

DOHA SYMPOSIUM
FAMILY, MIGRATION AND DIGNITY
Doha, Qatar 27-29 March 2012

Organized by the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development (DIIFSD)

Opening remarks on the Symposium significance, content, expectations and process.
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Welcome to a historic occasion, a first ever global gathering of experts addressing key issues of our time: migration, family, and human dignity.

Indeed, despite thousands of years of human migration, usually in family groups, this is the first time that migration and family have been looked at together in a truly international forum.

This first event is significant in who is here as well as what is on the agenda. It is safe to say that we are truly eminent gathering of academics and practitioners who know what we are talking about. We represent – necessarily-- a multi-disciplinary, multi-sector and multi-issue approach. A look around this room will confirm that the best expertise from around the world is well represented here. Nearly all of the key UN and international intergovernmental organizations are represented, as are important civil society organizations.

The symposium organizers intend an equally significant process and outcome over these next three days. We expect all of here to work together to grasp the complex web of issues, connections and challenges in the nexus between contemporary migration and family: family integrity, family unity, family function. We expect to identify the norms, standards, policies and practices that support –or don't-- family in the context of international mobility. And we hope to elaborate appropriate and viable recommendations for effective policy and practice. Worldwide.

The context we face may appear daunting. But if migration and family is already a major global challenge, it will become even more so in the next 20 years, and beyond.

According to the best available UN figures, 214 million people lived outside their country of birth or citizenship in 2010. But that figure measures those who are residing outside for one year or more. We simply don't have a measure of the millions more who migrate for temporary and seasonal work but return home in the course of any year. Much less do we have a clear estimate of immediate family members of migrating persons left behind and usually dependent on those abroad for their material sustenance. An average of one dependent for each migrant abroad would give another 214 million, meaning a total of concern approaching 450 million people. And that without counting those in temporary migration where family breadwinners may be absent from home for many months, even most of the year. But really, we just don't know even this basic data.

Today's trends suggest that these numbers, these real situations, are going to get considerably bigger in the next two to three decades. Many Western countries are reaching so called fertility rates of population –and work force-- free fall. But not only “western” countries. China's work force will decline by between 126 and 180 million people in less than 20 years. The Russian workforce is now losing one million persons a year. Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Iran, both Koreas, Lebanon, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Tunisia, Turkey, and Vietnam --among others-- have reached or are reaching zero population growth rates. Which means we can count on three, even two hands, the number of years before workforce and social security system bases go into stark decline.

And with what alternatives to migration? In the case of China, only 20% of the expected workforce reduction can be compensated for by increasing female workforce participation, raising retirement age, economic growth and enhancing productivity rates.

That is another discussion. However, what these trends mean is that issues of family and migration will become more immediate, more widespread and more urgent. The approach here is to obtain an overview of

what and where the situations and issues are today, to try to identify what all of the main issues and intersections are. We have sought to assemble a range of expertise and competencies in the fields that are already evidently engaged.

The agenda and participation has been deliberately constructed. We start off by reviewing the evidence, then we examine the specific issues, identify policy and practical references, and --building on all this-- identify areas of need, effective responses and recommendations for governance, policy and good practice.

The agenda calls for in today's sessions a review of the general situations and issues as they are experienced in origin and destination countries, with an attempt to grasp regional overviews. Tomorrow, we focus on examining specific groups --specific issue groups, how they are affected and what needs to be done to uphold and strengthen family support in these situations. With this context, the afternoon session intends to critically review policy frameworks and systems regarding how they take into account and address issues of family. Thursday morning, a first session will study the specific, all important questions of family relationship to material sufficiency and social participation. Then we take up the challenge of identifying the existing and possible policy lines and practical measures to protect and advance family in the context of increasing migration. These lines and actions, of course, rooted in the principles and standards that define the rule of law and a rights based approach to governing society to ensure dignity and decent work and life for all those in it.

You have been asked to share short presentations in an area where you have experience and expertise. You have also been asked to prepare a substantial paper for publication. The organizers believe this is an outstanding and unique opportunity to establish academic literature on this interdisciplinary theme. By so doing, to encourage new and further research, debate and action.

In order to pack as many perspectives in the short time we have been offered here, we ask all presenters to be mercifully brief. We recognize that all here are experts and that the discussion in each session will provide further enrichment to the invited presentations. Each session should allow for a half hour or more of discussion, following the four or five presentations on each panel. You will see that each section of the agenda, each day, concludes with an open dialogue session. This should allow from the first day forward, exchange on and discussion of conclusions and recommendations among all of us together. This approach, this methodology is intentionally a challenge and an opportunity for your engagement. It is intended to encourage full participation. We hope it will facilitate full ownership of the conclusions and results. And we hope you all will take onward a shared commitment to realize the recommendations.

It is with great appreciation that we acknowledge this unprecedented opportunity is thanks to the vision and initiative of the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.

I expect that this occasion is a beginning. Carrying forward work on this agenda of dignity and welfare for families will require concerted efforts, cooperation and coordination. We certainly can't predetermine how this should go forward. But I see it self-evident that we have gathered here an already existing community of practice. This community will surely want to continue to dialogue, network and cooperate. To share the results more widely, a short forum is already planned in Geneva in April on the occasion of the next session of the UN Committee on Migrant Workers. Other ideas will surely surface on how we keep in touch and cooperate in the future.

Thank you for being here and thank you for your attention. Now it's *tally ho* to get down to work!

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