



Berne Initiative Consultations:
“An International Agenda for Migration Management”
2 – 3 July 2003, Berne, Switzerland

REPORT

The Berne Initiative was launched in 2001 to open a dialogue between governments on international migration issues. The goal of the Berne Initiative is to establish a states-owned consultative process focused on obtaining better management of migration at the regional and global levels through enhanced cooperation between states. The outcome is projected to be a framework for inter-state co-operation for the management of migration.

At the “International Symposium on Migration” (June 2001, Berne), it was concluded that there is a need for a balanced approach to facilitate regular migration and prevent irregular migration, and that mutual benefits could derive from enhanced inter-state cooperation. The participants of the Symposium decided to take further the idea of developing a framework of guiding principles for the management of migration, through an ongoing and broadened process of consultations. It was clear that the Berne Initiative would not focus on the development of new international law, but rather on the exchange of ideas leading to the identification of common understandings and effective practices in the field of international migration.

How can the Berne Initiative contribute to better migration management?

To discuss this question, the Swiss Federal Office for Refugees invited some 40 Government migration experts and 20 independent migration experts to the “Berne Initiative Consultations” which took place on 2 and 3 July 2003 in Berne, Switzerland.

In his opening statement, Mr. Jean-Daniel Gerber, Director of the Swiss Federal Office for Refugees, highlighted the Berne Initiative as a *states’ owned process*. It was the first time that government and independent experts from all regions of the world had come together to lay the ground for the development of a framework of common understandings and effective practices for migration management, and he called for the active participation of all those present. He suggested that the framework could take the form of an *International Agenda for Migration Management*.

Mr. Jan O Karlsson, Minister for Development Co-operation, Migration and Asylum Policy, Sweden, welcomed the idea and agreed strongly that broad participation in this process was essential. He invited the widest possible variety of interests and stakeholders, including migrant organisations, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, national and international banks, employer organisations and trade unions, academia, mass media and civil society, all of whom could help identify and put together the building blocks for the framework.

In his view, migration was neither a problem nor a solution but “a human, social, economic and political phenomenon” requiring urgent attention at the global level. In endorsing the need for an *International Agenda for Migration Management*, he concluded that more had to be done to meet demographic and labour market challenges and to unleash the potential contribution of migration to development.

Ms. Patricia A. Sto. Tomas, Secretary Department of Labour, The Philippines, drew on the rich and varied experience of the Philippines to demonstrate how a managed approach to labour migration could be of substantial benefit to countries of origin and destination and, most importantly, to the migrants themselves.

She explained that the Philippines had a carefully planned, comprehensive approach to the management of migration including pre-departure counselling and training, the regulation and monitoring of recruitment practices, the development and contracting of bi-lateral arrangements, and close co-operation with countries of destination to ensure social integration, professional efficiency and overall protection of the rights of migrant workers. The end result was an equitable sharing of benefits: the labour needs of countries of destination were met, the economies of countries of origin were boosted by remittances sent home by Filipino workers abroad, and migrants obtained livelihoods for themselves and their families. All this could be achieved in a context of orderly movement.

In her statement, Prof. Dr. Rita Süßmuth, President of the Independent Council on Immigration of the Federal Government, Germany, emphasised, first of all, the need for the world to acknowledge the reality of migration. There had to be recognition and acceptance of the fact that it could make a positive contribution to society, but for that to happen more serious and substantial reflection was required on the reasons why people move, and on the costs and benefits that accompany that movement.

She also noted that it was particularly important to realise that efforts at the national level had to be complemented by sustained international endeavours. Hence, the essential value of the Berne Initiative as a platform that could bring together all interested parties to determine what common orientations could be developed.

Mr. Gervais Appave, Director, Migration Policy and Research Programme, International Organization for Migration (IOM), outlined the working arrangements for the two day consultations and used a formula to encapsulate the fundamental nature of the Berne Initiative: It is a process that is *consultative, co-operative, comprehensive, consistent* (not uniform but broadly compatible) and *balanced*, but *non-binding* and *non-prescriptive*.

