GDP:
 - i. Official estimates show growth of 4.8% in 2003 to 6.3% in 2005.
 - ii. Most experts believe the share to be two to three times greater.
- b. We would like to help our citizens to maximize the flows of their private funds.
 - i. Our national bank is seeking to improve our understanding of their actual remittance volumes by expanding the activities measured (adding individual banking account transfers to the wire transfer operator activities already used).
 - This information will help our financial institutions to serve the growing market.
- c. We want to also bring new, innovative remittance sending tools and products to our migrants by learning from the successes of the experienced Latin American and Asian countries. And we want to work with host countries to empower our citizens to use the banking systems in their countries.

5. Leveraging labor migration:

- a. Georgia's working age population has shrunk due to labor migration, compounded by our slightly negative natural population growth rate. We need to:
 - i. Offer our citizens more legal opportunities to work abroad, in order to support their families, promote protection of their rights, and minimize possible discrimination and exploitation by negotiating bilateral trade agreements.
 - ii. Promote stronger entrepreneurial linkages
 - iii. Improve prospects of sustainable return through forging readmission agreements and targeting business development resources to this population.

6. Strengthen our diaspora relations:

- a. In addition to those who left recently, we believe there are roughly 8 million ethnic Georgians (not citizens), primarily concentrated in Turkey, Iran, Russia, Israel and other former Soviet republics.
- b. Since 2004, we have made great efforts to strengthen cultural ties with our diasporas around the world, hosting an annual cultural festival every November and, last May, our first diaspora conference.
- c. We hope to broaden these efforts with planned cultural centers in major cities in Europe, the post-Soviet space, and the USA.
 - i. We hope to learn from the successes of our European neighbors, e.g., Germany's Goethe Institute.

As I have mentioned above, for Georgia the issue of legal opportunities to work abroad is extremely important. At the same time, we are focusing on our national and international efforts to fight against trafficking in human beings. On its part the Georgian Government, with the support of international organizations, has launched very intensive programme against trafficking. To this end the national action plan has been adopted, according to which coordination centre was formed, telephone

hotlines were opened and the assistance fund and the shelters for victims were created. Since 2003 Georgia has become the party of international mechanisms on trafficking and the national legislation has been accordingly harmonized.

Madame President,
Distinguished colleagues,

We all are very well aware that national efforts alone are not enough. Support and cooperation with partners is essential. Investment and assistance will foster sustainable development, boost economies and protect human rights. We hope that our joint efforts and strong actions from the international community, United Nations and other international organizations will help to solve the problems. We believe that our forum will be able to come up with effective responses to those challenges.

Thank you
