

GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
CIVIL SOCIETY DAY

Migration and Development

Setting the Scene

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Dear colleagues, civil society companions, and friends:

I want to start by posing a question: why has 'Migration and Development' suddenly become such a central issue in the agenda of governments, international organizations, academics, and CSOs? Obviously we agree that it is very important – however for a long time that was not a popular view – especially with policy-makers. On the contrary, for many years politicians and officials in labour-importing countries have seen South-North migrants **as a problem** for national identity and social cohesion. More recently, migrants have even been portrayed as a **threat** to national security.

Yet now policy-makers are doing everything to emphasize the **potential benefits of international migration** for the countries of origin. In the past, northern governments ignored the call of labour-exporting states (for instance at the 1994 UN Population Conference in Cairo) to build political mechanisms for cooperation on migration.

Now there is flurry of international activity: notably

- the 2005 Report of the Global Commission on International Migration,
- the September 2006 United Nations High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development,
- and, of course, this first meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Brussels.

Why this new concern? In the first place, it reflects the fact that most recent growth in international migration has been in South-North movements. UN figures show that the world total of migrants (defined as people living outside their country of birth for over a year) was about 100 million in 1980, of which 47.7 million were in developed countries, compared with 52.1 million in developing countries.

By 2006, out of a global total of some 190 million migrants, 61 million had moved South - South, 53 million North -North, 14 million North -South and 62 million South -North. Obviously this is an over-simplification, since many countries cannot be promptly classified as either North (developed countries in UN parlance) or South (developing countries), but it is indicative of an important trend.

A more important reason for the sudden preoccupation with migration and development is an **emerging dilemma**.

On the one hand migration is seen as an **inevitable consequence of globalization** – that is: as the result of powerful economic and demographic factors in both South and North. On the other hand migrants from the South (especially low-skilled workers and asylum seekers) are perceived as a **problem**. If migration cannot be prevented, policy makers want to control movements and maximize benefits for the receiving countries. However, successful **migration management** cannot take place without the cooperation of the governments of countries of origin and transit. This will only be forthcoming if migration also appears to bring benefits for them. **Linking migration to development** seems to be a way of achieving this, and securing the cooperation of southern states.

That is why ideas on the positive effects of migration on development are now at the centre of policy initiatives at the national, regional and international levels. Migrants are being re-defined as '**heroes of development**'.

The key element in the new debate is the **growth of migrant remittances** : the flow of remittances from North to South has risen from US\$48 billion in 1995 to US\$199 billion in 2006. If unrecorded flows through informal channels are included, the figure would increase by 50 percent or more, making the size of remittances greater than foreign direct investment flows and more than twice the official aid for developing countries.

However, remittances are not the only benefit of migration that has suddenly been discovered. Recent reports also highlight other potential benefits of migration, especially the **role of migrant diasporas in national development** .

One puzzling thing about the new debate is that it has been overwhelmingly driven by northern governments and by international agencies. Southern states and civil society organizations have been brought in, but usually as partners for implementation, rather than as equals in setting principles and priorities. Of course, Northern governments, supranational bodies and international agencies have varying interests and perspectives on migration and development. They therefore hold frequent meetings on migration control and management. Southern states also have varying approaches, but have had little communication between themselves. They have had marginal roles in global fora, while migrant associations have usually had none at all.

This situation has to change if we are to achieve coherent approaches and coordination on migration and development. This Forum is an opportunity to push forward the necessary change in attitudes and practices.

All the parties involved in the migration and development nexus must have an equal voice in setting goals, deciding on strategies and implementing new approaches. This includes governments, international organizations, and CSOs. Above all it includes the associations of migrants and the representatives of affected communities in both sending and receiving countries.

This demands an ***inclusive*** and ***comprehensive approach*** on the migration and development nexus, whereby the perspectives of the South are fully integrated and voices of CSOs are fully heard in policy discussions.

Moreover, **South-South dialogue** is as important as the North-North dialogue that has been taking place for years – it is a precondition for a genuine **global dialogue**.

The debate on migration and development has been dominated by the vision of the North, which tends to reduce the key issues to **security, control of migratory flows, integration into the receiving society, and remittances** (understood as the main driver of development). The vision of the South has been largely absent in this debate. This has led to a **distortion of the very idea of development**. It has also led to **fragmented views and interpretations**, which hinder understanding of the real significance and challenges of **contemporary human mobility as a force for change**.

Northern-dominated research and policy debates on migration provide an **inadequate** basis for understanding the real scope and potential of the major changes taking place, and for designing and implementing new policy approaches.

Adopting a **comprehensive approach** means much more than focusing on the situation of immigration countries. It means developing a **holistic analysis**, which examines each specific phenomenon in:

- the **broad context of the overall dynamics of North -South relationships**,
- the interactions of the various **spatial levels** (local, regional, transnational etc.) and **societal areas** (economy, culture, politics, gender, environment, etc.).