After a short discussion in plenary, the participants were assigned to working groups in order to identify common understandings on which the *International Agenda for Migration Management* could be based. Prior to the meeting, each participant received a discussion paper including a set of common understandings that should serve as a basis for discussion.

Following this discussion, participants worked in workshops covering the following topics: International Co-operation, Integration, Management of Entry and Stay, National Migration Policy, Asylum and International Protection of Refugees, Return, Human Rights of Migrants, Regular Migration, Irregular Migration, Management of Public Opinion and Information, Labour Migration, Migration and Trade, Migration and International and National Security, Migration and Health, Migration and Environmental Conservation as well as accompanying measures.

Participants were asked to identify effective practices for a planned, balanced and comprehensive approach to management of migration with regard to the relevant workshop topic. Each chair and rapporteur received a background paper including model ideas for effective practices that could be used to prompt the discussion.

The aim of the workshops was fully met. Discussion in all of the groups was open, lively and – given the breadth of representation – very well informed. Participants supported both the general concept of an *International Agenda for Migration Management* and, more specifically, its structure in terms of a combination of common understandings on the fundamental nature of contemporary migration and a set of non-binding effective practices drawn from the actual experiences of participating governments. The input received from the workshops and plenary sessions helped not only to further develop the *International Agenda for Migration Management*, but also to shape the direction of the Berne Initiative as a whole.

Two summing up sessions were conducted by Dr. Rolf Jenny, Director, International Migration Policy Programme (IMP), and Mr. Per Sjögren, Director General for Migration, Sweden.

Mr. Rolf Jenny highlighted the significance that participants had attached to the notion of mutual responsibility. For international migration to be managed effectively, all countries affected by migration had to be willing to engage in co-operation. He had also been struck by the centrality of the migration-development linkage, which should be addressed in both the common understandings and the effective practices.

He noted that it was important to give sufficient attention to the task of informing and educating public opinion. There were misunderstandings that had to be cleared, myths that had to be debunked and objective information to be provided on the nature and value of migration. Finally, it was clear that the *International Agenda for Migration Management* should focus on the importance of partnership, expressed not only in terms

of common interests and goals, but also through a willingness to share information, lessons learnt, and resources.

Mr. Per Sjögren pointed out that almost every workshop discussed the importance of the information dimension. Lack of information or misinformation may lead to poor decisions by potential migrants and exploitation by smugglers, traffickers, employers and others. It was one thing to produce good migration legislation, policies and procedures. It was another to ensure that they are known and understood by migrants, practitioners, host communities, countries of origin, civil society, and the media.

He detected, in the workshop discussions, an overarching plea for a more systematic approach to policy development. Uni-dimensional approaches to complex issues such as integration or border control were unlikely to be successful. Instead, migration should be viewed as a continuum that must be addressed in all of its facets, including by close co-ordination at national, regional and international level on policy development and implementation as well as by consciousness of the impact of migration on different policy areas and vice versa. It was, moreover, emphasised that it is not possible to deal effectively with migration policy without addressing major adjoining policy fields.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Jean-Daniel Gerber expressed his sincere thanks to all participants for the commitment and energy they had invested in the two-day consultations.

He was pleased that the concept of an *International Agenda for Migration Management* provided a sound basis for reflection and debate, and drew attention to some of the key issues raised in the discussions: the fundamental rights and dignity of migrants, regardless of their status; the need to carefully balance the rights and obligations of states against the rights and obligations of migrants; the increasing level of significance attached to the migration and development equation; the notion of adequate resources for migration management, effective technical co-operation and capacity-building; and the notion of partnership including an understanding of the impact of national policies on all stakeholders including other States.

The input received at the consultations will be used to produce a substantial working document for the further development of the Berne Initiative. This document will be used as an instrument for consultations in wider circles as the Berne Initiative process matures. Mr. Jean-Daniel Gerber invited the participants to further contribute actively in the future development of the *International Agenda for Migration Management* and undertook to send a draft working document to all participants for review and comment, before it is given wider circulation.