

# Immigrants and Emigrants

*by HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal*

Almost four centuries ago, just before Christmas, a brave group of political and religious refugees fleeing the English regime dropped anchor off the shores of the New World. (At that time, native American tribes had not thought of immigration policy for asylum-seekers.) Shortly afterwards, the United States opened its first declaration of a shared consciousness with the inclusive phrase 'we, the people'.

Immigration Policy nowadays concentrates on migrants when they reach the shores of the host country. I am more interested in why so many have left their homes and families in the first place. What happened to their will to stay? When governments fail to deliver economically, socially and more importantly humanely, when progress does not take place and when fair representation is not forthcoming, 'we, the people' all over the world would be ready to vote with our feet – if we can.

I refer to Merrill Lynch regarding world fortunes: 1.3 trillion dollars, invested in the US and Europe, are owned by several thousand Arabs. At the same time, every day, contented and lucky cows in the European Union receive an income in the form of government subsidies that amounts to \$2 per head, an income much higher than millions of men and women in Asia and Africa can earn by hard work. If European taxpayers are willing to subsidise cows to the tune of millions of dollars per day, would they not be willing to tackle that right-winger's bogeyman, the 'issue of immigration' in the same way – by subsidising the development initiatives for a viable civil society which would give migrants something to stay and work for at home? In this day and age, the phenomenon of globalisation has tangible effects on so many aspects of our daily lives. The migration of people has become a complex and powerful occurrence, too strong to deal with in the outdated and traditional ways which used to be effective. What is needed is a fairer system in which people from all over the world, nationalities regardless, can earn a decent living and build for a future in their own homelands.

I would like to point out that the 'third world' for some is the 'first world' for others. Your 'immigration issues' are our 'emigration issues' – you gain the brains of our most resourceful people while our 'brain-drain' leads to a vicious

spiral of cultural and intellectual decline at home as we lose the very talent we need to move forward, not to mention the investment we paid at such a cost to educate them. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, financially and in terms of intellectual richness; should our shared globe really become a case-study for 'survival of the fittest'? Many leading refugee charities warned the EU on the occasion of World Refugee Day this year against the construction of 'Fortress Europe', and yet still there exists no common policy that respects the human dimension. Boutros Boutros-Ghali also talked of these 'profound disagreements' dividing the EU members on immigration policy at the Club of Monaco this year, but in the context of the Mediterranean. Is it not time to approach these issues from a regional perspective, instead of seeing them in the black-and-white polarity of 'First World' versus 'Third World'? After all, with UNHCR estimating that seventy percent of the world's total refugees are Muslims, there is no doubt we in the Middle East have an important role to play in addressing the issue.

In 1994, we spoke of migration at the Casablanca Middle East and North Africa Summit. We proposed \$35 billion for a decade of infrastructure development from Morocco to Turkey inclusive. Shimon Peres and I both inquired from the EU in Brussels on what basis these funds would be spent. I expected an answer along the lines of, "We'll form a task force and come back to you in nine months". They actually said, "First come, first served". So I became mindful of the fact that projects take precedence over concepts. Meanwhile, more than ten times the sum we proposed for development has been spent on arms deals in the regions. In Jordan, our tiny population of 5.3 million has, since 1948, absorbed something of the order of 1.5 million Palestinian refugees from the Israeli-Palestine conflict. We are anxious about Iraq's 22 million inhabitants who now face carnage and mayhem at home. Where is the post-war reconstruction, development and attention to human rights? Where, for that matter, is *pre-war* construction, development and human rights? How long do you think you can absorb the fleeing millions on the basis of adhocism at the borders? Study after study has proven that borders will be breached regardless of their security, so surely some faith needs to be put into a system where incentives, rather than obstructions, direct the flow of would-be migrants. Such considerations were formulated in a holistic proposal in the Hague Declaration of 2002, which I hope can be the catalyst which can change the way migration and refugees are perceived. It must be time for us to focus on the huge potential inherent in the movement of people from one land to another, and examine how greater international cooperation can access this rich source of potential.

We do not even need to talk about material reconstruction so much as about psychological reconstruction – the reconstruction of hearts and minds. But the ‘coalition of the willing’, which (it has been suggested) should try and become a ‘coalition of the coherent’, does not possess the cultural collateral to restore the will and ability of occupied Iraqis to improve conditions on the ground for themselves, their family and their community.

Without ‘we, the people’, how can a nation declare the people’s constitution? What chance for democracy without the *demos*? The American example has suggested to generations that the noble soul pursues the dream of liberty and equality even if it means leaving home and family to do so. Today’s noble souls need a helping hand at home if they are truly to work for a world of peace and prosperity.

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