



Global Forum on
MIGRATION & DEVELOPMENT



GFMD

Bangladesh 2016

REPORT

Second Thematic Workshop Under Ninth GFMD Chairmanship On Migration for Harmonious Societies

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Summary Report

Opening plenary

- **Ambassador Shameen Ahsan**, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UNOG, opened the second Thematic Workshop¹ on “Migration for Harmonious Societies in the presence of **Ambassador Md. Shahidul Haque**, GFMD 2016 Chair and Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and **Ms. Begum Shamsun Nahar**, Secretary of the Bangladesh Ministry of Overseas Employment and Expatriates’ Welfare.
- The workshop was co-convened by Zambia, represented by **Ambassador Encyla Tina Chishiba Sinjela** and Australia, represented by **Ms. Romany Nanayakkara** with support from the International Organization for Migration, led by Director General **Ambassador William Lacy Swing**. Two keynote presentations were made by **Ms. Jyoti Sanghera**, Chief of the Human Rights and Economic and Social Issues Section, OHCHR and **Mr. Ryszard Cholewinski**, Migration Policy Specialist, MIGRANT, ILO, followed by a discussant, **Mr. Ignacio Packer**, Secretary General of Terre des Hommes International. The day-long workshop was conducted in a two-part plenary session – opening and closing – with two breakout sessions in between, one on “Creation of common values and norms within the rubric of cultural specificities” and the other on “Creating Harmony in the midst of diversity”.
- In his introductory remarks, **Ambassador Ahsan** explained that the objective of the workshop was to explore ways forward to foster response to the challenge of achieving harmony in the midst of diversity. He urged participants to reflect on what makes a society hold together and provide it with a strong sense of common identity and purpose, and the circumstances that allow a society to be diverse and cohesive at the same time. The workshop, he added, reflects the people-centric approach of the 9th GFMD, which is embodied in the Roundtable theme, “Sociology of Migration and Development,” and in particular under RT session 2.1, “Migration, Diversity and Harmonious Societies.” It presents an opportunity for member states to promote a dialogue in the spirit of the 2030 Sustainability Development Agenda to ensure that “no one will be left behind”.
- **Ambassador Sinjela** highlighted the reality that we live today in a world of diversity, marked by continuous movements of people, who bring along different cultures, beliefs and perspectives. She stressed that the key resides in the appropriate management of migration, in order to ensure the integration and well-being of migrant population, harmonious coexistence between local and migrant communities, mutual learning and development. She argued that policies should move away from the traditional perspective and approach of making people look alike.
- **Ms. Nanayakkara** shared Australia’s perspective and success story on multiculturalism; a concept that is largely supported and shared by its general population. She cited the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 as a foundation of this multicultural approach on countering racial prejudices and discrimination and commitment to diversity. Besides the legislative framework, she also highlighted local and national initiatives on advocacy, research and education which promote social and racial inclusion. She was mindful, however, that notwithstanding their achievements, Australia cannot rest on its laurels and must remain attentive to the long term trends of international mobility.
- **Ambassador Swing** emphasized that the megatrend of migration fostered by a combination of demographic needs and disaster challenges (both natural and man-made) will continue to drive people to move across borders. He underlined the demographic deficit and the increasing demand of workers in the Global North – i.e., EU alone will lack 14 million workers by 2020, as opposed to population explosion in the Global South. At the same time, he highlighted the “arc of human suffering” resulting from recent tragic crises that have uprooted communities. Nonetheless, he pointed to the opportunities and economic progress that diversity could bring. But in order to capitalize on diversity, he said the debate has to move away from its current harmful

1. The second GFMD 2016 thematic workshop was attended by 101 government delegates representing 66 member states, 39 delegates from 17 international organizations and 10 civil society representatives.



narrative to a more historically accurate one that demonstrates the positive aspects of migration. He articulated the importance of integration that provides a range of services for migrants, such as language training, education, and health services.

