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Delivered by Ambassador Andranik Hovhannisyan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to UNOG

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Mr. Chairman,
Director General,
Excellences, Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

International migration has been a defining feature of humanity since its inception and continues to be a reality of our interconnected globalized world. Millions of people across the globe are on the move. While this, first of all, recalls the images of those who are fleeing indiscriminate attacks, violence and systematic human rights abuses, there are also others who are driven by the lack of opportunity. In fact, the recent data shows that 90 percent of people, who live outside of the country where they were born, are economic migrants and only the rest are refugees.

However, these last decades have registered a dramatic increase in the international displacement driven by the conflicts and crises. This phenomenon has been frequently referred to as the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. The 70% growth of refugees since 2011 is indeed alarming, and there is no indication that this trend will falter away soon.

Tackling the root causes for the protracted displacement through the prevention of conflicts, peaceful settlement of disputes and achievement of long-term political solutions are among the most certain ways of addressing these situations. This similarly applies to the full and indiscriminate respect to the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all peoples, promotion of equal economic opportunities and social development. The violations of these rights are among the main causes of protracted conflicts and displacement. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to ensure equal, prompt and unhindered access to international humanitarian assistance for refugees and displaced persons in all affected parts of the world, without any distinction on the basis of the current political status of a given region or territory.

Unfortunately, there are instances when the refugees are instrumentalized for manipulation in the context of the very conflicts that caused their displacement. Such practices usually go hand in hand with gross human rights violations. We believe that the humanitarian response in addressing challenges associated with unprecedented numbers of displaced people should by no means become subject to political trade-offs and manipulations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Armenia gained its independence in 1991 already having faced the challenges of forced displacement of hundreds of thousands fellow Armenians who were uprooted as a result of ethnic persecution. Lately, a large number of refugees from the Middle East, mainly Syria, sought asylum in Armenia, making our country third largest recipient of Syrian refugees in Europe on per capita basis.

Taking into account the migration dynamics, the Government of Armenia has launched a comprehensive review of its integration policy. My Government has taken an open approach and offers several protection options, as well as a set of benefits for those in need, which *inter alia* include accelerated asylum-procedures, facilitated naturalization and residence permits. The Government provides victims of the forced displacement with durable housing, free medical assistance and scholarships, supports people in setting up businesses. Most recently, on November 21 the Government adopted a decision on the provision of housing for refugees who were displaced about thirty years ago. This time it will address the needs of 112 families who suffered in dire conditions for all the past decades.

In line with the SDG goals 4 and 8 the Government of Armenia provides educational opportunities for refugees and migrants, as well as various support packages, which results in many business plans developed jointly with migrants. We strongly believe that migrants generate economic, social and cultural benefits for countries of origin, transit and destination, as acknowledged by the 2030 Agenda for SDGs.

Hence, Armenia supports the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, as the first negotiated framework to cover international migration in all its dimensions. The Global Compact reiterates our conviction that human rights apply to every individual and recognizes that, while States retain the sovereign right to define their migration policies, international cooperation is required to respond effectively to migration challenges.

In conclusion, we would like to express our appreciation to the Director General Antonio Vitorino for his comprehensive report to this Council and reiterate our strong support for the work of the IOM.

I thank you.