

## Summit meeting of GFMD – Marrakech 5 December 2018

Regine De Clercq, Chair and Founding Executive Director of the GFMD  
2007

Monsieur le Ministre, Madame la Ministre, Excellencies and Dear Friends of the GFMD,

Allow me to be somewhat more informal and personal, in keeping with the character of the GFMD...I am grateful to the co-chairs and in particular the Moroccan government for their invitation to beautiful and vibrant Marrakech and for the opportunity to bring a testimony of how the GFMD started, taking you back in history, at this crucial state in the international migration debate.

I want to make it clear that I speak as the First and Founding Executive Director of the GFMD in 2007 ...and my comments today are mine alone and do in no way reflect the views of any government or organisation.

When looking towards the future, it is instructive to pause for a moment, and to look back and evaluate where one comes from. This is also valid for the GFMD.

Let me therefore take you back to 2006/7, roughly 10 years ago, when the GFMD was born in the run up to the first HLD on Migration and Development of September 2006. Kofi Annan, then SG of the UN, felt, towards the end of his mandate, that during his tenure not enough attention had been paid to Migration, one of the looming challenges of modern times, as was climate change, but insufficiently recognised as such. He wanted to do something about it. Peter Sutherland, his Special Representative for Migration, was to find a way to keep the dialogue on international migration on the global agenda, after the doors closed on the HLD.

That was easier said than done, since there was a loud and clear veto from a vast majority of member states against any UN 'meddling' in a matter considered the prerogative of states and of national sovereignty. And some were rather adamant... The by Peter Sutherland informally circulated document proposing a Global Forum for migration, was rejected by some important states and many would only accept it, on condition that any participation of the UN, even in the form of the participation of the SPSG, would be deleted. Maybe shocking now, but not then!

Belgium under the then government and also by tradition was among those that were of the opinion cooperation is better than confrontation and that the challenge of migration like other cross border challenges, could only be meaningfully

addressed through a multilateral and cooperative framework, but this conviction was not at all mainstream among the industrialised countries.

Peter Sutherland, also a visionary, realised all too well that in the absence of a critical mass of industrialised countries on board, any international dialogue on migration would be meaningless, but many remained stubbornly opposed. One day he called me asking, what are we going to do after 16 th september 2006 ??? Something needs to be done... I understood what he was driving at !!!

I suggested that instead of considering whether we should have a Global Forum, and getting a muddled answer, we should rather take it as a given and put the next question forward, namely how should this Global Forum look like. I agreed to submit a request to the Belgian government for us to take the lead in the initiation and creation of the first Global Forum, but the link between Migration and Development should be at the core, in order to create the win win potential necessary to muster critical political support for such a process, including of my own government, in particular the Minister of Development, whose support has been crucial. A few weeks later the Belgian government, by decision of a cabinet meeting, accepted to pioneer the Global Forum on Migration and Development, assuming it would get enough support during the during the HLD. Pour la petite histoire, I may add, that at the last minute, while I was already on the plane to New York for the HLD, a rumour was spread that Belgium had withdrawn its offer.. and I found Peter Sutherland quite upset upon my arrival in New York !!! Today we would call this fake news !!!

During the HLD, the idea of a Global Forum for Migration and Development was supported by a large majority number of states, but still opposed by some. Those who supported it wanted it informal, government led (already some sort of contradiction) and in no case should it lead to negotiated outcomes or normative decisions. That looked like a 'birth defect' or even multiple ones, which have haunted/hampered the Global Forum ever since !

Belgium, as the founding organiser, faced the challenge, to set up the Forum in a span of 9 months, with limited means, without formal UN mandate, very little guidance indeed and to try to make it more than a talking shop.

Me and my small team tried to find a way to overcome the birth defect mentioned earlier, by making the Forum and its preparative process as informal, inclusive but also as operational and concrete as possible...

The first question we had to solve was, what shall we talk about and to who should we be talking. Our diplomatic network was put to use for a worldwide survey of the

priorities of the countries, -123 responded- and we proposed a multi annual agenda reflecting those; we requested all countries to nominate a focal point, a high level intra governmental coordinator who would become our partner for communication; we created the Troika to guarantee as best we could a certain continuity of this informal process that had no clear leadership, the Steering Group was to prevent self serving politization of the Forum by subsequent chairs, the Friends of the Forum was a sounding board and preparatory body.