In other words, migration cannot be understood adequately in isolation, but only as one integral aspect of the **complex problems and challenges of contemporary global capitalism**.

Adopting a **comprehensive approach** also means **questioning the dominant understanding of 'development'**, which implies that southern countries must necessarily repeat the past trajectories of today's rich countries through the 'invisible hand' of market-driven forces (as interpreted through celebratory neo-liberal theories). This means understanding the **reciprocity** and **close-linkage** of the historical processes of development of the North and underdevelopment of the South – in which the coercive mobilization of southern labour and other resources was a crucial pre-condition for capital accumulation and industrialization in the North.

A **comprehensive approach** questions whether conventional measures of development, especially simply as growth in GDP per capita, are really meaningful in societies which are being profoundly transformed through new forms of **asymmetrical integration** into the new world order.

It is important to acknowledge in this regard that **worldwide social inequalities**, instead of diminishing have **grown substantially**.

Listening to the voices of migrants and communities affected by migration may involve re-defining the goals and indicators of development to focus on human well-being, community and equality, rather than monetary wealth.

This also means **focusing on emergent actors and agents from civil society** operating at different levels (local, national, and transnational), that are gaining an increasing role in the reconfiguration of power relations in the new world order.

Adopting a **comprehensive approach** implies questioning the idea that migration can be made into a force for development just through appropriate forms of **migration management**, in situations where other factors for positive transformations of society are missing.

Governments that see emigration as a **safety-valve** to export unemployment and political dissent are in fact using migration not as an instrument of development but as an alternative to necessary strategic transformations. Experience shows clearly that migration and remittances cannot bring about sustained economic and social changes where fundamental changes are neglected – such as land reform, combating corruption, improving transport and communications, and improving health, education and welfare.

Where governments rely on '**remittance-led development**' the outcome is likely to be **structural dependence** on further emigration and remittances: a vicious circle of decline, rather than a virtuous circle of growth.

Finally, a **comprehensive approach** means recognising **differences** in needs, values and interests among governments, international agencies, CSOs (including migrants and their associations), the private sector and finding ways of **cooperating** to achieve **workable compromises**.

Corresponding with the government discussions programme, the civil society day discussions will cover eight main topics:

1. highly skilled migration;
2. circular migration;
3. diaspora/migrant organizations;
4. the migration and development nexus;
5. temporary labour migration of low skilled migrants;

6. remittances;
7. Future strategies and partnerships; and
8. policy coherence and coordination.

In covering these crucial topics, there are – in my opinion – at least six cross-cutting issues, which involve basic principles and compromises capable of opening an avenue to respond to the main objective of this Forum, namely ‘to enhance the positive impact of migration on development (and vice versa) by adopting a more consistent policy approach, identifying new instruments and best practices, exchanging know-how and experience about innovative tactics and methods and, finally, establishing cooperative links between the various actors involved’.

These issues are:

1. Should development be envisioned as a way of reducing migration? It is commonly assumed that economic development will lead to a reduction in ‘migration pressures’, and thus a reduction in migration. This implies that migration is somehow **abnormal** and a **bad** thing. Yet mobility is seen as absolutely normal and desirable for the elites of developed countries, and even for the highly-skilled personnel of less-developed countries. Elites are meant to have free movement, but the poor should stay at home. But history shows that development leads to more migration and that highly-developed societies are also highly mobile.

Development should not be understood just as higher per capita income but as the **creation of opportunities for human development**, or as Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen puts it ‘development as **freedom**’. This means that development will give people greater opportunities for migration – but for a **voluntary mobility** rather than flight from poverty and violence.

2. What kind of relationship should be established between migrant-receiving and sending countries? Closely linked to the aim of reducing ‘migration pressures’, is a concern to introduce ‘**migration management**’ to control immigration flows and maximize its benefits for the receiving countries. However, successful migration management requires the cooperation of the governments of countries of origin and

transit. This will only be forthcoming if migration also brings benefits for them. Linking migration to development seems to be a way of achieving this. Any positive linkage presupposes **reciprocity**.

For migrant-receiving countries reciprocity implies the **recognition** of

- their need for migrant workers (both highly -skilled and lower-skilled);
- the significant contributions migrants make to sustainable growth of their economies; and
- willingness to engage in bilateral and multilateral **cooperation agreements** aimed at reducing asymmetries between sending and destination countries.

The EU integration process is a good example of large -scale and enduring achievements based on a cooperation for development approach. Co -development (as promoted by France in the mid 90s) is another example of an attempt to advance in this direction, but with a much lower degree of commitment and an over -emphasis on return policies, leading to poor results. Spain and Italy have recently engaged in co - development initiatives with an emerging emphasis on cooperation at local and municipal levels.