- **Secretary Shamsun Nahar** re-emphasized the positive impact of diversity within society in the fields of development and knowledge sharing. According to her, the benefits that migrants bring are too often minimized and underestimated. It is in the context of international forums like the GFMD that such issues should be addressed and initiatives to support inclusive, harmonious and cohesive societies be shared.

Keynote Presentations

- **Ms. Sanghera** brought into the debate the human rights perspective with three main elements. First, all migrants should benefit from the same rights as nationals, regardless of their legal status. Second, relying on facts and not on myths, and ensuring comprehensive, evidence-based and migrant-centered policy-making is essential. Finally, political courage and strong leadership is urgently needed in order to move away from the current emotional debate around migrants and migration, and to construct new perspectives based on respect, compassion and empathy.
- **Mr. Cholewinski** articulated the perspective of the labour market on the broader topic of diversity and harmonious society. He recalled the existing instruments and legal framework linked to the

protection of migrant workers which are embedded in the core values of diversity, equality and non-discrimination. He highlighted the mutual benefits that could be gained for both employers and workers from having harmonious workplaces and adequate labour protection, and avoiding resentment and a 'race to the bottom'. In the 'world of work, he said, there are a number of positive practices of collaboration between employers and workers. An example is the recent Statement of the European Economic and Social Partners on the Refugee Crisis that views migration as an opportunity in a European context marked by increasing skills shortages. He also mentioned the continuing integration challenges for migrants in the labour market, and pointed to specific ways to accelerate this integration process, such as through vocational and language training. He also cited two advocacy initiatives aiming at changing public attitudes and perceptions towards migrant workers.

Open discussions

- As a discussant representing the civil society, **Mr. Packer** asked participants if the language used on the topic of migration are "words of harm or harmony." He denounced the misleading language, images and metaphors (e.g., the image of refugees and migrants as water, as in "waves of refugees" or "flow of migrants") that are often heard and seen in the public sphere. These, he asserted, carry a racist and xenophobic baggage, tend to dehumanize migrants, and create a feeling of fear among the public, thus fostering an environment



favorable for restrictive immigration policies. He welcomed the initiation of a global campaign led by the UN to counter xenophobia and mentioned many initiatives aimed at rejecting the political rhetoric that stigmatizes refugees and migrants. He called for migration discourses to be steered in a more humanized direction and urged everyone to be more self-critical and aware of own use of language and metaphors.

- During the open discussion that followed, two delegates expressed strong support for the topic of the thematic workshop. One asserted that the full integration of migrants in societies is vital in order to protect their human rights and to enable them to contribute to the development of their host countries. The other held the view that migration can contribute to harmonious societies by compensating adverse demographic trends and by stimulating the economy. However, to have a positive impact, migration should not be a necessity; it is important to politically settle conflicts to limit forced migration.

Closing Plenary

- After the break-out sessions, participants reconvened in plenary for the closing session. The respective rapporteurs of the two breakout sessions presented their reports. This was followed by closing remarks from the co-conveners and conclusion of the GFMD 2016 Chair.

Report on the break-out sessions

- **Mr. Samson Lungo** of Zambia, rapporteur of breakout session I on “*Creation of common values and norms within the rubric of cultural specificities,*”² recounted the discussion on the different means to create common values and norms between migrants and host societies and the relevant policies and practices that were shared. According to him, when asked what legal and institutional measures are in place to ensure a peaceful and inclusive society, participants replied that the existing human rights framework is a common point of departure. A number of good practices were mentioned, like bilateral agreements, mainstreaming of diaspora and migrants into national development plans, the creation of a specific institutional framework in charge of human mobility and establishment of a legal system that prevents discrimination on one hand and facilitates inclusion through work on the other hand.
- Appropriate policy interventions were suggested to facilitate participation of men and women in society from varied cultural backgrounds. Efforts to create a safe and secure environment for workers, to ensure labour market access and protection, especially for the most vulnerable (like domestic workers and women migrants) and granting equal rights to migrant and local workers were underlined as vital for having an inclusive

2. The first break-out session was moderated by Mr. Ryszard Cholewinski of ILO.



society. Building links between migrant workers and employers, as well as with other workers in the community were considered as important measures to this end. Integration programs that provide free access to education services and language training were cited as another good example.

