Opening Remarks of Mr. Pasquale Lupoli – Regional Director – IOM Regional Office - Cairo

Dear Ambassador Faeqa, Mr. Neto, and Distinguished Guests.

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today to open this Regional Consultative Meeting on International Migration and Development, a topic of particular importance to the Arab region not only because of the social and political changes that have occurred in the past few years and which continue to develop, but also because of the important role that migration has played in the region’s development for the past decades and will no doubt continue to play in the future.

Our region is unique in that it comprises some of the largest destination countries for foreign labour as well as some of the most important countries of origin whose communities abroad contribute to economic development not only through sending remittances but also through their investments, the transfer of their skills to build capacity in their home countries, and their ability to build trading networks that contribute to economic growth.
We could simply look at the statistics to get a sense of the importance of this issue for our region:

- An estimated 22 million foreign workers in the GCC sending home over $80 billion in remittances each year, making it the source of one-fifth of the world’s remittances.
- Egyptians abroad alone contributed almost $18 billion in remittances last year, while Moroccans and Tunisians abroad remitted the equivalent of 7.2% and 4.2% of their countries’ GDP respectively.

But to look only at the numbers would not tell the whole story. Migrants to and within the region as well as Arab communities abroad contribute to the region’s social and economic development in ways that cannot be captured in statistics.

The foreign workers within our region help to run our cities, build our infrastructure, educate our children, and take care of loved ones when they are sick.

At the same time, Arab communities abroad are volunteering their time everyday to mentor young entrepreneurs in the region, to provide assistance and
health services to the poor and those in need, as well as to help new Arab migrants adjust and integrate into their new communities in countries of destination.

And probably at no other time is the support of Arab communities abroad more visible and more vital than in times of crisis and hardship, and we have seen this in abundance in our region over the past few years, not only through the disproportionate rise in the size of remittances which can be attributed, at least in part, as a response to the economic challenges many have been facing in the region throughout this period of transition, but also through the humanitarian missions and support that many associations have provided.

In December of last year, IOM jointly organized a workshop with the League of Arab States which brought together representatives of associations of Arab expatriate health professionals. To learn of the scope of their networks and the scale of the support they have provided for the region is truly inspirational: From organizing a shipment of emergency medical supplies into Misrata as the conflict was unfolding in Libya, to providing health services to Syrian refugees, to
organizing medical convoys to rural communities in Upper Egypt; the support these types of organizations provide to the Arab community cannot be overstated.

IOM’s role as an organization engaged in linking migration with development for the benefit of all, is to work with these communities to build on their good work and to open opportunities for their further engagement in development initiatives, as well as to work with governments to promote effective engagement with their communities abroad, to develop the macro-level policies that support expatriate engagement in economic development as well as the micro-level programmes that foster positive collaboration between expatriates and their communities of origin; and we are actively involved in several projects in the region to this effect.

The opportunities for our region to harness the talents and goodwill of Arab expatriates are significant, and it is vital that governments continue to develop policies and programmes to effectively engage with expatriate communities.

At the same time, we cannot forget the challenges and injustices that many migrants may face during their
journey, and which negatively impact migration’s potential to act as an instrument for development. While, it must be noted, in the majority of cases the migrant experience is a positive one, some migrants originating from the region, transiting through the region, or working within the Arab region are faced with hardships and injustices ranging from sub-standard working conditions, to non-payment of wages, to illegal recruitment fees to, in the worst of cases, human trafficking.

It is to the benefit of all of us to see these practices eliminated, and their eradication must be a priority for each and every one of us in this region.

This meeting offers us the opportunity to reflect on the positive work that has been done in the region over the past seven years since the first High Level Dialogue on International Migration & Development in 2006, and to consider the work that is still required of all of us to ensure that migration acts as a catalyst for positive and sustainable social and economic development in the region and beyond.
I am certain that this engagement will lead to fruitful and innovative ideas to be followed up at the High Level Dialogue in October and beyond; and I assure you of IOM’s continued support in your initiatives.

IOM views the 2013 High Level Dialogue as an important opportunity to improve the governance of migration, as well as the migration-development nexus in particular, at local, national, regional and global levels, while keeping the rights and well-being of migrants at the centre of the debate.

As the only international organization with a global mandate and footprint on migration, IOM has been intimately involved in the development and the build up to the 2013 High Level Dialogue and will play an important role in the implementation of the recommendations and initiatives to come out of the event.

We are certainly looking forward to our further engagement in this important and evolving field as we look to the outcomes of the 2013 HLD, to the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, and beyond.
Finally, I wish to thank our fellow organizers for this event: the League of Arab States, and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

This event serves to further cement our growing collaboration, particularly in the field of Migration & Development, and we look forward to continuing to build our partnership as we move forward.

I wish us all a fruitful and productive two days.

Thank You.