



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement by

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at the High Level Dialogue
of the United Nations General Assembly
on International Migration

and Development

on

New York, 14th- 15th September, 2006

Check Against Delivery

Madam President, the Delegation of the Republic of Sierra Leone wishes to appreciate the report of the Secretary General which highlights the complexity, new dimension and paradigm shift on migration issues. We want to thank the organizers of this conference which we find to be *very* timely and extremely important. Please accept our gratitude Madam President, for the excellent manner in which you are conducting the affairs of this session. Madam President my delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished Minister of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Distinguished Delegates, international migration is an age old phenomenon and it supported the industrialization, modernization and demographic transition in Europe. Today, it is a paradox that strict visa requirements and xenophobia exist in many countries, when former 'destination areas' of the world are trying to industrialize and modernize.

At the same time, the poor nations, with underdeveloped productive sectors, are not prepared to hold their own within the framework of globalization due to conditions that perpetuate a vicious cycle of hindering factors to their development. Yet, it is in these same nations that most of the demographic growth dynamics shaping the world population are taking place. As the gap between rich and poor countries widen, the unbearable conditions in many less developed countries (LDCs) create the urge for migration to the developed north. 'Thus, unless the fortunes of the LDCs are significantly improved, the south-north migration phenomenon is likely to continue well into the foreseeable future; exacerbating existing development problems through its effects on 'brain drain' and 'brain wastage'.

Madam President, 40 percent of the population of Sierra Leone is under 15 years of age. Unemployment is widespread and the situation may be worse off for female youths. 'Their contributions are not remunerated enough even though they work for longer hours, taking care of the home, the aged and the sick, and undertaking farm work. With low educational and skills background, the discrimination of the formal job market relegates them to the informal sector. The realization that so many young people contemplate their escape has become a contentious issue for many societies.

From the perspective of the individual youth and his family, immigration has been seen as an escape from deprivation and poverty. Migrant remittances have been used to pay bills for immediate household consumption needs and, in a few instances, investments like small businesses or erection of family dwellings. But the volume of remittances from the Sierra Leonean Diaspora is certainly way below those reported in Asian countries or other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

At the receiving end, developed nations have gone through the demographic transition and their populations are aging with a relatively smaller workforce to upkeep a growing

economy and a lifestyle of high mass consumption. Therefore, young workers from abroad will continue to be required to fill the labour force gaps.

Rich countries also encourage immigrants that possess certain critical skills and nowhere else is this disturbing to the developing countries as in the medical field. In sub-Saharan Africa with 25 percent of the infectious disease burden of the world, only 1.3 percent of the world's healthcare practitioners are retained. In addition, 23 percent of doctors trained in Sub-Saharan Africa are now working in eight OECD countries. Thus, the net effect is that source nations lose the services of these skilled personnel, their productivity-and the returns on their investment in educating highly skilled workers.

Before the eruption of the rebel war, Sierra Leoneans were largely sedentary. The war introduced a more dynamic element into the migration scenario. Not only was there a massive displacement of the population internally, it led to refugeeism on a scale never before known. Its immediate effects included deepened poverty of low-income households, and livelihoods were disrupted and traditional coping mechanisms failed to meet the demand for social safety nets and shock absorbers. In the circumstances, immigration provided an escape valve to many Sierra Leoneans. Remittances proved to be most useful during the war period and supported the well being of displaced persons. The war was officially declared ended in early 2002.

Madam President, Sierra Leone now stands at the crossroads of a major phase of reconstruction and development. As the country implements its first ever PRSP, the amount of doctors, nurses, engineers, scientists, lecturers, and other professionals and skilled personnel required in the process are currently not available within the country. The limited numbers available continue to migrate to countries of the north in search of a better life.

To ameliorate this situation, government has put together a Senior Executive Service (SES) scheme that aims at attracting highly qualified manpower in all MDAs. In the interim, a stop gap transitional measure has been worked out with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) according to which Sierra Leonean nationals with relevant expertise in the Netherlands and UK are being encouraged to return and render services of up to 30 months without losing any status or benefits in their countries of residence. Similar initiatives are being developed and we call on the countries of the north especially, to participate in such initiatives. It is hoped that during their sojourn, the members of the Diaspora may become interested in returning and further contributing to the ensuing development work in the country.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, this is time for real action. Initiatives like these and regional consultative processes (RCPs) between sending and receiving countries are some of the best practices that an increasingly globalising world should

adopt; if only to make international migration a win-win game. In addition, unless the poverty situations in our countries are solved and the gap between rich and poor countries minimized, it will be difficult to make any meaningful impression on the global south-north migration trend. Meeting the Millennium Development Goals will also be difficult in many of our countries because even the requisite human resource base is eroded and development planning and plan implementation is a problem due to lack of capacity.

I thank you all for your attention.