



IOM International Organization for Migration

– CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –

WILLIAM LACY SWING
Director General, International Organization for Migration

Migration and Development Series Seminar: “Peacebuilding: The Role of Diasporas”

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Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be invited to take part in this seminar. I am eager to hear your views on the role of diaspora in peacebuilding processes. I understand that you have now had a day and half of very good discussions, and I look forward to the proceedings of the earlier sessions.

This seminar, as many of you will know, is a series developed in partnership with UNITAR and UNFPA, funded by the MacArthur Foundation to which we are very grateful. The series is geared towards information sharing and advancing knowledge on migration issues relevant to debates in the United Nations. I am pleased that this week’s seminar appears to have met that objective. In reviewing the agenda, I counted participants of no fewer than 15 different UN departments and agencies; NGOs; think tanks, and academic institutions. This broad participation is in itself testimony to the cross-cutting nature of both migration and peacebuilding issues that demand truly comprehensive multi-agency and multi-sectoral approaches.

I would like to begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Carlos Lopes, Executive Director of UNITAR, along with his staff, and all those present from UNFPA, the MacArthur Foundation, and my IOM colleagues, for organizing this event.

Let me also express gratitude to the Permanent Representative of Chile, HE Ambassador Heraldo Munoz, Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his statement yesterday, along with the other distinguished presenters.

Introduction

I would like to begin by highlighting some broad linkages between our core subjects ---- peacebuilding on the one hand; and the diaspora, or broader still, migration, on the other. Peacebuilding is a term that conjures up different hinges to different people – the actors involved, their activities, and where in the spectrum of post-conflict assistance peacebuilding fits in.

Peacebuilding involves an entire range of actors and activities with a single aim – establishment of sustainable conditions of peace by augmenting national capacities necessary to generate a foundation for long-term development.

On a personal note simply to make a point - I recall that my final presentations here at UN headquarters - just before the end of my mandate as the Chief of Mission for MONUC -, was entitled "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding." In that presentation, I noted that peacebuilding, which should be the strongest link in the chain of international assistance tends to be the weakest – in large part because of the short-term nature of international commitments to peace processes.

It is during the peacebuilding phase --- when fledgling state institutions are being stood up and elections being organized -- that public expectations rise steadily, commensurate with international attention and support. Once good elections are held, popular hope and anticipation soar. Traditionally, and often tragically, however elections also tend to trigger a sharp decline in international support and attention. The result --- in the words of the Secretary-General taken from his forthcoming Report on peacebuilding --- is that, "[p]ersistent unmet needs may translate into new sources of instability and contribute to conflict relapse."

This is why so many of us were so pleased when the Peacebuilding Commission was established. And one's hopes have not been dashed. The Commission is making good progress with the initial countries on the PBC's agenda (Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and the Central African Republic) -- and has great potential to expand its assistance. Among my immediate priorities after assuming my mandate, was to seek IOM membership in the Sierra Leone country-specific meeting, of which we are now a member.

IOM --- the global migration agency --- is probably not the first Organization that comes to mind when thinking about the alphabet soup of peacebuilding actors. But consider for a moment, that IOM has implemented SSR and DDR programmes in more 35 post-conflict countries on all five continents over the past two decades from Cambodia to Croatia; and from Cote d'Ivoire to Colombia --- where I am headed later this week to attend an International DDR Congress in Cartagena. As the Commission expands its agenda, we hope to join new configurations in countries where IOM has an active presence.

Turning to the other broad topic you have discussed --- diaspora --- I am pleased that the Secretary-General acknowledges in his draft Report on peacebuilding, the role of diaspora as an "important resource of knowledge and expertise..." This has certainly been IOM's experience over the past several decades.

We cannot address the role of the diaspora in peacebuilding in isolation from geopolitics. In sheer numbers, the Third Millennium looks destined to be the age of the greatest human mobility in recorded history. Consider, for example:

- Were today's 200 million migrants to come together to form a single nation, they would be one of the world's five most populous nations.
- If pooled together, migrants' annual remittances (money sent back to countries of origin) of more than US\$ 300 billion, would give the migrant community a GDP

larger than any number of developed countries, including the country that hosts IOM's headquarters, Switzerland.

- These remittances from migrants -- who still constitute only three percent of the world's population -- are twice as large as official development aid and nearly two-thirds that of total foreign direct investment in developing countries.

While the communications revolution may have launched today's movement of people, it is current demographic and economic trends that will assure a continuing massive flow of people across borders in an ever more complex migration picture:

- Demographically, most industrialized nations are characterized by aging populations and dramatically declining birth-rates, amounting to longer-term negative population growth.
- Combine this trend with the persistent North-South economic divide and the results are -- a North increasingly in need of additional labour, and a South with an ever larger excess of labour -- not all of which can be absorbed in South-South migration -- even though South-South migration is almost as large as that of South-North migration.

This is all simply to say that migration, and in particular, the political and economic relevance of diaspora communities, is with us for the indefinite future in an unprecedented manner and will continue to have a wide ranging global impact.

There are two points from these considerations that strike me as relevant to earlier discussions today, and I hope will capture, some of the conclusions.

