



**111<sup>th</sup> IOM Council Meeting  
General Debate  
24-26 November 2020, virtual platform Interprefy**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. Chairman, for your election as Chairperson of the Council. I am sure your competence, experience and ability will guide us through the challenges ahead of us.

I take this opportunity likewise to welcome the Russian Federation to the IOM family and also welcome Malaysia as new observer.

Allow me also to express our gratitude to DG António Vitorino and - through him - to his team for the dedication and commitment of this organization during these unsettling times.

During the last 70 years, the international community and, above all, migrants themselves, have counted on this organization's firm support. And it continues to be so. Since the beginning of the health crisis, IOM officials' commitment to stay and fulfill their mandate has been unwavering.

Mr. Chairman,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the lives of millions of people, including refugees, migrants, and other vulnerable people. So far, sadly, almost 1.4 million lives have been lost. Likewise, measures aimed at reducing the spread of the new coronavirus suddenly and dramatically affected the income of those who had been struggling the most to make a living.

In June, as the whole world sought to understand the scope and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Secretary-General said, wisely and prudently, that "no one is safe until everyone is safe" and underscored the

potential impact of the pandemic on the livelihoods of refugees and migrants. Similarly, President Jair Bolsonaro pointed out that we had two problems to solve - the virus and unemployment - and that both issues should be handled simultaneously and with the same sense of responsibility.

We agree with DG Vitorino that "truly universal care is not simply a basic right but a public health imperative" and that global and national responses to COVID-19 must include all". At the same time, measures to protect public health must be accompanied by measures to protect people from poverty and hunger. This crisis requires that all States develop multidimensional policies that include actions in health, the economy, and social protection.

Mr. Chairman,

In this spirit, Brazil has created a unique \$38 billion cash transfer program for the low-income population, without distinction. In addition, the Brazilian Government has quickly adopted emergency measures to protect migrants and refugees from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our strategy of documenting all Venezuelans upon arrival - be they residents, migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees - made it possible to include and reach those vulnerable people with vital resources for their survival.

Faced with the needs related to the pandemic, "Operation Welcome" has prepared, in coordination with civil society and international organizations, including IOM, a contingency plan with a preventive approach, which includes: adaptation in shelters, exceptional attention to vulnerable groups, creation of a Protection and Care Area and a Field Hospital in Boa Vista. Sadly, 145 COVID-19 infections and 9 deaths were confirmed among the population assisted by the Operation.

Despite this new challenge, the Operation hasn't stopped. In total, more than 500 thousand Venezuelan migrants and refugees received assistance from "Operation Welcome." Approximately 400 million dollars have already been invested directly in the Operation since 2018, without considering the dispersed costs related to public services and social benefits. Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Brazil have full access to all public services, labor markets, and social benefits.

In order to promote the transition between emergency assistance and effective reception, the Operation has launched an internalization strategy, which consists of voluntary relocation of migrants and refugees to more than 600 Brazilian cities where they can find better job opportunities and social integration. The project has already benefited more than 46 thousand people. Despite the temporary closure of the borders, the internalization program continues to operate, although with a low monthly average (from 3,000 people to about 1,000 people since April).

Likewise, the National Refugee Committee has granted, within the framework of the Cartagena Declaration, "prima facie" refugee status to more than 50,000 Venezuelans, including 722 children and adolescents at the beginning of the pandemic. As a result, Brazil today harbors the largest number of formally recognized Venezuelan refugees in the world.

Mr. Chairman,

Brazilian science, art, and culture have benefited from those who found refuge in our Country throughout our history. This legacy is part of our proudly diverse national identity. During the current crisis, our Venezuelan brothers and sisters, many of them health professionals, were welcomed in Brazil. And they have offered us solidarity in return and joined the efforts against the COVID-19 pandemic, hence deepening their integration in our country.

We are aware of the scale of the unprecedented humanitarian challenges in our region, but we are confident in the determination to defeat the pandemic while protecting vulnerable groups, such as migrants and refugees.

Mr. Chairman, as I conclude, allow me to congratulate Ambassador Jespersen for steadily leading us in the arduous task of implementing Resolution 1383 on the strengthening of the IOM senior leadership. His persistence and resolve helped us navigate such difficult matter through extraordinary circumstances and landed us on firm shores. Please rest assured of Brazil's continued support for the complete success of this endeavor.

Thank you!