**Above all, we devised a working method that was unusual in a multilateral framework of this nature, that I called the participative approach.** Rather than entrusting international experts with the drafting of the papers on the themes and 12 sub themes that were adopted by the F of F, we choose instead to create small multistakeholder workinggroups of volunteers, consisting of developed and developing countries, international organisations or civil society partners incl academics and thanks, who would 'discuss, in fact negotiate' the content of the background papers on the basis of a template we provided...These working groups, guided by my team, came up with much better background documents than we ever anticipated, together with suggestions for concrete actions, which in itself was an important outcome and all participants learned a lot from each other ...I note that this method has been watered down over the years, over the years the preparatory teams have become larger to the detriment of ownership by the participating countries, which I consider a pity, because it seems states have left the space they did, and yes they should occupy, to other actors...

We involved the Civil society, with the Civil Society day, and were chastised for it by some, and we held regular consultations with a large number of international organisations in the Global Migration Group.

With UNDESA we set up the Marketplace, which would create the opportunity for practical cooperation among countries and other interested partners... This MP was later converted in the Platform for Partnerships, which is more geared to sharing good practices rather than towards cooperation on the ground....It may be a good time to revive the Marketplace in the framework of the GCM and beyond.

Nine frenetic months followed, with numerous consultations, internationally and nationally so as not to loose our own constituency on the way... and all this finally culminated in open, constructive, sometimes passionate, discussions in Brussels in July 2007. We became conscious that the world was watching, this first meeting generated so much interest of stakeholders, that we had to limit participation to 3 people per delegation of the 160 participating countries. We counted 200 representatives of the civil society... What was most surprising was the interest of

the international media. When I asked the journalist of Reuters during an interview why they were so interested in this, his answer was.. that for the first time, we hear talking about migration in positive terms !!!

All this to impress upon you that in the last 10 years, many countries who were reluctant to discuss migration in a multilateral framework, in particular under the UN banner, have changed course. **The creation of the GFMD, after the HLD which prepared the ground, was a catalytic moment for this change.** It led, mainly thanks to its participative approach, to the realisation that all countries were struggling with the issue in some way, this greatly contributed to the creation of mutual trust, a commodity which had been absent in the migration debate. Such trust is the prerequisite for positive cooperation in a multilateral and multi stakeholder framework which in turn is needed to collectively find solutions for a better migration management and answers to this all important question. Now, barely 10 years later we are at the eve of the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration, which tries to be that answer. This GCM, like all human creations, is not perfect, and can be read in many different ways, and important partners are absent, but it can be the beginning of a new era of cooperation, if put to good use and not as a tool to put each other in the wrong.

In the last 10 years a lot of progress has been made in understanding the position and challenges each country faces in the field of migration. This progress **cannot be taken for granted...in fact it is not granted.** We all know the political climate of today as far as migration is concerned. We all have seen the confusion and even chaos that can result from massive movements of migrants and refugees for which nobody was prepared, and by now we all know the price for that...

The GFMD in its deliberations has so far been focusing mainly on the contribution migration, when managed properly, can make and is making to development. Management is the keyword here. In a world that has never been as mobile as today, this management remains very incomplete, to say the least...It leaves part of the field open to criminal operators, and that is not normal... We all know that one of the main problems, stems from the transit of large numbers of desperate irregular migrants, who often are exploited by unscrupulous elements of the society. It should there for be no surprise that large segments of the population see migrants including refugees, negatively, as a threat to jobs and security, even if the large majority of them are law abiding and very hardworking individuals and notwithstanding our international obligations towards refugees, for whom, unfortunately, the burdensharing is far from perfect.

Today, we should be clear eyed. The reality is that migration, with or without the GCM, will continue and we collectively, regionally, nationally and locally have to decide whether we want to manage it better so that it leads to better outcomes, or on the contrary, we want to let it deteriorate further and leave it to the dark elements of the society. **The risk is imminent that if we do not succeed to manage it better, migration could likely become a threat to the development of all, instead of a contribution...**In the absence of clear and foreseeable migration management policies, including opening more pathways for regular migration, safe passages for refugees, combatting more forcefully smuggling and irregular migration, **we could, yes we will be faced with unsustainable migration patterns, on all ends of the spectrum, sending, receiving, transit countries.**

It is my personal conviction that if migration and international mobility has to remain a positive given in all our societies, it should be sustainable for all countries, for the countries from where people leave, so as not to deplete them of their most dynamic and strongest, for the countries of arrival and transit, so that their societies do not feel beleaguered.

Therefore, if I could have a wish, to end my discourse, it would be that the concept of sustainable migration like sustainable development becomes a theme which the GFMD can integrate and maybe define in the future....to the benefit of all...

I thank you all to give some thought to this idea and thank you for your attention in the meantime.