



PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY
HE MRS FEKITAMOELOA 'UTOIKAMANU
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
AT THE
61ST UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
14-15 SEPTEMBER 2006

Please Check Against Delivery

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Madam President

May I take this opportunity to convey our appreciation for the convening of this historical High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. I also thank the Secretary General for his report which brings out a comprehensive review of the multidimensional aspects of international migration as well as initial thoughts on how to improve the governance of migration.

At the outset, Tonga also wishes to align itself with the statement made by HE Ms Mapisa-Nqakula, Minister of Home Affairs of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Pacific Island countries and my country in particular can date its foreign adventures as far back as the fourteenth century, before irregular migration was introduced into our vocabulary. We all have come a long way, and fast-tracking to 2006, Tonga has more than 100% of its population in Tonga residing in three overseas countries. Tonga is categorized as a "mature-migration remittance economy" and ranks as the second country most dependent on remittances as a percentage of GDP, which is currently at a level of 29%.

Our country experience has demonstrated in a small way, the important nexus between international migration and development. A recent World Bank Study included the results of empirical analysis on remittances to Tonga, and concluded that recipient household migration and remittance have positive impact on migrant sending countries, and improves income distribution; has positive impact on poverty alleviation; induces higher savings and stimulates business activities and results also in larger investments in education.

The established relationship between migration and its contribution to poverty alleviation and economic development, and the significant contribution of remittances to development is clear. However, the attention accorded to labour emigration and its positive impact on sending countries' development is perhaps quite limited.

Overseas development assistance in its entirety cannot address the problems associated with small island states. As the World Bank study highlighted, through improved and unrestricted but organized labour mobility can significantly contribute to a country's GDP and the overall global income.

Labour mobility is a potential vehicle for achieving our commitments to pro-poor strategies such as the Millennium Development Goals and other global commitments to achieving national sustainable development strategies.

At the same time, Tonga's demographic profile, particularly population growth has been stabilized by emigration. But the migration phenomenon has not been without costs, including social costs and human capital costs in terms of the brain drain.

Whilst stressing the importance of remittances as an important source of development financing, it is viewed as complementary and should not be seen as a substitute for Overseas Development Assistance. On the pressing issue of transactions costs for remittances Tonga also welcomes the support to address and promote conditions for cheaper, faster and safer transfer of remittances.

Tonga like many other Pacific Island countries is not only a sending state, but is also a transit and a receiving state. The challenge for all of us is therefore to design migration policy that is closest to what the Secretary General described in his report as the "best case" scenario.....where "it benefits the receiving country, the country of origin and migrants themselves." This will require commitment and political will, continuation and where absent enhancement of dialogue and to be followed by specific action not only at a bilateral but also at a regional and international level. These foras can also address other important issues such as irregular migration, social integration and access to services and the design of temporary movement of person's schemes to cover both skilled and unskilled workers.

Madame President

Tonga shares the concern for the exploitation of migrants through mechanisms such as trafficking, as well as migrant smuggling and has passed a Transnational Crimes Bill in 2005 which criminalizes under domestic laws, people trafficking, trafficking in children and people smuggling.

Tonga has also benefited from the support provided through its bilateral contacts, as well as regional organizations such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali); and the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC). There is potential for the expansion of the roles of these existing regional processes to deal with any new issues that may develop as the member states attempts to deal with the real and complex issues of migration and development.

Madame President

In conclusion, the High Level Dialogue is an important and vital step in raising awareness of the development dimension of international migration. We must keep the momentum and agree on the formation of an appropriate consultative forum as proposed by the Secretary General in his Report, to "maintain our focus on international migration issues, while signaling that international migration is a normal but crucial element in the development process."