

**Statement by the Eritrean Delegation to the
GFMD Thematic meeting**

**LABOUR MIGRATION AND DIASPORA:
Improving labour market complementarities
and economic development outcomes**

(Geneva/ September 11, 2013)

Due to its history which witnessed several colonizers, Eritrea has a significant number of Diaspora population built over decades by people who have migrated, some for economic and academic reasons, others because of political repressions, socio-economic discriminations and war. This Diaspora has always stayed part and parcel of the Eritrean population.

Attracting the Diaspora is one of the priorities in government policy. Government structure has always included an entity -such as my Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs- that specifically deals and maintains links with the Diaspora. Furthermore:

- Dual citizenship is accepted
- Yearly Eritrean festivals in various parts of the world provide information and discussion forums for the Diaspora, and help to preserve Eritrean culture and values, and to transmit them to new generations.
- Early after independence, returnees were exempted from tax payment for imported household goods and cars.
- Bonds have been sold for some time to the Diaspora.

The Diaspora highly contributes in Eritrea's rehabilitation and reconstruction, lobbies for it in residence countries, establishes friendship associations with host communities, and maintains financial assistance. Contributions to the socio-economic development of the country are guaranteed through remittances, assistance to those in need, and investments.

On this occasion, I would like to bring to the attention of this meeting that these voluntary contributions are being unjustly hampered by some countries for political motives. This should not be allowed!

Returnees are encouraged as well to contribute in national development. They are organized in associations -established according to their host countries- which assist them to reintegrate in the society and to invest in groups or individually.

For now, investments by the Diaspora and returnees are focusing on housing and small businesses. We expect this to change soon. Last year, two conferences were held in Asmara aiming at enhancing Diaspora's investment in Eritrea. Each conference attracted a great deal of participants from the Diaspora, illustrating thus their strong patriotism, their sense of ownership and belonging, and their commitment to their country of origin.

Tourism by the Diaspora population is another source of revenue for the country: official figures indicate that about 100 000 Eritreans visited in 2012, mostly during the summer and Christmas holidays.

Eritrean associations in the Diaspora are additional tools who work in cooperation with similar associations within Eritrea. In one example, Eritrean women associations in the Diaspora have financed the construction of training centers for women in various cities in Eritrea.

Coming to labour migration, the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare has set a mechanism to frame it in legality. Prior to this procedure, people were recruited through private agencies, which opened the door to a number of abuses.

The major category sent is from the low skilled, most of the time for domestic jobs. Countries of destination are Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar. Drivers and flight attendants have been sent to Qatar in a bilateral agreement. Our understanding is that bilateral cooperation agreements among interested countries are instrumental in securing decent working conditions for migrant workers and respect of their rights.

Meanwhile, labour deemed unavailable in Eritrea is imported. In the Education sector, many teachers are recruited from India. Health and construction experts are also recruited. The expansion of the mining sector is requiring as well an increasing number of mining experts.

Furthermore, skilled Eritreans are encouraged to provide service in various government bodies (Ministries of Health, Education, Information ...) for periods going up to one year. Highly professional people often come for their sabbatical leave and teach at universities and colleges. My Department has introduced a data base system in efforts to assess the capacity and knowledge of the Diaspora. This will provide an overview of their skills to be used for the benefit of national development.

At last, I stress upon the importance of working in tandem with the ILO. The Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare has signed 7 out of the 8 core Conventions of the ILO. The 8th convention is in process.

Thank you for your attention