



10 July 2007
Wetstraat 16
B-1000 Brussels
Tel. +32 2 501 02 11

THE PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GUY VERHOFSTADT
AT THE GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Brussels, 10 July 2007

Monseigneur,
Secretary-General,
President of the European Commission,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nobody migrates for the fun of it. Nobody simply leaves their family, friends, possessions and country without a reason. And nobody just tries their luck without knowing what the future holds in store for them thousands of kilometres away from home. Yet there are more than 200 million migrants worldwide. That's one in every thirty people.

Migration is nothing new, of course. The history of mankind is a story of large-scale migration. People have always sought the best places to live and the most fertile land. The best example is probably the United States of

America, a country built by an immigrant population. But it would be far too easy to write off migration as merely a natural phenomenon. As something we can do nothing about. That would be like writing off global warming as a natural process that comes and goes of its own. Adopting such an attitude would mean dodging our responsibility. It would also mean denying billions of people their future.

Let's take a look at the reality of the situation. The West is home to 14% of the world's population. That 14% commands 73% of global income. So it's only normal that people should want to come over here and try their luck in the West. And it's also only normal that they should continue to do so. No wall will keep these people out, yet the current strategy entails building walls around the West. We try to stem the tide of migrants, of illegal immigrants, by patrolling in aircraft, boats and ships. We erect high walls or fences several meters high around the Spanish enclaves in Morocco. Anywhere there are ways into the West, modern new border surveillance systems are installed: like the Schengen Information System in Europe; the round-the-clock reconnaissance of Australia's 3,000-kilometer-long northern border; the expansion and reinforcement of the 1,100-kilometer-long fences between the USA and Mexico.

But these barriers do not stem the rising tide of would-be-migrants. And neither does our restrictive asylum legislation. For when there are no official ways in, criminal human trafficking flourishes like never before. People die in container lorries, starved of oxygen. People drown on the high seas when the unseaworthy boats carrying them sink. And those who do finally make it to their destination vanish into an illegal existence. Europe now has something

like 7 million illegal immigrants, the USA 12 million. These people live in constant fear. And supposedly nobody will know if they fall sick or die.

Ladies and gentlemen, today Europe and the US are spending more money on the control of migration than on development of the countries of origin. But let us be honest, this strategy just isn't working. Worse still, it's selfish and even inhuman. We should consider migration not as a danger, but as a symptom. A symptom of a hopeless situation from which people try to flee. Situations in which children die because they have no drinking water. In which human rights are constantly violated.

It is wrong to say that there's nothing we can do. There's a great deal we can do. First and foremost by earmarking the agreed 0.7% of our GDP to development cooperation. We've been talking about doing this for quite some time already. Now it's time to deliver on our promises. Belgium embarked on a path of growth in this connection several years ago. By 2010 we will reach the 0.7% mark. But that is not enough.

We need to create levers that empower people and countries. Like micro credits for example. Small loans that enable poor people to build their own future bit by bit. Or Hernando de Soto's revolutionary idea of awarding poor people living in slums property certificates for their humble possessions, effectively giving them papers that are worth money.

Meanwhile, we must have the courage to scrap export subsidies. After all, if we want to globalise prosperity, we must also allow poor countries to enjoy the benefits of globalisation. Out of nearly 1 billion people suffering from

hunger around the worldwide, no fewer than 600 million are farmers. Two of the major reasons for this are the farming (export) subsidies and import tariffs practised in Europe and the USA. Whereas hundreds of millions of people in the Third World have to get by on one euro a day, we subsidise European cows to the tune of two euros per day. It is because of these subsidies that Western products can be sold at under cost price at local agricultural markets in developing countries. This form of unfair competition condemns the Third World to poverty for ever.

We must have the courage to change this. Just as we must display the courage to find an urgent solution to the touchiest problems on a continent like Africa. In one report published by the United Nations I read that 60 billion euro is required. That's 60 billion euro to get to grips with all the basic problems in Africa. Every African can be guaranteed clean water, sanitary facilities, basic healthcare and education. And this can be achieved very quickly. The eradication of malaria alone would yield additional economic growth of one percent of the continent's gross domestic product. Solving all the problems I just mentioned would even generate growth of at least two percent in GDP. That would leave people in the Third World hundred times better off than they are now by the end of the century. And 60 billion euro is peanuts to the wealthy West.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The link between migration and development is something very close to my heart. So I'm also proud that this Global Forum is taking place here in

Brussels. The aim of this Forum is to share all the available knowledge, methods, objectives and solutions. The aim is to achieve greater coherence in our migration and development policies and thus greater effectiveness. This Forum is the start of a process. It is not a one shot event. Because our duty and responsibility today are the same as they were when expressed in the Charter back in 1945: "We the peoples of the United Nations are determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". So I wish you all the very best of success.

Thank you.