- A multi-stakeholder involvement is crucial for increasing community participation in fostering a sense of belonging among migrants and building social cohesion amidst growing cultural diversity. Educational institutions, employers and businesses, diasporas, civil society organizations that provide direct assistance to migrants and refugees, the media and politicians play a role in communicating and creating common values that help promote synergies between cultures.
- **Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel** of Tunisia, rapporteur of breakout session 2 on “*Creating Harmony in the midst of diversity*”³ reported that there was a shared consensus among participants on the positive, and even necessary aspect of diversity for the evolution of humanity. It is a reality that needs to be managed by governments and other concerned stakeholders.
- The first part of the session delved on the social challenges posed by diversity and aimed at understanding the reasons and factors that undermine the acceptance of diversity. A general

concern was shared with regard to negative views about migration in the public sphere, as well as the climate of fear stirred often by ignorance. Poor (if not absent) communication, lack of mobility, media influence, school curricula with negative connotation of diversity, and belief in the superiority of one’s culture were cited as some of the reasons why people are hesitant to embrace diversity.

- During the second part, member states shared their own experiences and practices in encouraging people to embrace diversity and promoting harmonious and diverse societies. Education programmes, intercultural dialogue and language training were commonly considered as crucial for migrants’ integration and observance of their own culture, and for living together with the local community. Concrete initiatives that provide migrants with regular status and access to basic services (such as education, health and affordable housing), decent work and rich cultural life are likewise effective in promoting their inclusion in the host society. The role of diaspora was also highlighted in this regard.
- Some recommendations on how to counter the negative narrative on migration and diversity were offered. Creating links and working with journalists on the use of more positive language about migrants and migration was deemed as important. In addition, avoiding the politicization and

3. The second break-out session was moderated by Mr. Appave, Special Policy Adviser to the Director General of IOM.



securitization approach to migration and mobility – a phenomenon that has taken hold lately – was also cited as vital for the promotion of harmonious and diverse societies.

- It was also stressed that integration happens mostly at the local level and that local authorities and city administrations play a key role in enhancing social cohesion. In this regard, a suggestion was made for the GFMD to participate in the preparation of the upcoming HABITAT III. In the same vein, the GFMD was urged to draw inputs and contribute to relevant processes that celebrate diversity and promote the protection of migrants' rights and their full integration in host societies.

Closing remarks from the co-conveners

- **Ms. Nanayakkara** suggested other issues for future consideration and discussion. She first pointed to the challenges related to diversity and social cohesion in regional areas, especially with double citizenship. She also mentioned that circular migration – which is characterized by continuous movement of people between countries of departure and origin -- should be taken into consideration when looking at the concept of creating harmonious societies.
- **Ambassador Sinjela** invited the participants to look at the national experiences and best practices presented during the discussions.

Concluding remarks by the GFMD Chair

- As a conclusion, **Amb. Haque** reiterated the objective of the Chairmanship to anchor the discussion of mobility and harmonious societies on the larger framework of the 2030 Agenda. He shared his observation that diverse societies are entrepreneurial, productive and innovative. A key to building a cohesive and harmonious society in the midst of diversity is successful integration that allows people with different identities and cultures to coexist peacefully. He pointed out that the difficulty and reluctance in accepting and embracing diversity and otherness result from the over-rapid transformation of societies. In order to facilitate acceptance and transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous societies, mutual respect is vital. He concluded by listing five elements for enabling harmonious society: political, economic and cultural inclusiveness, acknowledgement of the reality that we live in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious world, an open dialogue on security and religion and recognition of the existence of multiple identities and democratic values. ■