

13 October 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,  
President of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Meeting on Migration and Communication: Re-balancing  
Information Flows, and Dialogue**

Her Excellency Ms. Heidi Hautala, Minister for International Development, Finland  
Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director-General, International Organization for Migration  
Professor Federico Mayor, Chair of the Board of Directors, Inter-Press Service  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to open this meeting on “Migration and Communication: Re-balancing information flows, and Dialogue”.

I thank the Inter-Press Service (IPS), the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for the invitation to join you in Helsinki today.

Migration is undoubtedly one of the major global issues of the 21st Century.

International migration has grown in the last 20 years, and today about three per cent of the world's population lives outside of their country of birth.

Accompanying this growing movement of people is increasing awareness that migration has important implications for development, both economic and social.

In 2006, the General Assembly held its first ever high-level meeting dedicated solely to international migration and development. Our task was - and continues to be - promoting international cooperation to maximize the benefits of international migration and to minimize its negative consequences.

In May of this year, UN Member States took stock of the advances made since 2006.

Numerous governments discussed recent policies and programmes to harness the full benefits of migration.

International organizations spoke of the projects they have developed, to ensure migration benefits countries of origin, transit and destination, and migrants themselves.

And participants emphasised that international cooperation is critical to ensuring that migration takes place in optimal conditions, with optimal results.

While gaps remain, it is clear the international community is making progress.

Unfortunately, fear of the “other” has long plagued discussions around migration. And since the onset of the world financial and economic crisis, migrants have increasingly become the target of racism and xenophobia.

Today’s meeting therefore, is both timely and relevant.

In considering how to re-balance the public debate around migration, I would suggest that, to begin, it is important to look at the facts and to unpack the myths.

Today, South-South migration has become as widespread as South-North migration. Most migration is actually taking place over short distances, to neighbouring countries and within regions.

New migration poles are emerging in Asia, Africa and South America, in response to the labour demands created by an increasingly interdependent global economy. The largest shares of migrants to total population are not found in Europe or North America, but rather in countries such as Arab States in the Gulf. In these countries, international migrants make up more than half of the working age population.

While abroad, most international migrants transfer remittances. These remittances contribute to the well-being of families and communities of origin. In 2010, some US\$325 billion were remitted to developing countries, far outpacing official development assistance.

Migrants use these resources to improve the living standards of their families, often by paying for health and education. In the past few years, remarkable successes have been recorded in lowering the transfer cost of remittances. This has put more money in the hands of migrants, lifting many families out of poverty.

When they return home, international migrants bring their skills and expertise, and- not least- global perspectives.

Migrant workers also make important contributions to economic growth in countries of destination. As entrepreneurs, migrants establish businesses and create jobs in the countries that host them. And in the face of ageing populations, the role of migration cannot be overlooked.

So, dispelling myths and focusing on the contributions of migrants to development in countries of origin, transit and destination is one way to re-balance the debate around migration. The facts speak for themselves.

A second approach to re-balancing the message is to ensure full respect for the rights of migrants in accordance with international human rights law and relevant instruments.

The General Assembly has called upon States to effectively promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migration status. This is especially crucial for women and children, and migrants in irregular situations.

And thirdly, strengthening dialogue and information flows around migration requires greater coordination and cooperation at the global, regional and bilateral levels.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Migration is a global phenomenon that requires a global approach.

If the full benefits of migration are to be leveraged, we need to work together, sharing information and best practices.

Whether in government or in the media, we have a shared responsibility.

I will end by noting that in 2013, the General Assembly will hold a high-level dialogue to take stock of the advances made since 2006.

I call on all of you to ensure that, in the remaining two years, efforts are redoubled to maximise migration and to demonstrate its benefits to voters. The role of media in this endeavour cannot be underestimated.

I commend the organizers of this meeting, for emphasising the need to re-balance the public discourse on international migration, and for challenging us to do just that.

Thank you.