

2013 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development

Side -event

Co-hosts: Switzerland and Bangladesh

“Making the Case for Migration in the Post-2015 Agenda”

Input by

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Bahamas has a migration issue. So it welcomes the effort to put the issue of migration on the post 2015 agenda. What drives the migration to our country is the fact that we are relatively prosperous when compared to Haiti to the south of us. Then there is Cuba to the west of us. Most people who leave Cuba are headed to the United States. There is a policy in the United States which is a catalyst for people to head toward the US. The Bahamas being proximate to Cuba is a way station for people trying to get to the US.

In this connection, the Prime Minister when he spoke to the General Assembly on 28th September in New York said: *Of special note in this regard are migrants from Cuba. We believe that the policies, rooted in*

the Cold War that largely account for this migration ought to be brought into alignment with the realities of the modern era.

Of course, we tend to focus a lot on illegal migration but there is also legal migration that has to be factored into the equation because the country of just over 350,000 has from time to time a skills shortage which has to be augmented by documented migration and also it has been using the fact that people want to live in The Bahamas because of the climate and the environment to market the right to live in the country as a permanent resident.

By far the greater political concern in The Bahamas is the illegal migration. In the last few months, the policies which drive the Cubans to leave their country and go to the United States have put us in quite a stew. There was a double standard of the treatment of Cuban refugees and Haitian refugees by the officials in The Bahamas. We have now stopped this practice. The political realities at home being what they are, we are not to be caught again in a situation where people simply are too long in a lock up before being sent back home, or, (?) and on to their ultimate destination with all the attendant problems that come with that.

At its core, migration, especially illegal migration, is an issue of a lack of respect for human rights and meeting basic needs. As the UN Secretary-General concluded in his Report on “The Work of the Organisation”: “...too many people have yet to feel [a] sense of progress and hope in their daily lives.” The Post-2015 Development Agenda addresses this directly by emphasizing: inclusivity, integration and measurement. We, therefore, agree with the United Nations System Specialized Agencies and Affiliated Organisations that migration must be mainstreamed under the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

We also want to discourage third countries from promoting around the world that they will take migrants who make their way illegally to The Bahamas and assist them to get those third countries. This will simply lead to the floodgates being opened and this will result in a migration effect with which we could not cope. We have asked these third countries to desist from making statements in public about these matters which are unhelpful.

In our own view, it may be that the International Organization for Migration or the Organization of American States might have to use their good offices to meet with all of the countries surrounding our sub region with a view to better coordinating the policies associated with migration. Putting migration on the agenda for post 2015 will in fact help to influence the public policy on this issue for all countries. It will also bring to the fore the necessity for domestic policies not only to be driven by their own internal political realities but also by the impacts which those policies will have on neighbouring and friendly states.

In addition, however, we believe that it is important for those states who are the progenitors of the free trade movement to act at the same time to keep their borders open so as to permit the lawful movement of people to seek a better life or to seek work in another country. The policy of The Bahamas government recognizes this need for labour. In fact, one study done for Caricom indicates that The Bahamas welcomes more Caricom nationals to our country than any other country in the sub region.

We find however that too often when it comes to lawful migration to other countries from The Bahamas by Bahamians, the countries who most trumpet free trade and lowering of barriers to trade are now busy putting up barriers to the movement of people into their countries, even as they seek to persuade us to lower all barriers.

In sum then, there must be a balance between the need for law enforcement and ensuring that migration produces documented non-nationals in a country and the need to be humane in interdicting those who breach the borders of our countries. There must also be a tweaking of the policies on lawful immigration so that the application process for crossing borders to work do not become the new barriers to trade.

Thank you.