

SIXTIETH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

14TH AND 15TH SEPTEMBER 2006.

Mr Secretary General, migration poses one of the key challenges of the twenty-first century with global economic and social repercussions which affect the countries from which migrants emigrate, the countries to which they migrate and, of course, the migrants themselves. Malta is therefore committed to participating whole-heartedly in this High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.

We congratulate your Special Representative, Mr Peter Sutherland, on the quality and comprehensiveness of the report on International Migration and Development. This highlights vividly the clear linkages which exist between migration and development, as well as the opportunities for co-development both in the countries of origin and of destination. Labour migration has indeed become crucial for the global economy and is both a product and a producer of growing inter-dependence.

Malta itself faced the opportunities and challenges of migration in the middle decades of the last century. It benefited directly from the economic and social advantages that flowed from such migration not only in easing unemployment in my own country, but also from the inflow of sums of money sent back. The Maltese diaspora as a result of those two or three decades of emigration is now to be found in countries as far afield as Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere, contributing positively-culturally, economically and socially – to the life of their country of adoption.

Malta is understandably proud of the contribution it has made to those countries of destination to which its migrants went – legally and in a controlled and well-managed manner. Today, however, Malta is confronted by the new and often tragic phenomenon of illegal immigration. The report before us rightly emphasises that migration should occur in a safe, legal and fair

manner. But it devotes only a limited section to the pressing issue of illegal immigration.

For Malta – one of the most densely populated countries in the world, placed at the southern most tip of Europe and at the cross-roads of migratory routes from Africa through the central Mediterranean – and, I dare say, for other countries in Europe, illegal immigration poses socio-economic problems of the most serious magnitude. Illegal immigration constitutes the unacceptable face of international migration. It is a problem, Mr President, which we sincerely hope that this High Level Group will address.

It calls for a concerted response from all of us. None of us can on our own hope to deal with the causes and effects of a problem which affects millions in so many different countries and whose social, economic and historical causes are so deep-seated. We firmly believe that a coordinated and unified approach should be adopted which addresses the countries of origin from which illegal immigrants depart, the countries of transit through which they pass and their destination countries.

We would like to see this High Level Group commit itself to adopting a holistic approach to illegal immigration. There are five separate elements to the problem. These can be broadly defined as, first, the need for comprehensive arrangements for the return, re-admission and re-integration of illegal immigrants to their countries of origin. Second, the need for improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of border management in countries of origin and of transit. Third, and related to the second, the elimination of human smuggling and trafficking – a topic to which this report makes very telling reference. Fourth, the need for improvements to the management of illegal immigrants by transit countries. And, fifth, the better management of migrants in destination countries if it can be shown that they have genuine cause to migrate and the destination country wishes to receive them.

While it is easy enough to define broadly these key areas for action, it is, as ever, more difficult to decide what actions actually need to be taken in detail to produce real remedies on the ground – as the authors of the report before us would be the first to acknowledge. But this is what we would hope the follow-up work stemming from this High Level Group would do.

There are a number of specific actions which can be adopted as the necessary first steps in the process of devising a holistic and integrated approach to illegal immigration. I offer these as a basis for further discussion by the High Level Group and the further work which this report will hopefully lead to.

There needs to be a regular and constructive dialogue between countries of origin and destination countries to strengthen cooperation and to identify common solutions – as this report itself highlights. The generous allocation of development aid for the eradication of poverty in countries of origin should be encouraged. But we see no reason why this should not be tied to returns and re-admissions as an incentive to closer cooperation. We see no contradiction here with the principles of co-development to which this report rightly refers.

As to the need for the strenuous elimination of human smuggling and trafficking, we must find ways of closer security cooperation between destination countries, transit countries and the countries of origin to eradicate these inhumane operations.

We must work for the better integration of migrants in destination countries through the adoption of a long-term, sustainable – I stress sustainable – migration management approach, as well as through the establishment of a regular dialogue on migration matters between countries of destination, and the countries of origin and transit most affected.

While Malta is fully committed to the central concept of this report that there is a direct relationship between legal migration and development, especially as it affects poverty reduction, we are equally convinced that illegal immigration

must in turn be properly controlled. There are three strands to the problem and these affect the countries of origin, transit countries and countries of destination. These elements are inseparable. They must be tackled holistically, in detail. Detailed action increasingly needs to be taken in a determined and coordinated manner on a global scale if constructive solutions are to be implemented.

I hope, Mr President, that you will agree that this is work which the High Level Group should now embark upon and follow up energetically.