



OPENING STATEMENT

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin Co-Chairman

“Crossing Borders, Keeping Connected: Women, Migration and Development in the OSCE Region” April 24, 2008

Good morning. It's great to be here at a hearing on an issue that the Commission has not focused on in some time—and if memory serves me correctly, I think this is the first Commission hearing on this exact topic of women and migration so I'm pleased that we are finally addressing this important issue.

The OSCE has taken a number of commitments with regard to migration and the Office of the Economic Coordinator has created initiatives, particularly in sending countries, to help migrants learn their rights and to avoid many of the traps, such as trafficking, that can ensnare migrant laborers.

Much of the focus on women has been on trafficking prevention, which is laudable, but as we are highlighting today, the issues surrounding women and migration are more complex than simply anti-trafficking efforts. We have to look at not only their situation once they arrive in their destination country, but at the family and community situation in their home country.

To me, the potential negative or positive impact of migration for the woman's home situation seems to be disproportionately higher than that for men and I'd be interested to hear the views of our panelists on that specific question.

The financial contributions of migrants—specifically women migrants—is also an area that deserves greater attention.

The numbers here are just staggering. The World Bank estimates remittances at \$204 billion in 2007.

Let's contrast that with the \$104 billion in direct aid that the major donor countries gave in 2006.

In the OSCE region, we have a number of countries whose economies rely heavily on remittances: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Tajikistan—in all of these countries remittances are greater than any other category of capital inflows, and account for more than 5 per cent of GDP (in some cases even reaching over 30 per cent of GDP).

What makes the remittance figures even more interesting is the human factor—the World Bank noted that “remittances are large, counter-cyclical, and pro-poor. They are better targeted to the needs of the poor than official aid or foreign direct investment.”

That means if we can find ways to leverage and to support remittances, particularly by the increasing number of women migrants, then I think we can help tackle at least part of the development problems in the sending countries.

I look forward to hearing what the witnesses have to tell us on that issue. Thank you.