I. Facilitating Diaspora Involvement in Peacebuilding

First, greater efforts need to be directed at facilitating diaspora contributions to peacebuilding in the countries of origin. (*This is a message I shared yesterday at the European Ministerial Conference on migration in Prague, hosted by the Czech EU Presidency - - a meeting that also examined the role of diaspora as a force for development*).

An institutional framework is taking shape to support a more formal role for diaspora communities in peacebuilding processes; the framework would include outcomes and recommendations from the first ever High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development held at the UN General Assembly in September 2006; the High Level Dialogue underscored the potential role of diasporas as agents for change.

Policy tends to follow practice, and there are a number of practical examples over several years of constructive diaspora engagement in post-conflict peacebuilding. In this regard, IOM implemented projects in four key areas, which my colleagues have no doubt discussed in greater detail during earlier sessions:

1. Return of qualified nationals, whose qualifications and expertise gained abroad can provide much needed support at home in new or transitioning institutions (and offset “braindrain”). IOM has several examples:
 - In Afghanistan, IOM partnered with the Afghan civil service to recruit 846 members of the diaspora living in 32 countries, and return them to work in positions in Government that could not be filled locally.
 - In Sudan, IOM recruited more than 1,000 Sudanese teachers, doctors and other professionals from IDP and diaspora communities and facilitated their return to assist in reconstruction efforts.
 - In Somalia, a similar initiative is about to start in partnership with UNDP, which foresees 330 members of the Somali diaspora returning to their country to work in government institutions.

It is essential to ensure early, appropriate assistance and thorough vetting, so as to make certain that the most qualified and appropriate recruits are selected. In this regard, I believe it will be important to consider the inclusion of diaspora in the on-going discussion on expert rosters and rapidly deployable international capacities.

2. Electoral assistance to facilitate the participation of diaspora communities and other displaced persons in voting abroad in electoral processes in their respective countries.
 - Since 1996, IOM has assisted hundreds of thousands of verified eligible nationals in more than 74 different countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, East Timor, Ecuador and Bosnia-Herzegovina, to exercise the right to vote, in a combination of mail and in person operations.
3. Reparations and property claims. IOM provides technical advice to Governments on establishing land and property compensation schemes to serve victim populations inside and outside post-conflict countries. Many of the more than 100 armed conflicts since World War II have been waged over land.
 - Iraq: IOM is working closely with the Commission for the Resolution of Real Property Disputes (CRRPD) to help work-through a heavy caseload in a consistent, efficient and transparent manner.
 - Sierra Leone: IOM is providing technical assistance and capacity building to the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), the government agency appointed to implement the national reparations programme for victims of the civil war. We are pleased to carry-out this important work with the UN Peacebuilding Fund, which has generously provided US\$ 3 million for the programme.

4. Facilitated relations between diasporas and their countries of origin to generate organized funding via remittances, encourage private sector investment, and help influence reconciliation processes. As we know, migrant remittances are private financial flows; however, some governments have worked closely with their diaspora communities to mobilize or maximize remittances for the benefit of development projects back home as well.
 - Mexico: Mexicans resident in the United States have formed “Hometown Associations” to launch development projects in their communities of origin.
 - Paraguay: The Government has devised a transfer arrangement that has lowered diaspora remittance transfer costs to only one percent.

In 2009, formal migrant remittances are expected to exceed US\$ 300 billion, with more than US\$ 200 billion of that amount received by developing countries. Of concern of course, is a World Bank forecast that remittances will fall as much as nine percent in 2009 --- a prediction that does not bode well for developing countries that cannot afford stimulus packages.

It is for this reason that World Bank President, Robert B. Zoellick has called on developed countries to dedicate 0.7% of their economic stimulus packages to a “Vulnerability Fund” for those developing countries hardest hit by the global economic recession. Those countries will inevitably include those in the midst of peacebuilding transitions, which will demand that all peacebuilding actors work with an even greater sense of urgency, and consider new innovative means to bolster peace.

Therefore origin and destination countries need to harness the energy, enthusiasm, expertise and resources of migrant communities at home and abroad for peacebuilding and sustainable development.

II. Need for unprecedented cooperation

My third and much briefer final point is that unprecedented cooperation is required to make peacebuilding succeed, particularly in the current global environment.

No single organization, agency or single approach can be applied in isolation to address effectively complex issues such as peacebuilding and migration. If we are going to succeed in effectively building national capacities we must work together in partnership. I know for example, that despite being the only international organization whose mandate is exclusively migration – IOM cannot, should not and does not try to manage migration alone.

One of my top priorities is to strengthen and to increase our partnerships – with Member States, with UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNODC, ILO, OCHA, DPKO, DPA, UNDP, UNITAR, UNFPA and many others, as well as with NGOs, academia, and think tanks.

This is a point I have made at both Headquarters and to each of our Chief of Missions in more than 130 countries and 430 IOM offices around the globe.

Let me conclude with my solemn pledge that IOM stands ready to support the United Nations peacebuilding agenda. IOM is eager to share its experience in building national capacities and involving diaspora communities in their countries peacebuilding processes.