

THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE: SUGGESTIONS FOR THE AGENDA

The International Metropolis Project

The United Nations High Level Dialogue, scheduled to take place in 2006, offers a rare opportunity for the United Nations to discuss migration and its effects on societies, be they societies that send migrants, receive migrants, or through which migrants travel on their way somewhere else, a passage that

already a large number of organizations in the migration field whose work is recognized as of excellent quality and against which the contribution of the United Nations will be judged on whether it adds value or not. The Metropolis Project supports this particular entry of the United Nations into a holistic migration discussion and offers the comments in this paper as suggestions for ensuring that the High-Level Dialogue has beneficial results, both for Member States and for the United Nations itself.

In preparing for the High-Level Dialogue, the United Nations ought to plan for the long-term, not just for this one event. It ought to consider one of its principal objectives as being to position itself as an effective forum for multilateral debate on international migration. The planning, including setting the agenda, must strive to avoid an outcome on which Member States may be deeply divided and which

- Agreements whereby migrants not admitted or who are present without legal rights in a sovereign State can be rapidly returned to their country of origin with the guarantee of that country that they will be re-admitted to it.

These are some examples of issues around which progress will not likely be possible at the High-Level Dialogue of 2006 and which, in the best interests of the United Nations, ought to be left off the agenda. *The agenda, as far as possible, ought to be designed with the future viability of the United Nations as a forum for discussing and settling migration issues firmly in mind.*

A. THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE AGENDA

1. Migration and development

This paper suggests that the agenda be dominated by the issue of the relations between international migration phenomena and the economic and social development of the poorer countries in the world, whether these are countries that “send” migrants or that “receive” migrants. The issue is not only an empirical one of whether there are developmental effects, positive or negative, associated with migration, but whether international migration can be *managed* in such a way that it increases its positive effects on development, especially for poor countries, whether they are the origin or the destination of migrants. Both inflows and outflows of migrants can have development effects on society; the question is whether these effects can be altered in positive ways by effective management. This question related to policy: how to manage migration so that it promotes development?

This set of issues has become highly fashionable, particularly from the point of view of countries of

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- Migration and business development including the role that businesses and industries in countries of destination can play in the responsible development of businesses and industries in countries of origin.

Many now speak of the migration-development issue as one whereby the international community can produce a win-win-win situation for migrants, countries of origin and countries of destination. With persistence, this may indeed be realizable. It is incumbent upon the High-Level Dialogue organizers to pursue this issue from the point of view of promoting a win-win-win result. There are others, however, who would urge other approaches to migration and development, including one whereby development aid would be offered provided that the country receiving the aid agreed to manage migration flows in a way that would help the donor country meet its migration goals. For example, a donor country might insist that future development assistance would be forthcoming only if the country receiving the aid agreed to curb illegal migration flows and to accept returned illegal migrants or rejected asylum-seekers. This paper will be silent on the merits of this approach except to say that discussion of it should be reserved for another day. The High-Level Dialogue, again, should work towards an agenda of items where all sides can recognize benefits from the discussion and any agreements that might some day arise from it.

2. Protecting vulnerable migrants and their families

Of some migrants it is nearly universally thought that they are vulnerable and in need of protection or measures to help assure their well-being. The alleviation of suffering is a goal that the United Nations can safely discuss in the current context of international migration. There are some issues that ought to be considered by the High-Level Dialogue under this general title, issues where international co-operation could make a significant difference.

d. Protecting the well-being of the families of those who engage in migration, especially circular

B. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE METROPOLIS PROJECT

The Metropolis Project is a multinational network of policy makers, academic researchers, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. It encourages academic research on migration issues that is useful to policy makers, and it convenes meetings and arranges other communication fora whereby discussion amongst these groups can take place, all with the aim of improving migration-related policies. The Metropolis Conference has become the world's largest annual conference on migration, attracting members of the world's key migration organizations to discuss the current issues facing the migration community. Its meetin