

*Mission Permanente
du Royaume du Maroc
Genève*



البعثة الدائمة
للمملكة المغربية
جنيف

Statement by Mr. Mohammed BENJABER

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On behalf of the African Group

103rd session of IOM Executive Committee

7-8 June 2006

In recent years, migration has been making its way steadily towards the top of international affairs agenda and now calls for the urgent attention of governments, whatever the nature of their involvement, approach or interest in the management of migratory processes.

Given that the number of migrants is rising and that this trend is likely to persist in the foreseeable future, there is a need for a comprehensive and balanced approach to migration taking into account migration realities and trends as well as linkages between migration and other key economic, social, political and humanitarian issues.

The High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, to be held in New York, on 14 and 15 September 2006, as the first ever high-level UN event entirely devoted to migration and development, can offer a unique opportunity for States not only to share best practices on migration management, but also to foster cooperation on key migration issues.

The UNGA resolution A/RES/60/227 adopted last year, explicitly requested the International Organization for Migration, to contribute to the preparation of, and participate in, the High-level Dialogue. This request is a positive development that clearly shows that IOM is more and more recognized as a key player in dealing with Multilateral Migration Issues.

In addition to participating in a number of preparatory initiatives anticipated in the GA Resolution, IOM also organized, together with partners both inside and outside the UN system, several other events in order to contribute to the success of the HLD.

IOM also submitted last april a set of key messages and suggested concrete outcomes for the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The African Group notes that this initiative aimed at contributing to the advancement of a more coherent approach to migration policies and a better balanced understanding of migration and migrants. In this regard, the Group would like to highlight the implications of three key messages on strengthening the ties between IOM and its African Membership:

1. Migration needs to be integrated into development policy and planning:

As pertinently pointed out by IOM, even though there is a growing recognition that migration impact analyses should figure in development project planning, inadequate research and patchy data inhibit movement from theory to action. The lack of reliable data is certainly one of the major issues preventing many african states from developping coherent Migration Policies and further IOM support in this area is most welcome. The need for complete, independent and relevant information that could be used for comparative analyses and research was explicitly recognized by the ACP Ministers in the Brussels Declaration on Asylum, Migration and Mobility and the LDCs Ministers in the Cotonou Declaration on Migrants' Remittances. IOM can contribute, inter alia, to the creation of the ACP Virtual Observatory for Migration and the International Migrant Remittances Observatory for LDCs.

IOM call for further research on the link between migration and development is also pertinent. We are looking forward to the results of IOM/World Bank joined study about “Development-Friendly” Migration Policies that would notably examine and review data on current migration policies relevant to development and poverty reduction in countries of origin. I also heard yesterday about a new report jointly sponsored by IOM and The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration that sheds light on the role of migrants’ remittances in development. It might be interesting to hear Professor Bimal Ghosh presenting the major findings of the report on a future occasion. We also appreciate IOM willingness to assist Governments in mainstreaming migration into the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), as well as the national development plans, and hope that many African Member States will soon benefit from it.

2. Countries need migration policies and the internal capacity to develop them:

The main element of this message is IOM call upon the HLD to encourage international organizations, individually and in the framework of the GMG, to continue supporting governmental capacity building. IOM has been quite successfully assisting many States in drafting new legislation, reviewing and upgrading their national policies, legal frameworks and migration management structures, improving border management systems and travel documents, and training specialized staff, especially law enforcement officials, on the topics of human rights, assistance and protection for victims of trafficking and vulnerable migrants, and detection and interception of traffickers and smugglers. As the needs of the African Member States in this regard are huge and steadily increasing, the African Group calls upon IOM to consider opening capacity building centers in Africa. Delocalization has proved to be worth it as regards administrative functions and may well be extended to operational activities if the objective is to be closer to the field of action at the best conditions. We are looking forward to a concrete proposal of the Administration on this subject during our next consultations about the 2007 programme and budget.

3. The development potential of diasporas needs to be explored and enhanced:

Strengthening and enhancing the involvement of the African Diaspora in the development process is a key aspect in fostering the migration-development nexus and has been identified in NEPAD as a sectoral priority within its Human Resource Development Initiative. Furthermore, the 2004-2007 Plan of Action of the African Union adopted by the Executive Council at its 4th Ordinary Session places the Diaspora at the centre of the priorities of the AU.

Although remittances are, above all, private funds and are not substitutes for national development efforts or official development aid, they have the potential to contribute significantly to economic development at household, local, national and regional levels. Among other benefits, remittances provide a source of foreign exchange, enabling recipient countries to acquire vital imports and/or pay off external debts, and increase the recipient country’s creditworthiness. At the household level, remittances can help reduce the poverty of recipients, supplement their income and provide them with funds that can be used for consumption, savings, or investment in areas relating to development.

The African Group welcomes IOM call for the reduction of the cost of remittances. The Organization has itself some valuable experience it can share with others at the HLD but also extends to other locations, in particular to Africa. One good example is IOM temporary migrant worker program in Canada, where migrant workers’ remittances are bundled and sent in a single transfer through a Canadian bank to a collective account in IOM’s name at a bank in Guatemala, with the cost of the transaction divided among the workers.

IOM experience in enhancing the development impact of remittances through incentives is also needed in Africa. IOM pilot project for the construction of affordable housing for Guatemalan migrants in their place of origin and IOM/UNDP joined initiative for microcredit in rural Tajikistan are concrete examples of what might be done in this area, thus responding to the call of the Cotonou Ministerial Conference of the Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) to seek lasting solutions for the enhancement of the impact of remittances on development.

International migration may also result in the outflow of individuals with considerable educational attainment. This brain drain is of great concern to African countries since essential skills for development in the region have been lost endangering the capacity to meet development challenges. Many parts of the African continent are currently affected by a shortage of qualified human resources, created in part by the large-scale departure of professionals and university graduates.

Qualified migrants can be encouraged to return to their countries of origin on a voluntary basis – either temporarily, permanently or virtually – to transfer knowledge, skills and technology. IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) programmes makes it possible for African professionals in Europe and North America to return temporarily to their home countries to provide short-term assistance and expertise in fields such as health, education, engineering, agriculture and finance. MIDA programmes have achieved some substantive results but are, however, seriously hampered by the lack of funding. As we pointed out in our statement on the revision of the programme and the budget for 2006, during the last SCBF, MIDA only attracts some 1.5 million USD, whilst several proposals for projects are still pending.

Last, but not least, addressing the root causes of migration is fundamental in any comprehensive approach to migration management and can directly link migration and development strategies. To stabilize the population in areas of high migration pressure, realistic opportunities must be available at home to offset the pull factor of opportunities abroad, providing viable alternatives to migration through irregular and often dangerous channels.

IOM does have pilot programmes, two of them being in Morocco and Tunisia, focusing on targeted community development activities in developing regions with high levels of unemployment and outbound migration, and aiming at improving local living conditions, building local capacity for the establishment of micro-enterprises, and providing vocational counseling and training courses to unemployed persons.

Although not a substitute for more comprehensive development efforts, targeted economic and community development programmes have tangible value-added and present concrete opportunities to link development and migration management goals. The African Group encourages IOM to pursue the implementation of such programmes in other African countries.

In Conclusion, Mr President, the African Group wishes to convey its deepest appreciation of IOM's efforts to adapt the Organization to the specific needs of its developing membership. We hope that this statement will provide some additional guidance to the Administration about the African priorities and that these latter will soon be duly reflected in IOM action.