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IOM Council

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Geneva, 28 November 2017

Chairperson and members of the Council of the International Organization for Migration,

Your Excellency, President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák,

Director-General Bill Swing,

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address you briefly today. It is a pleasure for me to be here and I look forward to a continued dialogue on the issues that have occupied all of us intensely in the last few months.

We are at an important moment in the calendar by which we are to realise a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration.

The formal consultations are over. Next week, in Mexico, United Nations Member States will reflect on discussions to date and shape the way forward towards a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration.

Early next year the Secretary-General will issue his report on migration, as mandated by the General Assembly. This will serve as his principal input into the zero draft of the compact which we can expect to be tabled by the end of January, following which the formal negotiations will begin.

Before I turn to what lies ahead, let me pause to reflect on the environment in which our deliberations are taking place. It should be abundantly clear to all of us by now that safe and orderly migration is unlikely to happen spontaneously.

If more evidence was required, the last few months have also made clear that we are still very poorly equipped to address the extreme vulnerabilities of many people on the move.

Meanwhile, our consultations over the same period have brought to light the enormous opportunities that migration represents and how increased international cooperation will allow millions of people, in origin as well as destination countries, to harvest its benefits.

Hence the importance of this process and the responsibility we all share to bring it to a successful conclusion.

Since, one assumes, the compact will not be legally binding, its success will rest on the extent of states' political and moral buy-in, and the broader support that it will generate. As such, the compact should contain specifics for early concrete action; lay the ground for intensified cooperation at all levels; and provide for means by which to gauge progress.

But the compact cannot be, and should not be, the end point. Just as human migration has always been with us, so it always will be. The global compact should aspire to be a living document, forward looking, flexible and adaptable.

I would like to take this opportunity to share some reflections about some of the key challenges that the global compact will need to address; and what this might mean for the United Nations as the system seeks to support its implementation as effectively as required.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will focus my comments on three – obviously non-exhaustive – points: what is meant by ‘global’; what is meant by ‘vulnerable’ in the context of migrants; and, what the compact might mean for the United Nations system, including IOM.

When we talk of a global compact, I would suggest that the adjective – ‘global’ – captures a few key aspects of migration.

First, that viewed globally, the overall story of migration is a positive one. This recognition was a singular achievement of the New York Declaration and should be built upon.

Second, that migration is truly global, occurring within and between all regions, neither a unique privilege nor burden on any one alone.

Third, that despite migration being global, different regions face different migration dynamics. Whether in labour market needs, demographic trends, developmental, environmental, political or other factors, each state will have its own perspective on where the emphasis of the compact should lie. The same is true within countries, as cities and regions have different needs and will experience migration differently. Hence the importance of being attuned to all these perspectives and incorporating the needs of local communities among whom migrants reside.

Fully understanding the breadth, depth and multifaceted aspects of migration’s global nature will be essential to developing the cooperative framework that must encase the compact. This understanding will better highlight the convergence of interests among and between states, rather than positing migration’s challenges in confrontational terms.

Let me now turn to the critical question of the vulnerability of migrants. Whether acute or less so, many people who migrate experience some form of vulnerability. As they lose the primary protection of their home state, they face the challenge of settling in, even if only temporarily, into a foreign environment, often facing language barriers and, at times, discrimination and hostility.

We must bring clarity to our policy response to situations of vulnerability of migrants

Some migrants are inherently vulnerable. Children represent the clearest example of this.

Women also face situations of vulnerability, often severe, but not akin to those of children as women also share with men competencies and resilience that discrimination obscures. The compact must therefore address the gender dynamics of migration, including both the remarkable contributions made by women migrants and the appalling circumstances in which they are often exploited and abused.

Migrants in general can be rendered vulnerable by the situations in which they find themselves. This is most apparent in the case of large movements of populations, often of mixed migrants and refugees. It is also the case for irregular migrants, in general, whether those on the move or those living in situations of irregularity.

But even regular migrants can be made vulnerable, most acutely perhaps as a result of xenophobia or prejudicial labour practices.

In helping to ensure that migration is brought more squarely within the remit of the rule of law – by which I mean the rule of just law – then the global compact will need to help us understand and better confront these various strands of vulnerability.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global compact will be judged on its ability to deliver results: to migrants, to those they leave behind, to host communities, and to states keen to maximise migration's opportunities, while overcoming its challenges.

The Secretary-General is determined that the United Nations system will play its part, as necessary, in moving towards that end.

Expertise and capacity on migration is currently atomised in the United Nations system.

This can be seen in the size of the Global Migration Group – 22 UN entities; as well as in the decision last Fall to bring IOM one step closer to the UN system as a related organization. It can be seen, too, at the intergovernmental level, where a variety of fora and governing bodies engage on the issue.

While it would be premature for the Secretary-General to pronounce on how he intends to position the system to support the global compact until its content becomes defined, he will clearly insist on situating any such response within the overall context of his management and development reforms; conflict prevention agenda; and, above all, the 2030 Agenda.

He will insist, too, that in responding to Member States needs and in seeking to uphold the rights of all, particularly the most vulnerable, emphasis be placed on results on the ground, and on operational and policy capacity and expertise, in a spirit

of efficient cooperation rather than in a rigid assertion of mandate and competition for resources.

For IOM, the same question also looms central: what will the global compact be? While we await that with keen anticipation – and many of you will be engaged in shaping the outcome – one thing is clear: IOM will have a central role to play in bringing that compact to life.

In the coming weeks and months, I would urge you to reflect and engage on how best to position IOM moving forward. As soon as the compact starts taking shape, we will need to examine whether our collective institutional framework is sufficiently fit for purpose.

If the decision, for example, to make IOM a related organization was a reflection of the need to bring it closer to the UN, how has that worked? What further initiatives could we take to enhance the performance of the system as a whole, while strengthening the role that IOM should play within it?

This organization is on the frontline of many migration-related issues. Others in the United Nations system have complementary capacity, expertise and experience, whether in demographic research and analysis, labour issues, the development sector, human rights, combatting trafficking and smuggling, and the like.

The challenges and opportunities ahead of us are immense. It is within our power to equip ourselves to address these issues in a smart, effective and principled way. Actually, it is within your power to do so.

You can count on my unwavering support, and that of the Secretary-General, as together we seek to ensure both the strongest possible compact and the most determined and coherent of efforts to realise its fullest possible implementation.

Thank you.