

Testimony to the UN General Assembly's
Informal Thematic Debate on Migration and Development
May 19, 2011

While we in Civil Society agree that it is important to address the economic contributions of migrants to development of both receiving and sending countries, we are concerned that it is a limited and narrow way to frame the relationship between migration and development and tends to overemphasize the importance of remittances for example. While there are certain best practices about remittances that should be followed, and some of them were shared here this morning, we should remember that remittances are by and large a *private* matter of how migrants, their families and communities spend their own money. *Public* policy, on the other hand, should focus on the more underlying relationship between migration and development, particularly for those low-wage migrants most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, which is the denial of opportunities to lead a decent life in their home country, in other words the lack of a suitable, sustainable, and people-centered development as a root cause of migration should be the primary focus of States. For this reason we are glad that the issue has been raised this morning by some of the speakers, in particular Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa of Ecuador.

These root causes can include human rights violations, imbalanced trade policies and other policies such as agricultural subsidies in particular in the Global North that impede rather than facilitate an autonomous development in poorer nations; and environmental degradation. On this last point we want to agree with Ms. Espinosa on the importance of addressing climate change, and urge UN member states to address this crisis in a more responsible and direct manner, as it stands to become perhaps the single largest root cause of migration in coming years.

We would also like to respond to the Chair's statement that "large scale migration is necessary" for the future well bring of wealthy industrialized nations. We agree, and would urge that there also be more acknowledgement of the responsibility these nations then have towards those migrants that they are depending on for their well being. Specifically, we want to urge member states to stop promoting so-called circular migration as the model to follow for the future - especially when based on temporary worker programs that tie migrants' visas to a single employer and which have been found repeatedly to violate workers rights in many countries. These programs institutionalize family separation, often result in discrimination, and are designed to maximize the benefits of receiving nations without having to grant migrant workers full rights.

Just as we work toward a world in which migrants have a choice to migrate or not, we need to ensure that those who do migrate have the right to remain with their families in the country that is directly benefiting from their labor.

We believe that the responsibility of countries of destination should also include:

- The protection of especially vulnerable populations from violence and abuse, including migrant women and children
- The regularization of status of undocumented migrants. We're glad that some of the representatives from Latin America have shared this morning their plans to implement such a program.
- Lastly, the passing of national laws that are consistent with international Conventions and treaties, in particular the *International Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Their Families*. Being that this is a major human rights treaty of the United Nations, we are disappointed that it is so often marginalized and sometimes not even mentioned in international debates and meetings such as this one today.

-Richard Mandelbaum, CATA
Representing the NGO Committee on Migration