



STATEMENT BY MR. AJAI MALHOTRA, ACTING PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGENDA ITEM 4: GENERAL DEBATE ON NATIONAL
EXPERIENCE IN POPULATION MATTERS: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND
DEVELOPMENT IN THE 39TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ON APRIL 05, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

We congratulate you and other members of the Bureau of the 39th Session of the Commission on Population and Development and assure you of India's support in your conduct of the proceedings of this Commission. My delegation would also like to convey its appreciation to the outgoing Bureau for guiding the preparations for this meeting. We thank the Secretary-General for the useful reports prepared for the 39th Session of this Commission.

Mr. Chairman,

Migration has always been an indispensable ingredient of the human situation. While only about 3% of the world's population lives outside its country of origin, the global migration dynamic has rapidly become a highly visible feature of today's world. India is a major country of origin, destination and transit of migrants, with a long history of attracting and sending people to other lands. India has traditionally been a destination for migrants who have made India their home. An estimated 20 million migrants, including irregular migrants, today live in India.

India's unique civilization and rich cultural heritage have drawn sustenance from diversity, tolerance, and the opportunity for co-existence and development of multiple identities, absorbing customs, traditions and ideas from both invaders and immigrants. Early migrants from India traversed the world as traders and teachers. In the fifth/sixth century BC the first ever universities of the world were set up at Takshila and Nalanda. Over the centuries, practically every community has found a place in the Indian crucible. Some came to India as students in pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, others as traders or invaders drawn by its legendary wealth and spices. In turn, later migrants from India crossed the seas to work as labourers on sugar plantations or build railways for the colonial powers of the day. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Indians went as emigrant workers to the oil-rich Gulf, and as professionals in the fields of medicine, engineering, finance and management, and more recently,

information technology, to Western and other countries. There are presently over 20 million people of Indian origin overseas, including those with Indian nationality.

Mr. Chairman,

India does not restrict its nationals from migrating overseas. This is a choice exercised by the individual. We favour a regular, non-discriminatory and orderly process for their proceeding overseas, whether for permanent or shorter term migration. Indian migrants have traveled to many distant lands in search of a livelihood, or knowledge, skills, and professional opportunities. India recognizes that migration offers opportunities for our nationals and benefits to our country. We believe that 'brain drain' as a result of migration of skilled and highly trained people can be translated into an overall gain. In our estimation, we have successfully managed to do so. The Report of the Secretary-General acknowledges that India has experienced large-scale emigration of workers in information technologies and yet been able to replace those skilled emigrants and create a thriving service export industry. This is largely due to the emphasis in India on good quality education, especially higher education, aided by the opportunities that they have found in the host country.

The Report also acknowledges that countries of origin can benefit from the return of migrants if they bring back skills or capital that they would not have acquired at home. It highlights that India is one of the countries where returnees have been the main driving force for the growth of the software industry. The Report states that existence of stable institutions is a prerequisite for the engagement by those abroad in the development process of their countries of origin. Furthermore, migrants can make best use of economic opportunities at home if international mobility is facilitated by both countries of origin and countries of destination. A secure legal status at destination, with work and residence permits allowing for temporary absences, and the recognition of dual citizenship by the countries concerned are some of the measures that the Report acknowledges as being needed for circulation to take place.

The twenty million plus overseas Indians consist of "NRIs" (or non-resident Indian citizens) and "PIOs" (or Persons of Indian Origin who have acquired the citizenship of another country). Residing in faraway lands, they have succeeded by their dedication and hard work. Yet, they have retained emotional, cultural and spiritual bonds with India. This has struck a reciprocal chord in the hearts of the people of India. To nurture this symbiotic relationship to mutual benefit, innovative schemes such as the "Person of Indian Origin Card", followed by the "Overseas Citizenship of India Card", have been launched. For India, globalisation also provides an opportunity to link up with the Indian community abroad. We hope to see that ultimately every person of Indian origin can aspire to become an Indian citizen.

There are an estimated five million overseas Indian workers across the world. Their hard work helps build their host countries while their remittances have contributed significantly to the economic empowerment of their families and the development of their communities in India. The Indians in the Gulf are in some senses in a unique situation. They are NRIs who may never become naturalized citizens of their host countries. Most have immediate families in India and thus a vital stake in local governance. Their search for “voting rights” at home is under serious consideration.

Mr. Chairman,

Recorded remittance inflows into India have increased impressively in recent years, growing from US\$13 billion in 2001 to US\$ 21.7 billion in 2005. This surge in remittances to India, particularly following the information technology revolution in the 1990s, has made India the highest remittance receiving country in the world. Initiatives are being taken to facilitate remittance flows and promote transfers through formal channels. Greater use of formal channels for remittance transfers has been aided by factors such as institution of a market-determined exchange rate, current account convertibility, and increased availability of speedier and cost effective money transfer arrangements. We are further improving the efficiency of financial and consular services and working out an easy-to-use, affordable and efficient remittance facility. We have launched a programme to provide enhanced insurance benefits to Indian workers abroad. We are streamlining the process of emigration and creating awareness among workers about their rights and obligations. We will help develop the skills of workers and set up credible mechanisms for their certification.

The positive role of overseas Indians in building bridges between their countries of origin and destination, has been acknowledged in India through the celebration of “Pravasi Bharatiya Divas” or ‘Day of the Indian Migrant”, which also honours the high achievements of Indians abroad. A Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has been set up to promote all matters relating to overseas Indians, including innovative investment and policy initiatives.

Overseas Indians have also played an important role in global brand building. If India is today viewed as a “knowledge economy” it is because of the reputation that many overseas Indians have earned for our knowledge institutions by their creativity and diligence.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, sending and recipient countries derive benefits as a result of the process of migration. Migration needs to be seen from this multi-dimensional perspective and regarded as a “win-win” concept.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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