

Opening statement by the Secretary General at the Global Forum on Migration and Development, Ports Louis, Mauritius 21 November 2012

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GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT (GFMD) 2012 SUMMIT MEETING ON

“Migration and Development: Common Ground and Partnerships in Action”

The Swami Vivekananda International Convention Center (SVICC)

Pailles, Port Louis, Mauritius,

21 November 2012

Your Excellency The Rt. Hon. Navin Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius,
Your Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Your Excellencies, Dear Participants,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for me an honour to address the Sixth Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). It is the first time that this Forum is hosted by an African country. I would like to commend the Government and people of Mauritius, and in particular His Excellency Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam for bringing us all here in the warm and pleasant shores of Mauritius. Mauritius is a much valued member of the ACP family of nations and a leading example of what prudent economic management and wise leadership could achieve in lifting a nation out of poverty and accelerating the process of economic transformation.

Your Excellencies, in our rapidly globalizing world, migration has become an increasingly salient issue in domestic policy as well as international political relations. From being seen as a ‘problem’, the discourse on migration is shifting towards better appreciation of its benefits as well as challenges.

According to one study, in 2011, global remittances totaled US\$370 billion, of which 80% was from developing countries Diasporas. The recent lessons of world development have also shown that Diaspora communities are often crucial as bridgeheads for the mobilization of international capital for investments. The Chinese Diaspora in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia, for example, played an important role in the remarkable economic reawakening of China in recent times. The same may be said of the Indian Diaspora communities from Malaysia, Europe and North America.

Mr. Chairman, lest we forget, migration these days is not just a one-way street from developing countries to the advanced countries. There are indications that, with the ongoing financial crisis in Southern Europe, many Portuguese are migrating to the Lusophone countries of Brazil, Angola and Mozambique. Another noteworthy trend is that of South-South migration. The ACP Observatory on Migration has recently conducted four studies on Diaspora communities from Nigeria, Kenya, Lesotho and Haiti. The studies reveal that intra-regional mobility is an increasing trend among ACP countries. According to UN population data, in 2010 81% of African migrants resided in another African country, being the worldwide leader in South-South migration. In Asia, this figure attained 75%, in Latin America and the Caribbean 60% and in Oceania 15%.

Other more recent phenomena include Africans migrating to China and Latin America and the Caribbean, but also Asians migrating to Latin America and the Caribbean as well as South Americans migrating to Africa. Indeed, post-colonial, linguistic and cultural ties have always been a key element of extra-regional mobility. Economic development in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) has also served as a source of attraction for migrants. Migration restrictions in the advanced industrial economies have provided further impetus to these new trends.

Ladies and Gentlemen, speaking for the ACP Group that I represent, I have to say that human mobility is and has been a key livelihood approach for millions of our Member States' nationals. The importance of this gathering cannot be over-emphasized. While I have touched on the positive aspects of migration, we would be remiss to claim that it is devoid of its challenges. There is, in the first place, the reality of illegal migration, which often involves young men and women endangering their lives through long treks across the Sahara and getting on dilapidated boats in hazardous seas in an attempt to reach the proverbial 'greener pastures'.

We have heard pitiful stories of young Somali and Eritrean migrants being kidnapped by nomads in the Arabian Desert and their vital organs being pulled out of them and their dead bodies buried in shallow graves.

As we reflect on these issues we also have to address our minds to the developmental imperative of creating conditions that offer young people more hope and prospects in their own home countries. More than two thirds of Africa's population consists of young people under 25 years of age. In the near future there will be a quantum leap in the demand for jobs, for health, housing and education services. Some of these young people also happen to be better educated and more connected to the world than their parents, with greater expectations in terms of professional fulfilment and their concept of the Good Life than what is on offer locally.

Another important trend relates to the impact of political conflicts and ecological catastrophes on migratory patterns. For much of the last two decades violent conflicts have afflicted several African countries, leading to massive displacements of populations. Environmental factors, such as droughts, desertification, floods and sea level rise, also influence the decision of people to migrate. There are also the poor and destitute who simply do not have the capacity to migrate, apart from those migrants who settle in foreign city slums under very hazardous conditions.

Your Excellencies, one of the paradoxes of our era is that the liberalisation of world markets and capital is taking place against the backdrop of more restrictions on the movement of people. In his famous book, the Economic Consequences of the Peace, written in 1919, the young John Maynard Keynes lamented the idyllic world that was lost when the dark clouds of war overtook Europe in 1914:

"The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth, in such quantity as he might see fit..."

He could secure forthwith, if he wished it, cheap and comfortable means of transit to any country or climate without passport or other formality, could despatch his servant to the neighbouring office of a bank for such supply of the precious metals as might seem convenient, and could then proceed abroad to foreign quarters, without knowledge of their religion, language, or customs....he regarded this state of affairs as normal, certain, and permanent, except in the direction of further improvement, and any deviation from it as aberrant, scandalous, and avoidable."

Ladies and Gentlemen, I find it rather illogical that we strive to promote free trade and the free movement of ideas while at the same time most countries continue to place such heavy restrictions on the movement of people -- especially movement of people from young and vigorous societies to those that are aging and declining in demographic terms.

I believe that migration can be mutually beneficial when properly harnessed and properly managed. But we have to be mindful of the tension it can generate in local communities where people feel that their way of life is being threatened by the sudden appearance of strangers in their midst. I hope that our deliberations will help to take this agenda forward.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to recount a rather tragic story. It is the story of two Guinean stowaway children who perished inside the cargo hold of the defunct Sabena airlines Airbus A330 from Conakry to Brussels in July 1999. Yaguine Koïta, age 15, and Fodé Tounkara, age 14, were realistic enough to know that they may not make it alive. They took the precaution of leaving a note which was found on their cold, lifeless bodies. I read:

"Excellencies...members and officials of Europe, we have the honorable pleasure and the great confidence in you to write this letter to speak to you about the objective of our journey and the suffering of us, the children and young people of Africa.

But first of all, we present to you life's most delicious, charming and respected greetings. To this effect, be our support and

our assistance. You are for us, in Africa, those to whom it is necessary to request relief. We implore you, for the love of your continent, for the feeling that you have towards your people and especially for the affinity and love that you have for your children whom you love for a lifetime.

Therefore, if you see that we have sacrificed ourselves and risked our lives, this is because we suffer too much in Africa and that we need you to fight against poverty and to put an end to the war in Africa. Nevertheless, we want to learn, and we ask you to help us in Africa learn to be like you."

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is just one story of two unlucky African children. There are literally thousands of such stories in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East; stories of stowaways sort in ships, railways and across the treacherous sand dunes of the Sahara.

I hope that, in our deliberations in this very important forum, we would forever keep in our minds the fact that migrants are not abstract and faceless entities. Rather, they are real people with real fears, hopes and dreams.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas
ACP Secretary General

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