



# IRELAND

**Statement**

by

**Ms. Mary Wallace T.D., Minister of State**

**at the**

**High-level Dialogue**

**on International Migration and Development**

**United Nations, New York**

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Madame President  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to represent Ireland today at a UN forum which specifically links international migration to the concept of development. I can say from Ireland's perspective that our preparation for this Dialogue has developed and improved our understanding of the synergies between these two areas and provided the impetus for increased contacts and action.

I want at the outset of my remarks to express my appreciation to my fellow countryman, Peter Sutherland, for the work undertaken by him as the Secretary General's Special Representative for this Dialogue.

I would like to associate myself with the statement made by Ms Tarja Filatov, Minister of Labour of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

#### **IRELAND AND THE MIGRATION CHALLENGE**

For Ireland, this theme naturally has a particular resonance. It is no exaggeration to say that migration, and in particular emigration, has been a defining element of Ireland's history and experience in the last two hundred years. Perhaps the greatest achievement of our economic policies of recent years is that for our young people migration now is a matter of choice rather than the necessity that it once was.

The dramatic growth of our economy in the last decade has resulted in Ireland experiencing the forces of migration in a completely new way.

My country has become a major destination for migrant workers with an estimated 9% of our working population being non-Irish. Recent preliminary 2006 census results indicated that in a population of about 4.2 million, the number of non-Irish nationals in the State is likely to be roughly 400,000 as compared to 222,000 in 2002.

We greatly value their contribution to Ireland's social and economic development as well as to our country's cultural diversity. We believe that this migration has benefited migrants themselves and their countries of origin.

This substantial increase in migration over a short period of time has posed challenges to the State and necessitated putting in place structures, legislation and systems to manage it.

#### **PLANNED NEW LEGISLATION**

A sound and transparent legislative framework to manage migration effectively is essential in any developed economy. Recently, the Government of Ireland

announced its proposals for new Immigration, Residence and Protection legislation which represents a radical overhaul of our immigration laws dating back to 1935. This legislation will provide the framework for orderly and managed legal migration into the State. It will set out, in a single code, comprehensive statutory procedures for the application of stated policies to the various stages of the immigration process.

As Ireland is an integral part of the European labour market of 200 million it is envisaged that the majority of our future skills and labour market needs will be met within this market.

We are also developing policies aimed at encouraging people with special qualifications, skills or entrepreneurial abilities to consider Ireland as a permanent destination. An important provision set out in the new proposed legislation is the status of "long-term resident", with entitlements and access to State services that will approximate to those of Irish citizens.

We have also plans to introduce a Green Card system for highly skilled and highly paid migrants from third countries. This will comprise a gateway to permanent residence after two years, immediate family reunification and unrestricted spousal access to employment.

## **INTEGRATION**

Madame President, integration strategies for legal migrants are another vital element in this whole area of people movement. Ireland is committed to enhancing the framework already in place for integration as well as ensuring that our migrant population is provided with full legal protection against exploitation whether in the workplace or elsewhere in society.

It is an understatement to say that the Ireland of 2006 has a diverse population. As I said earlier the rate of demographic change that has occurred in recent years has not been gradual. This rapidity has presented its own issues and Ireland continues to learn from others' experience. We are, however, coming to terms with the reality that Ireland is irrevocably a major multicultural society with over 160 nationalities living and working in the country.

The integration of newcomers into that new multicultural society is one of the most important social issues we face over the next few decades. Investment in social infrastructure will be critical to ensure that our migrants can participate not only in the economic aspects of society but also in its equally important social and cultural dimensions. We cannot afford simply to have a multicultural society and to leave it at that. We must ensure an intercultural society where the different cultures speak to each other, listen to each other and enrich each other in the context of a common aspiration to promote the welfare and values of a new Irish society. This is no easy task.

But we are heartened by the emergence within Europe of a common set of basic principles on integration - the fruit of much cooperation from all member States. The principles are based on strategies of cooperation rather than harmonisation - a pragmatic and wise approach in a very complex and differentiated social policy area where traditions, cultures and historical antecedents are, indeed, so different among the European partners.

We are also committed to enhancing a *whole of Government approach* to integration policy and recent policy initiatives have included plans to establish a central Unit within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to promote and co-ordinate social and organisation measures across the whole of Government, for acceptance of lawful migrants into Irish economic and social life. The Irish Government have also announced recently major funding initiatives in the area of integration.

### **MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Madame President, a key challenge for this High-level Dialogue is to identify appropriate ways and means to maximise the development benefits of international migration and to minimise its negative impacts.

In line with the partnership approach in managing migration flows between countries of origin, transit and destination advocated in the Rabat Declaration issued after the Euro African Ministerial Conference in July 2006, Ireland recognises that each country is primarily responsible for its own development but seeks to support its partner governments in the developing world in working to reduce poverty and to enable their people to meet their basic needs in health, education and sustainable livelihoods.

Ireland for its part is committed to reaching the UN ODA target of 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2012. This year our aid spending is at its highest ever level not only in terms of volume but also as a percentage of our GNP.

This Dialogue cannot ignore the negative impacts of migration on development. Migration - whether voluntary or forced - is now regarded as a key factor in increasing HIV and AIDS vulnerability. This is a risk for migrants and their families throughout the world. Ireland factored this into our development cooperation work in our HIV/AIDS strategy document of 2002.

We recognise the problems encountered where qualified professionals migrate to better-paid jobs in richer countries. The situation has become critical in sub-Saharan Africa where the health workforce has become seriously depleted. There is clearly a need to take concerted action to address the push and pull factors of health worker migration.

A priority of the Irish Government aid programme is to support our partner countries to improve management and working conditions of health workers so that they are encouraged to continue working in their own countries.

We also recognize the responsibility of richer countries to manage international recruitment so that skilled health workers are not encouraged to migrate from severely understaffed countries. The Government of Ireland is committed to best practice in recruitment and we welcome the European Union initiative to develop a Code of Conduct for ethical recruitment of health workers.

There is increasing recognition of the potential of migrants' remittances to contribute to economic development at household, local, national and regional levels. Ireland takes the view that work on the development potential of remittances must take place in a context where it is recognised that such remittances are private funds and are not substitutes for national development efforts, comprehensive development strategies, or official development aid. We have supported research and a network of on-line groups working on this issue in Central America.

#### **INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION**

Madame President, the importance of co-operation between States in the area of migration was stressed by the Secretary General when he presented his report to the General Assembly earlier this year on international migration and development. We all have a lot to learn from each other whether as countries of origin or of destination.

The Secretary General's Report suggested the establishment of a consultative forum which would offer Governments a venue to discuss issues related to international migration and development in a systematic and comprehensive way. Ireland supports the establishment of such a forum which would be non-bureaucratic, open-ended, state owned, consultative and non-decision making and would provide a framework for continued dialogue on challenges which face all our societies in the areas of migration and development.

Thank you, Madame President