

The Hague Process-Global Hearing

Remarks for June 4-5 Global Hearing on Refugees and Migration by Peter Sutherland, UN SRSG

1. I wish I could be there with you during this important moment in the life of The Hague Process and in our common effort to make progress on the global agenda on migration and refugees.
2. We find ourselves at an especially sensitive and critical crossroads. Migration and mobility are becoming ever more central in our lives. The stock of migrants is increasing. New poles of attraction—the BRICs, Turkey, Mexico, South Africa, southeast Asia, and other regions—are emerging. Climate change poses a new and unpredictable threat. Our economies rely more and more on ensuring that the right workers are in the right place at the right time.
3. Yet the politics of migration have turned toxic in too many places. Anti-immigrant populists are being seated in Parliaments in Europe and elsewhere, seizing control of the debate and silencing more sensible politicians. The gap in school achievement between natives and newcomers is growing. Discrimination and xenophobia are prevailing.
4. One response would be to be paralyzed by all this, to cower in some dark, safe space until a more auspicious political climate emerges.
5. But if we did so, not only would we be betraying our own principals, we would be misreading what our publics are demanding.
6. When five or 10 or even 15 percent of voters cast their lot with anti-immigrant populists, what we should recognize is the concern of the other 80 or 90 percent of voters who fear a downward spiral in social cohesion, civility, social justice, and fairness.
7. There should be no place in the 21st century for the extreme degradation of the human rights of migrants that we see in too many places. There is no place for the violence and exploitation that is sanctioned by a failure to build mobility systems that are safe, legal, orderly, and secure. And there is no place for self-destructive policies that starve our economies of needed workers and our societies of the benefits of an inclusive form of diversity.
8. It is not as if we are at a loss to know what needs to be done. Too many of our national immigration systems are broken. Our public institutions have not adapted to the demands of diversity and the need to take the necessary steps to build inclusive societies. Even the asylum system—one of the bright spots of the past century in terms of international cooperation—is in need of serious reform.
9. I trust we will seize this opportunity to build a positive agenda next year at the UN's High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development. I can assure you that Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stands ready to support all wise efforts to improve the international migration system.

10. Whether this means addressing the plight of migrants stranded by conflict, of protecting children in transit, of amplifying the development impacts of migration, or any of a host of other opportunities and challenges we face, our scope for action is very significant.
11. Even in these very difficult economic and political times, we should be pleased by the progress that is being made. It is worth remembering, for instance, that the Domestic Workers Convention was forged during the darkest days of the global financial crisis.
12. At the heart of our efforts must be cooperation—cooperation across borders and across sectors. Migration is by definition a transnational and cross-disciplinary phenomenon.
13. This is why I am delighted that The Hague Process has focused this Global Hearing on the role of businesses and cities—perhaps two of the most important actors in the lives of migrants and refugees.
14. In so many parts of the world, especially in the West—where many important national politicians appear to have abdicated their responsibilities when it comes to immigration and immigrant integration—some municipal leaders have taken the lead. The private sector, meanwhile, not only stands to gain the most from immigration, but it also bears the most important responsibility in integrating workers into our societies.
15. I wish you insight and inspiration in your deliberations, and look forward to hearing the conclusions you reach.