



**OPENING ADDRESS OF H.E. Mr. BAN KI-MOON
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS
AT THE THIRD GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
ATHENS - 4 NOVEMBER 2009**

Your Excellency, President of the Hellenic Republic, President Papoulias, Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister, honourable ministers, distinguished delegates,

Special Representative Peter Sutherland, whose vision and energy animates this forum,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentleman,

On behalf of the United Nations and Member States of the United Nations, I would like to thank the government of Greece for hosting this Third Global Forum for Migration and Development.

What a fitting place for us to meet here. Greece is a crossroads.

One of the most beautiful words in the Greek lexicon is *philoxenia* — friendship towards strangers.

For thousands of years, the sons and daughters of Greece have been venturing to all reaches of our planet.

Today, Hellenes can be found almost everywhere around the world, contributing in countless ways to the societies of which they are now an integral part.

Meanwhile, the economic success of Greece has transformed this country into a magnet for migrants, both returning nationals and many others as well.

They, too, are becoming an integral part of your country, contributing to your economy and enriching your culture.

This dual experience of yours—as a country of both immigration and emigration—has endowed Greece with a more profound understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed by migration.

Thank you for your contribution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is only the Third Global Forum on Migration and Development, but it is already shaping the debate in important ways.

Participation remains extraordinarily strong.

I am very much impressed and grateful for such a large number of delegates participating in this important meeting.

As a result of the Forum, practices on the ground are changing.

Migrants, diaspora organizations, and other civil society leaders are enriching the conversation.

Together, our goal is to harness the power of migration to reduce poverty and inequality – to help more people share in the world’s prosperity—and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

We are here to ensure that migration and development policies are founded on evidence, not fuelled by prejudice.

We meet in what I call an age of mobility.

An era where people cross borders in growing numbers in pursuit of opportunity and hope for a better life.

Today, the number of international migrants is greater than at any time in history, with 214 million people living outside their country of birth.

Thanks to the work of the Forum and others, there is a growing understanding about the good that such mobility can generate.

When managed well, international migration greatly improves human welfare and development.

That message was at the heart of this year’s UN Human Development Report.

In countries of origin, migrants contribute to development by transferring remittances and transmitting new ideas and technologies.

In countries of destination, migrants fill gaps in labour demand and skills to make the economy more productive.

But we have work ahead of us.

Around the world, migration is often the subject of shrill debate, in the parliament, in the politics and in the society – a wedge to provoke social tensions, drive political extremes, fan the flames of discrimination and hatred.

We cannot yet say that the development potential of international migrants is being fully realized.

We cannot yet declare that the rights of migrants are being fully respected. That is a very unfortunate reality at this time.

The conditions in which many migrants move and live continue to be treacherous.

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation are disturbing realities.

Many migrants still face high costs in migrating and lack vital information.

Every year, thousands put their lives into the hands of smugglers or unlicensed recruiters.

In many parts of the world, migrant workers still face appalling working conditions.

And in every part of the world, more can be done to build places where natives and newcomers join together for a common purpose; places where migrants and their families have assured access to education and health and other vital services.

Like so many of today's global challenges, migrations cannot be addressed unilaterally.

We must work together. United in purpose, united in action.

I would like to highlight three challenges that add to the urgency for action.

Three issues that underscore how and why more countries have a stake in managing migration well.

First, the economic crisis, the financial crisis.

The global recession has highlighted the vulnerability of migrants, particularly recent migrants.

Unemployment rates are usually higher among migrants and foreigners.

They are often concentrated in sectors hit hardest by the crisis, such as construction, manufacturing and tourism.

Migrants often lack safety nets. And many cannot afford to return home, which makes them vulnerable to predatory practices.

The crisis has also soured the public perceptions of migrants.

They become easy scapegoats for job losses or lower wages. Yet the facts paint a different picture.

Migrants tend to complement, rather than displace, national workers.

They generate additional demand.

They often perform jobs that nationals do not want, even in times of this economic crisis.

We must work together to expand that economic potential and uphold the basic human rights of all people.

There is added urgency.

Remittance flows—the most tangible development benefit of migration—are being affected.

By the last quarter of 2008, there were signs that flows were slowing down.

The World Bank projects that remittance flows are likely to fall 7 to 10 per cent in 2009.

As a result of all these developments, more countries have a stake in better managing migration flows.

The second challenge is climate change.

The effects of global warming will be far-reaching.

At least 10 per cent of the world population lives in low-elevation coastal zones that would be the first to suffer from rising sea levels.

Forecasts of migration caused by climate change and environmental degradation vary widely.

Yet even the lower range would mean major population movements.

Already, we are painfully aware of how the devastation of a modern city like New Orleans forced the evacuation of hundreds of thousands.

In poor countries like Bangladesh, perennial floods temporarily displace millions.

In Africa, expanding desertification is affecting the migratory patterns of pastoralists and prompting more people to leave rural areas.

So far these movements have occurred mostly within countries. But that could very well change over time.

We are in a critical period, just weeks away from the climate change conference in Copenhagen.

Negotiations have recognized that migration is a likely consequence of climate change impacts.

Populations will relocate due to more extreme weather including prolonged droughts, intensive storms and wildfire.

In some cases, as with small island nations, whole countries are under threat.

Protecting vulnerable communities must be a priority in both national and international adaptation efforts.

We need action and agreement in Copenhagen.

We will continue to push for the most ambitious target and ambitious agreement possible.

Third, we must devote special attention to the most vulnerable migrants of all – victims of human trafficking, especially women and girls.

Human trafficking injures, traumatizes and kills.

It devastates families and threatens global security.

And it involves abhorrent practices, including debt bondage, forced labour, torture, organ removal, sexual exploitation and slavery-like conditions.

Traffickers deny victims their fundamental rights, including freedom of movement and freedom from abuse as well as access to health, education and decent work.

There are still many countries that are not yet parties to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

There is still much to do to boost international cooperation in combating such heinous practices.

That is why I have launched a global campaign to prevent all forms of violence against women.

I ask you to join with me in making this commitment: no tolerance for trafficking in women and girls.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we look to this challenge, we recognize that in many ways, migration is not just a journey of people – it is a journey of policy.

Our destination is a global system of mobility that allows people to move in legal, safe and orderly ways—with full respect for their dignity and for their human rights.

Together we seek a transformation of the conditions in which people move across borders, forge fulfilling livelihoods in their adopted societies and, in the process, expand their freedoms.

The evolving system must respond to the new realities of our globalized world.

Too many migration policies assume that migrants will behave in ways that most people do not.

For instance, policies might assume that migrants would willingly go home after a short time abroad even if they lack a legal pathway to migrate again.

Policies might assume that highly skilled people would accept working abroad for long periods without their families.

We must work to develop supportive policies that do not go against human aspirations, subvert our development goals or complicate inter-state relations.

This year's Human Development Report proposes a policy package that includes access to migration opportunities, better treatment of migrants and sensible measures to optimize migration's contribution to development.

The package is politically feasible, responsive and adaptable to the changing nature of the global economy and the global environment.

The United Nations system is reaching out to a broad range of stakeholders.

The European Commission-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative, for example, is playing an important role in forging the supportive system needed to realize the benefits of migration.

But there is much more work ahead

Let us never forget that, in the end, policies and laws are really about people and values.

We are here to deepen our commitment and common values of inclusion and social acceptance, education and understanding.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister,

Here in Athens, let us take inspiration from the ancient Greek term of “philoxenia” – and let us work together to make it a modern, global reality in every corner of our world.

Thank you for your commitment.