



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ECWA/POP/CONF.4/INF.5  
19 October 1981  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Conference on International Migration  
in the Arab World

11-16 May 1981  
Nicosia, Cyprus

ADDRESS BY MR. RIAD TABBARAH  
CHIEF, POPULATION DIVISION

TO THE CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION  
IN THE ARAB WORLD

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Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Executive Secretary of ECWA has asked me to convey to the Government of Cyprus the deep appreciation of the United Nations for the hospitality and cooperation we have received in the organization of this conference. As you all know, the very sad events that are taking place in Lebanon have forced a last minute change of venue from Beirut to Nicosia. Had it not been for the tremendous cooperation and understanding of the various government ministries and departments, particularly the ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Interior and the departments of Immigration Civil Aviation and Airport Administration, the organization of this conference would not have been possible. Because of this cooperation and understanding on the other hand we are holding the conference under the most comfortable of circumstances.

The subject of international migration is rapidly increasing in importance in both the academic and political circles around the world. In Central and North America, illegal migration is emerging as a major recent issue. In the receiving countries of Europe, the emerging issues have to do with the return of immigrants to their home countries and the second generation migrants remaining in the receiving countries. In Africa, concern is often expressed over temporary or circular migration across boundaries and in the Far East, recent flows of refugees have taken the greatest part of the attention of both academicians and decision makers.

In the Arab world, all of these concerns are prominent and some more. Illegal migration, return migration, nomadic and circular migration, refugees, the brain drain, temporary and permanent migrations, the ethnic and political impacts and other issues are all of concern in this region. Arab development has been unique in that, of the three factors of production-land, labour and capital-it is capital that is in relative abundance while the major shortages have been in the supply of labour and human resources. As a result, considerable movements of population and labour have been taking place between countries of the region, generally from the non-oil-exporting countries to the oil-exporting-countries. At first, these movements relieved unemployment in the sending countries while helping to satisfy the need for labour of the receiving countries. As things progressed, the sending countries began themselves to experience shortages of

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labour and this led to the situation where countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, and others have become, at the same time, importers and exporters of labour. Jordan, for example, exports its own nationals to the Gulf while importing Syrians, Egyptians and, lately, even Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos and others in their replacement. Add to this the fact that, the Arab world in general, is experiencing, at the same time, a brain drain to the developed countries while importing persons with similar qualifications from these countries and you will get an idea of the complexity and importance of the international migration phenomenon in the Arab world.

Facing this, there has been a lack of coordinated action by the countries of our region. Indeed, there has been, until very recently, a general neglect of the subject among Arab academicians and intellectuals. By organizing this first major regional conference on the subject, ECWA is undertaking a first step in initiating intelligent and scientific discussion of the subject in the hope that future steps will eventually lead to appropriate political action.

This is a scientific conference. Scientific in that its aim is to discuss views expressed by experts, from within and without this region, in the various aspects of the subject. These experts have been carefully chosen and represent the highest possible quality of expertise we could find. Most of them are known to most of us. They bring with them the experiences of other countries and a knowledge of the ways that these countries used in solving the problems associated with international migration. It is a conference in that it is a forum for discussion among country representatives and between them and the experts of the major issues facing policy making in their countries. The final session of the Conference is a roundtable in which conclusions will be drawn so that we may be able to communicate your views to the various bodies of the United Nations and to receive guidance as to the future steps we need to take to continue our work in this very important field of population and development.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The success of this conference is in your hands. It is going to depend on the organization of the sessions and on the presentation of the papers by the experts. It is

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going to depend, even more, on your discussions at these sessions and on the conclusions that will be drawn by you at the end of the Conference. We, at the secretariat, are at your disposal for any assistance that we can render but we shall take only a supportive role in the conduct of this conference. In this spirit, we wish you success in your deliberations.

