



Trans-border Migration: A Challenge to Regional Stability

By Andrew Bruce, IOM Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific

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Excellencies; Esteemed Fellow Panelists; Distinguished Delegates; Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be with you here this morning participating in this important forum. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to His Excellency, Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Malaysian Minister of Defense, and the Malaysia Institute of Defense and Security for giving IOM the opportunity to participate in a panel at this – the third – Putrajaya Forum.

The overall theme of *Strengthening Security and Regional Stability* is a most relevant one in this increasingly globalized world and we appreciate the opportunity to be part of this panel discussing the topic of “Trans-border Migration: A Challenge to Regional Stability”, including to reflect on how IOM has sought to support states in developing migration management approaches that minimize the risk of migration undermining regional stability.

Human mobility has progressively become a more important issue in our world in recent years. There are an estimated 232 million migrants globally, including it is estimated up to 50 million in irregular status. As economies expand, people are travelling further, and more often crossing borders to find work and improve the lives of themselves and their families. There are also people fleeing persecution and conflict as well as those who have been displaced by natural disasters, including across borders. It is estimated that there are currently some 4 million irregular migrants in Southeast Asia alone. Migration in its different forms intersects with development and humanitarian and security issues.

With international migration projected to continue increasing in scale and complexity over the coming decades, societies of the future are expected to exhibit increasing social and economic diversity. The successful integration of migrants into host societies and, more broadly, the manner in which communities at large experience migration constitutes a major policy challenge for states and societies, including in our region. Migration remains politically sensitive and governments face the difficult task of dispelling the misunderstandings surrounding it. Indeed, misinformation and misperception can trigger a vicious cycle which influences government policy, and in turn, perpetuates negative attitudes to migrants and migration in mass media and the community at large. This can negate efforts to make migrant communities feel part of society and identify shared values and interests. Marginalization and stigmatization of migrants may cause instability – not migration as such.

Perception of migrants as a threat to national security often neglects that migration contributes to economic and social development and that properly managed migration can reinforce national and regional stability and development. When migration is well managed it contributes to the economic and social development of migrants, and of both countries of origin and destination. In fact, labour sending countries in the Asia-Pacific received some 237



billion US dollars in remittances in 2011, a significant amount. Destination countries' economies also benefit immensely from the contribution of migrant workers. In Thailand for example, migrant workers annually contribute some 11 billion US dollars, or 6 per cent of the country's GDP.

On the other hand, we have seen in the past that migration flows between countries can create bilateral and regional tensions. There is further growing recognition that **irregular trans-border movements** may have a destabilizing effect on a region. In the Asia and Pacific region, smuggling and trafficking networks pose a genuine threat to law and order. These criminal networks are at times related to organized crime, corruption and in some cases to the movement of illicit goods, including weapons and drugs. It is against this backdrop that the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime was set up in 2002. More than 45 member countries and international organizations participate in this voluntary forum. The Bali Process provides states in the Asia and Pacific region with an opportunity to discuss and develop coordinated approaches to address people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime. The Process further supports the development and implementation of strategies and practical cooperation in response to these challenges.

At times migration is looked at as creating regional instability, whereas in some cases it is in fact regional instability, including conflict and situations of insecurity that are generating migratory movements.

A contributor to regional instability that is often overlooked, but that is directly linked to trans-border migration is the issue of **land and property** which is often at the root of conflicts and instability. Particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations, changes in land use and ownership can be both driven by instability – as people are forced to move off their land, and be drivers of instability – as those claiming original ownership try to reclaim land.

Issues of tenure and land use can exacerbate tensions and conflicts in several ways. The occupation of land and property left behind during a conflict can lead to bitter and prolonged disputes after the crisis is over. A breakdown of pre-conflict arrangements on how to manage land and property - - - and how to resolve disputes - - - can destroy pre-existing conflict resolution mechanisms; land can easily be damaged or degraded during a conflict; additional pressure can be put on land and property where camps or informal shelters are created to accommodate those displaced by conflict; and the overall land and property picture may shift - temporarily or permanently – as a result of a conflict.

The civil war in Rwanda is an example of one with property rights at its heart. The roots of the issue are known to be ethnic, between Tutsis and Hutus, however in practical terms the issue has been exacerbated by land and property disputes. After independence in 1962, a large population of Tutsis fled the country as a result of the political turmoil and of persecution. Their land, then abandoned, was often arbitrarily divided between the remaining, mainly Hutu, residents. After the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front's victory in the civil war of the mid-1990s the new government ordered land to be reallocated to take account of the returned Tutsi population. However, this has by no means resolved land-



related uncertainty in the country. The reallocation used a variety of different methods and thus was not wholly consistent. Additionally, any security of tenure is predicated on the Tutsi-led government remaining in power, which is by no means assured.

