

Statement by H.E. Tobias Billström, Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Sweden

100th Session of the IOM Council, 6 December 2011

Mr. Chairperson, Director-General, Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

First, allow me to congratulate IOM on this auspicious occasion celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Organization. Milestones like this provide a welcome opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the achievements that the Organization has made over the years in assisting and improving the lives of millions of migrants. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend IOM for its efforts earlier this year in assisting migrants fleeing violence in Libya.

Mr. Chair,

We live in an age of unprecedented global mobility. Our countries, societies and cultures are more intertwined and interdependent now than at any other point in human history. They are also more vibrant, dynamic and innovative as a result of the exchanges and transfers of knowledge that migration has facilitated. As the theme for this Council Meeting suggests, we are indeed all beneficiaries of migration. Migration has, and continues to be, a key driver of our human progress and development.

At the same time, large socioeconomic disparities still persist within and among countries, and decisions to migrate are all too often made out of necessity rather than choice. We must continue to address the suffering and hardship faced by many who are forced to migrate, and we must never lose sight of the human face of migration.

Mr. Chair,

I am proud to represent a country that, for the past three years, has had the most liberal system for labor migration in the OECD. As a follow-up to our labor migration reform, I appointed a Parliamentary Committee

on Circular Migration and Development in 2009. The Committee was tasked with proposing measures to remove obstacles to increased back-and-forth mobility – what we call “spontaneous circular migration” – between Sweden and migrants’ countries of origin, and to promote its positive development effects.

The Committee presented its final report to me in March this year, containing 24 specific proposals. Among other things, it has been proposed to allow periods of absence from Sweden longer than one year without loss of permanent residency status, relaxed rules on reacquisition of Swedish citizenship, state support to the development-related efforts of Diaspora organizations and the establishment of a website on remittances which would allow people to compare the prices of sending money to third countries. The proposals were sent to concerned authorities, trade unions, universities, migrant organizations and other stakeholders for comments during the summer, and we are now carefully considering them within the Swedish Government Offices. Our ambition is to present a proposition to Parliament sometime next year.

Mr. Chair,

Sweden welcomes the good work IOM does in conducting migration research, stimulating policy debate and offering practical approaches to various current and future migration challenges, not least within the framework of the International Dialogue on Migration and through publication of the World Migration Report. Moreover, we appreciate the work IOM is doing in the field of return, as well as the Organization’s capacity building efforts within the broad field of migration management. Furthermore IOM plays an important role in refugee resettlement.

Sweden also supports IOM’s involvement in the Global Migration Group, which constitutes an important forum for cooperation and coordination on migration issues. We encourage the GMG to continue to identify new areas for cooperation that can strengthen coordination between its members in order to avoid gaps and overlaps.

Mr. Chair,

Sweden welcomes IOM's new organizational structure. The ambition to further consolidate activities and the commitment to the efficient use of funds to make the organization even more efficient are essential. We also welcome the focus on gender issues and that the organization is mainstreaming its gender policy into all programmes with the aim to address the specific gender-related needs of migrants.

We commend IOM for its work as cluster lead for camp coordination and camp management in situations of natural disasters. We attach great importance to IOM's active and constructive involvement in all relevant fora for humanitarian coordination, both at global and at country level, as well as IOM's support for the Humanitarian Coordinator function. In this context, we encourage the development of a humanitarian strategy for IOM.

Mr. Chair,

As you know, Sweden will host the 7th meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Stockholm in 2014. I am proud of the way that the international community has come together to discuss these issues in a spirit of true partnership. I thank the outgoing Swiss Chair and all the previous chairs for their able stewardships of the GFMD, and I wish the incoming chair Mauritius all the best. It will be my pleasure to welcome your Governments to Stockholm in the spring of 2014.

In conclusion, I would like on behalf of Sweden to thank IOM's staff for their dedicated work in helping migrants all over the world.

Thank you.