Reciprocity for **transit and immigration countries in the South** (especially those which are also emigration countries), means replacing over -emphasis on migration control and security concerns with policies promoting **South-South cooperation and development** . For migrant-sending countries reciprocity means ceasing to see migrants as a panacea to compensate for inadequate economic investment and infrastructure. States need to listen to the voices of migrants and their communities and take steps to help them become **active partners** in development.

3. Is the respect of labour and human rights of migrants in receiving countries a key issue for a migration and development agenda? Despite the demand for migrant workers, in most receiving countries there are limited opportunities for legal entry and settlement. The *de facto* acceptance of **large-scale irregular migration and employment**, exposes migrants (especially low -skilled workers and asylum seekers) to unbearable degrees of labour exploitation, social discrimination and high vulnerability, to

the point of putting their lives at risk. Even some forms of legal migration, such as short-term guestworker programs, are filled with abuse.

Vulnerability and high levels of labour exploitation are the other side of the coin of asymmetrical relationships between receiving and sending countries. Without the **firm commitment** of receiving countries to fully respect labour and human rights of migrants, there is no solid ground for building any possible coherent agenda on migration and development.

4. Is there a need for sending countries to promote an alternative development model? International migration could stimulate development through remittances, brain circulation, investments, and the contributions of transnational communities, but it should not be pursued as the **main** strategy for development. Migration can promote short-term socioeconomic 'stability' and contribute to limited survival opportunities, but cannot remove **structural constraints** to sustainable development. There is a need for broadly-based long-term approaches that link the potential benefits of migration with more general strategies to reduce inequality and to improve economic infrastructure, social welfare and political governance.

The state in countries of origin should play a **pro-active role** in pursuing sustainable development and enhancing the creation and strengthening of institutions conducive to development, taking into consideration the broad context of the overall dynamics of North-South relationships.

5. Is successful incorporation into the receiving society contradictory with diasporas' contribution to the country of origin's development process? There is compelling empirical evidence that upward incorporation of diasporas in destination countries **does not prevent** the maintenance of **fruitful transnational links** with the countries of origin. Moreover, **migrant empowerment** is crucial in working towards sustainable development in countries of origin. Empowerment means creating conditions that enable migrants to participate equally in economic, social and political life both in their countries of origin and destination. Migrant associations play an essential part in such processes. States should adopt an inclusive and transparent approach in ensuring diverse representation in dialogues and consultations.

Recognition in sending countries of **full citizen rights** for nationals abroad (as has been the trend in most migrant -sending countries) and accepting **dual nationality** and recognizing the benefits of acquiring citizenship in receiving countries, are coherent public policies for fostering co operation among governments and opening channels of collaboration among CSOs.

6. Can circularity be envisioned as an option for promoting a positive nexus between migration and development? European 'guestworker' recruitment of the 1960s was based on the idea that carefully -managed temporary admission of workers would prevent permanent settlement. This approach was thought to match the interests of all main players: sending country government, receiving country governments and employers, and the migrants themselves. In fact, migrants' interest and behaviour changed in the migratory process, and temporary workers became permanent immigrants, leading to profound changes in European societies. Since then, new immigration countries in Asia and the Gulf have tried to enforce strict controls on migrant workers to prevent settlement. Other countries have relied on irregular workers, who lacked legal rights and had little chance of permanent stay.

Today 'circular migration' is seen as a solution, because it is said to serve the interests of all the main players. Most migrant workers plan to return home when they first migrate. Many do return, but some change their intentions over time, and want to establish families and become permanent settlers. This right should be recognized. Circular migration schemes should be based on incentives, not compulsion, and must recognize human rights, especially the right to live with one's family. Return to countries of origin may only be realistic where major changes – such as land reform, reduction of corruption and improvements in economic infrastructure – give a real chance of acceptable livelihoods.

Circular migration on its own will not bring about such changes. It has to be closely coordinated with a range of other international and national strategies connected with, cooperation for development, fair trade, investment, governance and conflict prevention.

To conclude these introductory remarks, I want to express my recognition to the Belgian government for opening this space and for giving voice to civil society actors on the issue of migration and development, regardless that most governments wanted to maintain the 'governments only' character of the Global Forum.

I also want to express my recognition and gratitude to the King Baudouin Foundation for their hospitality and their excellent job in organizing the civil society day.

My recognition also goes to the other external and financial contributors to the Forum

Finally, I sincerely hope that the conclusions and recommendations derived from our Forum, the civil society days' Forum, lead to a better understanding of the complex nexus between migration and development, and can also serve as an initial step in the construction of a fruitful, constructive and inclusive dialogue among CSOs, governments and international agencies.