



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS TO THE UNITED NATIONS
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

MISSION PERMANENTE DE LA REPUBLIQUE DE MAURICE AUPRES DES NATIONS UNIES
ET DES AUTRES ORGANISATIONS INTERNATIONALES

96th Session of the Council of the
International Organization for Migration
2-5 December 2008

Statement by the delegation of the
Republic of Mauritius

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Mr. Chairman

My delegation would like to join previous speakers in congratulating you for your election as Chair of the 96th Session of the IOM Council.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by Nigeria on behalf of the African Group.

Mr. Chairman

The issue of migration is high on the agenda of the Mauritius Government.

This is mainly because Mauritius believes that migration is an inevitable consequence of globalisation and that, if managed properly, it can be a useful tool to address some of the challenges linked with globalisation and promote development, especially in low-income and middle-income countries.

Moreover, the need to devise a comprehensive labour migration programme was imperative for Mauritius, a Small Island Developing State with no natural resource except its people.

My delegation would like to seize this opportunity to share the experience and perspectives of Mauritius on Circular Migration, which the Government of Mauritius is seeking to implement with the assistance of IOM and its main development partners.

Mr. Chairman

Mauritius is at a critical juncture of its economic history. In the wake of globalisation, the country is facing unprecedented challenges linked *inter-alia* to the erosion of long-held preferences which has allowed Mauritius to prosper economically. To meet the challenge of globalisation, the Government has embarked on a 10-year reform programme to restructure the economy. This has inevitably led to labour retrenchment in two key traditional sectors: Sugar and Textiles.

Coupled with this, the country is faced with the problem of growing unemployment on account of an increasing number of new entrants in the labour market. Additionally, the rate of female unemployment is relatively high in Mauritius.

One of the possible solutions for our growing unemployment was to devise Circular Migration Programmes that would offer an opportunity to those unskilled and semi-skilled workers who lose their jobs or those whose skills do not help them to find suitable jobs in Mauritius to spend a few years abroad to build their skills before returning home to find employment in the new sectors or to start a business.

In this context, the Government of Mauritius came up with a Circular Migration Project with the development aspect at its core. The Project is based on the principles of cooperation, namely (i) cooperation with IOM as the leading migration agency that

could assist Mauritius in reaching migration agreements, and (ii) cooperation with the potential receiving countries to mitigate the fear often associated with labour migration.

The Project also draws on the triple win principles, that is, benefits would accrue to:

- Receiving countries that would fill labour shortages, increase revenue, and reduce social tensions related to irregular migration;
- Sending countries that would accumulate savings and build their human capital; and
- Migrants who would increase their income, improve their skills, maintain links with their families, and create trade or investment linkages between countries.

To ensure that the Circular Migration Project is a success, Mauritius has set up a National Empowerment Foundation on the basis of a Public and Private Sector Partnership for:

- Training and reskilling the unemployed, including those earmarked for Circular Migration;
- Small and Medium Enterprise development;
- Integrated social development for the poor; and
- Social housing.

The National Empowerment Foundation will be used to implement the Circular Migration Project, i.e. pre-departure, departure, training and, on return, to help to find employment in new sectors or to start a business. IOM is working in close collaboration with the National Empowerment Foundation for a matching service for training and reskilling the unemployed. IOM is also helping to set up a Generalized Database for Mauritians seeking employment abroad and a Migration Research Centre which would enhance the capacity of Mauritius to manage labour migration projects.

Mr. Chairman

To implement the Circular Migration Project, the policy of Mauritius is to go through Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements. In this regard, Mauritius has been seeking partners that would be interested to start a pilot project with Mauritius.

A concrete development to this initiative was the signature on 23 September 2008 of a Bilateral Agreement on Circular Migration between Mauritius and France. Under this Agreement, low-skilled Mauritian workers would be able to go and work in France, gain experience, save money, before returning to Mauritius to find employment in new sectors of the economy or set up their own Small and Medium Enterprises. The procedures to implement this Agreement are currently being discussed by both parties.

The Agreement was presented during the workshop on “*Creating development benefits through Circular Migration*” held in Mauritius in September 2008 under the auspices of the European Commission and the Government of Mauritius. It may be recalled that one of the objectives of the Workshop was to inspire concrete outcomes and the establishment of operational projects involving migrant source and host countries.

The Agreement between Mauritius and France was also projected at the Second Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development held on 24 and 25 November 2008 in Paris.

The Government of Mauritius hopes to establish similar agreements with other interested countries.

Mr. Chairman

Circular migration is becoming an important component of the next stage of the national economic development of Mauritius. However, to be able to effectively implement the various programmes envisaged under the Circular Migration Project, Mauritius would require technical assistance and financial support from the IOM and the development partners. We would like to reiterate our plea for assistance in this regard.

We would also like to seize this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to IOM for its support to Mauritius since it joined the Organisation in 2006. We are confident that under the new leadership, this cooperation will continue.

Finally, my delegation would like to state that the actual financial crisis should not impact negatively on Migration and should not be used by destination countries to close their borders.

Legal migration must be organised, regulated and promoted in a spirit of solidarity and co-responsibility, in order to remain a vector of human exchanges and development. The success of this policy will depend on increased cooperation with the origin and transit countries.

I thank you Mr. President.