

---

Howard  
DUNCAN

Executive Head  
Metropolis Project, Canada

## CLOSING REMARKS



We have covered a lot of ground in these two days of meetings on diaspora, and it will be difficult in the few minutes I have to summarize, let alone synthesize and draw sharp conclusions from the diverse material that we have encountered. Looking at the phenomena of diaspora from the points of view of both the homeland and the country of destination has been revealing, and I believe that we have all gained insights into diaspora, whether these insights concern social or economic relations, the causes of diaspora, the motivations behind return, or the political relations between the homeland and host country.

Let's begin this modest recapitulation with the concept of "diaspora" which has been our focus. When we think about the term "diaspora" it immediately suggests to all of us a kind of dispersion, often a forced dispersion, of a people from a homeland. And when we use the term "home", there is an immediate inclination to think about the question of return or, if not the question of return, at least the question of the relations between those in the homeland and those in the country of destination. We regard these relations as integral to the concept of diaspora, as distinguishing diaspora from other forms of international migration where relations to the country of origin or the idea of a homeland may be far less-pronounced. Our discussions of return have inclined me to wonder whether return is in the natural order of things, that it is perhaps the anticipated end result of the processes by which diasporas are created.

Behind our discussions has been the question of how and *whether* governments should manage the relations between the homeland and country of destination that diaspora produce or make possible. We have seen that, in some cases, these relations can be for the better, in some cases for the worse, and we take it that governments, if they are to have a role at all, will want to manage diasporic re-

lations for the overall betterment of those in host societies and for those back home. But again, the fundamental question for us has been the extent to which any of this should matter specifically to policy. The issues clearly matter for those intimately involved, but should they also matter to policy? What are we to do as policy makers or as decision makers about the facts that we have been exploring these last two days?

Let's just note a few of these things. We have learned that the issue of return is very complex, that in some cases people do not want to return although the homeland might wish that it happens, that in some cases the homeland does not want their emigrés back and that when people do return they are not particularly welcomed by their homeland. We have found in some cases that it is to the advantage of the homeland that those who are dispersed remain dispersed because of the economic advantages that they can provide to the homeland so long as they remain outside. We have learned a great deal about the difference that diaspora can make in terms of home country conflict and, more happily, in the terms of homeland reconstruction. This has been especially apparent from the experience of Croatia about which we have heard so much.

We have learned about the contributions that members of the diaspora can make to the homeland's economic, social, and political development. These issues strike most of us forcefully. As I asked on the first day of this conference why the policy maker should care about diaspora, I am now inclined to think that part of the answer has to do with helping the diaspora contribute to homeland development. Ideally, policy could facilitate this. Some of you have eloquently urged a set of recommendations for the international community to consider, recommendations about the rights and responsibilities of both source countries and the countries of destination, recommendations for managing international migration for mutual benefit. It is clear to me that we are soon going to see a considerable amount of discussion on the international stage about multilateral agreements with respect to migration. There is now a notable impetus in a number of regions in the world for bilateral or multilateral agreements that would secure an overall increase in the benefits of migration to both sending and receiving societies and to mitigate the harm that mis-managed migration can create. Some of these measures, certainly, would affect diaspora.

Implicit in some of these discussions and in the proposals that we have been offered is that the migration game is a game that can produce mutual advantages and that

we ought to drop the frequently invoked but misleading assumption that migration must be a zero sum game, that it cannot be otherwise than a zero sum game. The recommendations that I referred to a moment ago would require, for their success, that we get beyond, get away from regarding migration as a zero sum game and focus in a practical way on how we can manage the phenomena of diaspora for mutual advantage. The hope must, then, be that policy can do so, can successfully promote and enable an active diaspora for purposes of economic, social and cultural development, for purposes of helpful political activity, for purposes of reconstruction and peace-making. Or if not actively promote, at least remove barriers from.

But let us step back for a minute and remember that international migration is something that individual human beings, perhaps with their families, embark on. It is often a brave and difficult decision to leave one's home and we ought to exercise some restraint in imagining policies for managing the relations that diaspora make possible because this will often come down to managing the activities and lives of individuals. To what extent ought governments let individuals who have migrated run their own course? Should, rather, governments step back from trying to manage migration and its impacts, step back from managing the relations between the host and sending society? To what extent do these relations need managing by governments?

Being from Canada, I am from a traditional immigrant receiving society whose government is strongly involved in migration management, from an initial selection of many of our immigrants, to their settlement, integration into our society and eventual citizenship. Our governments are involved in preventing potential conflicts which can arise with respect to receiving large numbers of immigrants into our society and promoting the positive aspects of multicultural diversity that we all talked about during last two days. In other words, I am predisposed to seeing the hand of government in managing migration. I came to this conference thinking that diaspora matters a great deal and that governments should be highly involved in managing the various phenomenon we have been discussing, managing them for the benefit of one's society if not for mutual advantage. But, to go back to my speculations about the diaspora process, if we think of strong relations between the homeland and the country of destination as being in the natural order of things, if we think of return as being in the natural order of things, what is the-

re for a government to do specifically on diaspora? On what should a government intervene?

This idea of the naturalness of the links between homeland and host country has impressed itself upon me a great deal, immersed in them as we have been for two days. The naturalness and powerfulness of the ties are such that perhaps governments should rather step back and manage only at the extremities where problems of a certain threshold present themselves. I am less sure now of how and why the policy in a country of destination should spread its hand over the issues of diaspora relations, of why a homeland government should feel that it can make demands upon those who have left. But if governments are to restrict themselves to managing only at the extremes to protect their societies or to remove impediments to diasporas functioning in ways that will bring mutual benefits, their realm of influence is decidedly smaller, except in unusual times, such as with civil strife.

Questions of the appropriate level and occasions of government interference in the functions of a diaspora apply to both homeland and host governments. To what extent should a homeland government impose a duty upon those who have left to assist those back home? To what extent are they to be left alone to manage their own affairs? Should homeland governments tax remittances for community or national development, should expatriates be made to feel an obligation to return to aid their home countries' social, political, or economic development? Should a government in a host country force a member of a diaspora to choose between competing allegiances, reject former interests in the political life of the home state, turn one's back on family and community? The inherent nature of the diaspora make these unrealistic. Members of a diaspora are, and this is nearly definitional, members of an active international community. Recent history has shown that attempts to control or eliminate the natural ties across the diaspora, can in the worst of cases result in horror.

I leave you with these questions about the appropriate role for policy, where its limits ought to be set, where policy can make a positive contribution or prevent harm, and where governments ought to leave well enough alone.