Thanks to the IOM and the co-conveners for the invitation to this important discussion on opportunities and constraints for Diaspora engagement in post-conflict peacebuilding.

Diaspora communities have the potential to make powerful contributions to peace and reconciliation, and are an important source of financial, entrepreneurial and human capital. They are a possible source of knowledge and expertise in early recovery.

In my own country, Chile, the scale of Diaspora is nearly one million people. Pinochet’s dictatorship forced an estimated 200,000 Chileans into exile (some 2% of the population at that time); exiles went to at least 110 countries, on all continents. Developing countries sought the talent and benefitted from the expertise of the Chilean exile community --particularly in Latin America and Africa-- composed of abundant numbers of professionals, technicians, and educators, all products of Chile’s educational system. Some developed countries also benefitted from this exile community and, at the same time, helped those exiles through various programs. When democracy returned to my country, in 1990, some stayed behind, but an important part of the Diaspora went back home contributing with new ideas to the political, economic and social development of the country. The current President of Chile Michelle Bachelet is an example of that Diaspora, having been in exile in Australia and Germany. Many international organizations, including the IOM, played a fundamental role in facilitating the return of Chilean exiles.

Experience shows that mobilizing the Diaspora is a highly complex undertaking that must be carefully undertaken and managed. Engaging Diasporas in formal peacebuilding processes -- including through inter-governmental mechanisms such as the Peacebuilding Commission-- remains a challenge. Diasporas are composed of economic exiles who migrated to seek a better future for themselves and their families, and political exiles who migrated to escape repression. More often than not, it is easier to engage former political exiles with their countries of origin, particularly when political conditions have evolved past conflict. Successful economic exiles sometimes feel that they were not allowed to be “prophets in their own land”, and it requires patience to involve them to contribute to their countries of origin. But, there are many good examples of Diaspora contribution to the recovery in post-conflict nations.
• Some Diaspora are currently engaged in key initiatives to build capacities at the country level, through projects implemented by national governments together with UN agencies, the IOM and other international actors, and with the support of donor governments.

• Such projects have helped rebuild institutions and provided critical technical support in countries under the PBC agenda. The Sierra Leone’s Department of Diaspora Affairs and the IOM will have important results to share from the “Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals project”. Lessons learned from this initiative could be applied in the development of future projects to mobilize the Diaspora in other PBC and PBF countries, including projects receiving PBF funding.

• UNDP’s Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) program also provides important experience. Similar to IOM’s Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals program, the TOKTEN program allows expatriates from program countries to return home for a period ranging from two weeks to three months to contribute their skills and services to their homeland’s development. The TOKTEN approach contributes to reducing the adverse effects of the “brain-drain”, and advances South-South cooperation, with several advantages such as shared language and traditions, relatively low cost, and speed of implementation. Importantly, the TOKTEN program is based on a spirit of volunteerism, which means that TOKTEN volunteers are not paid direct salaries, but are entitled to roundtrip air tickets and a daily subsistence allowance. The program has produced promising results in post-conflict countries such as Afghanistan, where it was launched following the Bonn Peace Agreement in December 2001. From 2002 to 2006, 38 TOKTEN volunteers supported national capacity-building efforts of the Afghan Interim Administration and the successor government.

• Considering these successful experiences, where possible, assessments of national capacities and gaps undertaken at the peacemaking phase could be strengthened by considering the role of Diaspora communities, as well as regional actors.

• Specifically, the PBSO’s “Mapping of Resources and Gaps for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi” found that Diaspora need to be further mobilized and efforts are ongoing. In May 2008, an event was organized with the support of Belgium and the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa (AWEPA) to address ways to leverage the Diaspora for socio-economic recovery. In August 2008, the private sector and Diaspora joined forces to launch a campaign to boost tourism. Moreover, remittances are playing a critical role in the socio-economic recovery of the country. While Burundi does not keep detailed track of remittances, and the 2008 World Bank Migration and Remittances Factbook did not gather data for Burundi, it is estimated that between $4 and $16 million are remitted yearly, in part from neighboring Tanzania.
• Remittances are recognized to be a very significant channel through which Diasporas contribute to socio-economic recovery in post-conflict countries. However it is crucial to stress that remittances are private flows produced and owned by migrants who respond to personal needs and incentives. Thus, remittances do not reduce the need for official development aid and foreign direct investments, nor should they be accounted as such.

• Remittances directly augment the income of the recipient households. In addition to providing financial resources for poor households, they affect poverty and welfare, and also have an impact on macroeconomic conditions.

• Analysis of household survey data provided by the World Bank shows that remittances have reduced poverty and resulted in better development outcomes in many low-income countries. Remittances may have reduced the share of poor people in proportion to total population by 11 percentage points in Uganda, 6 percentage points in Bangladesh, and 5 percentage points in Ghana. Studies in El Salvador and Sri Lanka found that the children of remittance recipient households have a lower school drop-out rate. In Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Sri Lanka children in remittances recipient households have higher birth weights and better health indicators than other households. Remittances are also behind small business investments, especially in countries with a good investment environment.

• At a time of global crisis and job losses, the Diaspora and remittances will suffer. An anticipated significant drop in remittances will have a multiplier effect throughout the economies of many developing countries, as remittances income will drop and return migration of the unemployed may increase, a phenomenon which not only may have an evident economic impact, but also social and even political repercussions.

• Finally, this seminar provides an important forum to discuss how to more effectively harness the commitment and good-will of Diaspora communities - derived from their emotional engagement in home countries – as well as their technical expertise, in the form of critical capacities toward rebuilding institutions and providing technical support and financial resources in peace-building reconstruction and reconciliation.