



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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**ADDRESS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**
New York, 14 September 2006

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Migration is a courageous expression of an individual's will to overcome adversity and live a better life. Over the past decade, globalization has increased the number of people with the desire and capacity to move to other places.

This new era of mobility has created opportunities for societies throughout the world, as well as new challenges. It has also underscored the strong linkages between international migration and development.

Just a few years ago, many people did not think it possible to discuss migration at the United Nations. Governments, they said, would not dare to bring into the international arena a topic on which their citizens are so sensitive.

Yet here you are, and I sense that the mood is changing.

More and more people are excited about the ways in which migrants can help transform their adopted and their native countries. More and more people understand that governments can cooperate to create triple wins—for migrants, for their countries of origin, and for the societies that receive them.

No one can deny that international migration has negative aspects—trafficking, smuggling, social discontent—or that it often arises from poverty or political strife. But by being here today you show yourselves willing to tackle migration's challenges through dialogue and cooperation, rather than antagonism and isolation.

Your presence is also a tribute to the infectious energy and visionary pragmatism of my Special Representative, Peter Sutherland. His efforts have reassured and inspired everyone. I am deeply grateful to him.

As you begin your Dialogue, let me suggest three reasons why this is the right moment for it.

First, to put it simply, we are all in this together. More countries are now significantly involved in, and affected by, international migration than at any time in history. And they are no longer so easily divided into “countries of origin” and “countries of destination”. Many are now both. Countries that are very different in other respects face surprisingly similar migration challenges.

Second, the evidence on migration’s potential benefits is mounting. With their remittances reaching an estimated 167 billion dollars last year, the amount of money migrants from the developing world send back to their families exceeds the total of all international aid combined. And money is far from being the whole story. Migrants also use their skills and know-how to transfer technology, capital, and institutional knowledge. They inspire new ways of thinking about social and political issues. They form a dynamic human link between cultures, economies, and societies. As a result, we are better positioned than ever to confront the challenges of migration, and seize its opportunities.

Third, Governments are now beginning to see international migration through the prism of opportunity, rather than of fear. You are focused on magnifying the positive, mutually beneficial aspects of migration: on sharing your experiences, developing practical ideas, building partnerships.

For all these reasons—and also because people migrate not only between neighbouring countries or within regions, but from almost every corner of the world to every other—international migration today cries out for a global discussion.

Of course, it also stirs passionate debate. It can deprive countries of their best and brightest. It can divide families. It can generate social tensions. Sometimes criminals and terrorists exploit it. But the answers to many of these problems can be found through constructive engagement and debate.

That’s why I think the dialogue you are starting today should not end tomorrow. I am especially delighted that so many of you have embraced my proposal for a Global Forum on Migration and Development, and asked me to help set it up. And I am particularly grateful to the Government of Belgium for offering to host the first meeting next year.

I believe such a Forum can foster practical, evidence-based cooperation among governments. It can give you a chance to frame the issues in a way that allows you to move forward together, to discover areas where you agree, and to find ways of improving cooperation.

Clearly, there is no consensus on making international migration the subject of formal, norm-setting negotiations. There is little appetite for any norm-setting intergovernmental commission on migration. But, as I understand the thinking of the countries that back it, the Forum would be the opposite of that. It would be informal, voluntary, consultative. Above all, it would not make binding decisions.

The Forum would allow us to build relationships of trust, and to bring together the best ideas that different countries have developed: facilitating remittances; engaging diasporas; exploring new ways to reduce poverty; building educational partnerships; and so on.

Finally, it would show that Governments are now willing to address this complicated, volatile issue in a thoughtful, constructive fashion.

The Forum must be led and overseen by States. But the United Nations System, and I personally, stand ready to support it. I have decided to extend the mandate of my Special Representative on Migration beyond this Dialogue. I trust that the Special Representative will form an essential link between the proposed Forum and the entire United Nations system. Also, I stand ready to create a voluntary Trust Fund to help support the Forum's work, should you find this useful.

The United Nations is rising to the challenges of international migration in other ways as well. Last spring, I established the Global Migration Group, which brings together UN offices, Funds, Programmes, and Agencies engaged in various aspects of international migration and development, as well as the International Organization for Migration. You are no doubt familiar with the important work done by the constituent members of the Group -- from supporting labour migration to helping developing countries connect better with migrant communities abroad, from outstanding demographic analysis to research on remittances, from efforts to secure the rights of migrants to combatting trafficking in human beings. The Global Migration Group is working to ensure stronger coordination and greater coherence among its members.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This High-level Dialogue will succeed to the extent that it ushers in an era of sustained, thoughtful consideration of international migration and development issues. For far too long, migration policy has been based on hunches, anecdotes, and political expediency. It is now time to turn to the evidence, and use it to build a common understanding of how international migration can bring benefits to all.

Thank you very much.