

## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Session 11: Humanitarian Issues II**

*Migrant workers, the integration of legal migrants;  
Refugees and displaced persons;  
Treatment of citizens and other participating States*

As prepared for delivery by Alex T. Johnson  
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

The United States recognizes the unique vulnerability of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. The vulnerable status of these particular groups has been exacerbated by three principal challenges: the global economic downturn, environmental degradation, and instability in conflict regions. These challenges exist within a troubling socio-political climate where the number of acts of xenophobia and discrimination is increasing in many parts of the OSCE region.

As we said at the opening of this conference, we must also reiterate our call for respect for the human rights and safe, dignified and voluntary return of internally displaced persons in the conflict areas of Georgia, as well as refugees and displaced persons in other conflict zones.

Refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants are among the principal targets of violence based on their race or religion.

We remain deeply concerned about working and living conditions of migrant workers in OSCE countries and worldwide. Violations of migrants' rights – as workers and as human beings – can also be found in OSCE participating States that attract migrant workers. Labor trafficking, worker exploitation, ethnic discrimination and ethnicity-related violence and murder are not uncommon. Just like citizens, migrants should have freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; should not be subject to forced or compulsory labor, and should not face discrimination in the workplace.

We should strive to facilitate legal and orderly labor migration, including social frameworks, as well as foster the humane treatment of migrant workers and a tolerant environment toward different ethnicities. In addition, government officials and civic leaders must respond to rising hate-motivated rhetoric and violence against migrants with coordinated efforts to reduce community tensions around immigration – and by speaking out against the demonization of immigrants.

At the 2008 Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, a resolution offered by then-U.S. Representative Hilda Solis, now U.S. Secretary of Labor, was adopted. This resolution recognized the economic, cultural, political, and social contributions of migrants and illuminated a number of key considerations, namely establishing national frameworks for migration

management and addressing the root causes of irregular migration through economic cooperation with countries of origin.

The United States applauds the successful 17th Economic and Environmental Forum coordinated by the Greek Chairmanship. This forum analyzed migration within the inseparable context of all three OSCE dimensions.

Unfortunately, some policies in States on the borders of the OSCE region run counter to migrant integration and empowerment objectives. Asylum seekers entering these States encounter challenges in that their unique circumstances are not appropriately distinguished from general migration trends. They also encounter the unfortunate challenge of policies that decrease access to the asylum process, particularly in the Mediterranean region.

The global economic downturn has created numerous challenges not just for migrant workers, but for states of origin. Remittances are an indispensable economic engine for these countries, the monetary value of which far exceeds international aid efforts. Following global economic trends, recently remittance streams have declined, adding to development challenges for sending states. Improving cooperation with appropriate regulatory agencies and international financial institutions to ensure remittance mechanisms are timely and transparent will result in positive, sustainable development and thus help improve the stability of countries of origin.

Other means of optimizing remittance streams include small business micro-loan initiatives and supporting the development of more easily accessible local financial institutions. Such initiatives have seen great success, in particular with women who have multiplied the potential of remittances by reinvesting the funds into local entrepreneurial activities. Another successful example is the work of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the United Nations Development Program, which started a program to invest remittances in Tajikistan, the country of greatest emigration in Central Asia. Initiatives like this could go a long way toward alleviating at least some of the challenges faced by migrant workers across the OSCE region.

Mr. Moderator, helping the vulnerable improve their conditions will benefit not only them, but our societies. We urge everyone to work collaboratively to this end.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.