

STATEMENT TO THE FORTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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This is a particularly opportune moment for a meeting to consider new trends in migration. Over the past 15 years, the world has seen major changes in the extent and complexity of migration flows, both within and between countries. Urbanization is proceeding rapidly in developing countries. New sources and destinations of migrants are emerging, and in many cases, countries have become points of origin, transit, and destination simultaneously.

Furthermore, with the target date of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) rapidly approaching, a global debate led by the United Nations is underway about the nature of the Post2015 Development Agenda and its relation to the MDGs. Finding ways to integrate population dynamics, including migration, into the Post2015 Development framework will be essential.

As you know, the world is changing rapidly. The global economy is becoming increasingly integrated with major changes in trade and finance, including the global organization of production and services as well as cross border financial flows and the underlying and evolving demand for migrant labor. In the not too distant future traditional patterns of international migration may have actually become outdated. Not only has the origin of international migrants become increasingly diversified over the past 20 years, but emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are beginning to attract new migratory flows.

Migration patterns are changing in other ways as well. Circular migration has become an increasingly important feature of development, and many migrants continue to make significant contributions to the development of their countries of origin through remittances or transfers of knowledge via their contacts and networks.

From a global perspective, migration should be recognized as a positive force for development. Migrants bring fresh energy and ideas to receiving areas, thereby enhancing the productive capacity of the economy, and contributing directly to economic growth. For sending areas, migrants can relieve pressure on labor markets, lower rates of unemployment or underemployment, besides supporting the economy through remittances or the transfer of knowledge and ideas.

Safeguarding the basic rights of migrants and their families is a fundamental obligation. When human rights are not respected, everyone loses: the migrants themselves, the native workers who struggle to compete with migrants earning less than fair market wages, and the host societies that are tarnished by the exploitive behavior shown to migrants. As the number of international migrants continues to rise, destination countries will increasingly need to integrate newcomers while at the same time working to avoid or eliminate racism and xenophobia.

There is much to be gained from fruitful collaborations between countries of origin and destination to enhance the positive effects of migration. The youth bulge currently observed in many developing countries shortly will become a bulge in the working age group. Our ability to take advantage of this potential demographic dividend will depend critically on how successfully the global economy can create new jobs in locations that are accessible to those in need of work. If addressed in a coherent manner, migration can be beneficial for both countries of origin and countries of destination, by also alleviating—although by no means eliminating—problems arising from demographic trends. Yet, at this point, there are no adequate mechanisms at the global level for addressing these concerns. Within this context, greater global cooperation is urgently needed.

Finally, despite their important role in development, both internal and international migration flows have proved difficult to analyze, owing to a paucity of high-quality data for many parts of the world. Beyond laying the substantive foundation for the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development later this year, this Commission also has an important opportunity to raise awareness about the data gaps that still exist and the need for a larger and more concerted effort to collect migration data.