IOM's expertise in the area of land, property and reparations was recognized when the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda requested the Organization to develop a set of concrete recommendations and suggestions leading to a lasting solution to this issue. The Organization has also been asked to develop similar recommendations for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

In this region, there are land rights and displacement issues to be resolved in Mindanao in the Southern **Philippines**. IOM has recently been working with the World Bank to assess questions of Land and Property which have arisen due to widespread displacement caused by ethnic and religious tensions and conflict in the area. Resolution of these issues would make an important contribution to bringing stability to this region.

IOM as the international migration agency continues to advocate comprehensive approaches to migration challenges that take into consideration the legitimate security concerns of all states, including those of source, transit, and destination as well as the human rights of migrants.

IOM itself was established in 1951 during a time of regional and global instability following the Second World War when there were some 3.5 million people displaced in Western Europe alone. IOM was tasked with helping European governments identify resettlement countries for these people uprooted by the war. In the 1950s, the organization transported nearly a million displaced people to resettlement, mainly in Latin America and Australia. Over the decades, IOM has considerably broadened its thematic and geographical scope based on the mandate given it by its member states.

I served as IOM's first Chief of Mission in **Kosovo** following the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces in June 1999, at a time of large-scale displacement and regional instability.

In the late 1990s, against the backdrop of Yugoslavia's economic collapse and Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians, large numbers of these people fled Kosovo to Albania and Macedonia. Broadly, this migration resulted in increased trade and an 'economic boom' in Albania whereas in contrast Macedonia's ability to cope with hundreds of thousands of Kosovar-Albanian refugees was limited and the burden took its toll on the country's economy and placed an enormous strain on relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. The government's policy of slowly admitting refugees, police violence against them, and the periodic refusal to admit additional refugees fuelled resentment among Macedonia's Albanians. Furthermore, insurgents from the Kosovo Liberation Army began crossing the border under the pretext that Albanians were treated poorly and needed protection. This may have played a role in triggering the civil war that began in 2001.



Conversely, the sudden surge in Kosovar-Albanians into Albania was effectively managed and refugees were taken care of.

It is interesting that the same population had such different impacts on the two countries. This can partly be explained by the fact by the different policy approaches taken by each of them.

IOM's response to this humanitarian crisis within Kosovo focused on community stabilization activities. These activities addressed the root causes of tension and displacement by providing for basic needs beyond emergency relief. In short, displacement was reduced and return encouraged by making the place of origin more attractive economically and socially, thus creating a pull factor.

IOM also assisted Kosovo's neighbours cope with the strains of large numbers of arrivals of Kosovar Albanians through temporary evacuation to safety in third countries, medical care and medical evacuation, the provision of public information, and training and capacity building for the Governments in dealing with vulnerable migrant populations. IOM also provided services in camp management, community relations and micro-enterprise activities.

Since the 1990s, States have increasingly requested IOM to provide a range of support measures to address trans-border migration in crisis and post-crisis situations, and encourage the organization to develop more strategic approaches to the migration dimensions of such crises. In particular, states systematically come to IOM to seek assistance for their nationals who find themselves in crisis situations abroad. Forty-six of them formally requested IOM to evacuate their nationals from Libya during the recent civil war there and forty-three countries have done the same for their nationals in Syria including the Philippines, Vietnam and Bangladesh in this region.

The inter-linkages between security, regional stability and international migration are complex and require attention at different levels. IOM strongly believes that trans-border migration, when properly managed, contributes to rather than undermines regional stability.

I have made 4 recommendations here today on how Governments can help ensure that migration contributes to regional security:

1. Through regional cooperation to prevent and combat irregular movements,
2. Through comprehensive responses to crisis situations with a migration dimension,
3. Through improving public perception of migrants and migration and support for migrants to integrate into host communities, and
4. Through solving land and property disputes often through the use of reparations.

IOM stands ready to assist states in all of these areas.

I would like to conclude by again thanking His Excellency, Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Malaysian Minister of Defense, and the Malaysia Institute of Defense and Security



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for inviting me to participate in this forum. I look forward to interesting and productive discussions during the rest of this session, as well as throughout the remainder of the Forum.