



**STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR GENERAL AMY POPE
TO THE 115TH SESSION OF THE IOM COUNCIL
26 NOVEMBER 2024**

Excellencies, Members of the Council, esteemed guests, IOM colleagues and friends, it is my honour and privilege to welcome you all to the 115th Session of the IOM Council.

I would like to open the Council meeting with a story. It is the story of an extraordinary woman who I met on my travels in the last year. The woman happens to be Venezuelan. She used to have an administrative job working in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at a school in her hometown and had a reasonable standard of living – middle class – even through some periods of extreme instability, politically and economically. But then she was diagnosed with breast cancer and her mother suffered a debilitating stroke. With rising inflation and economic pressures she could no longer afford the costs for the health care that she so desperately needed. She lived for some time in these increasingly desperate circumstances.

Then one day, she took the extraordinary decision to leave to seek health care for her mother. She left with her husband. Her teenage son and daughter left school to join them. They found a smuggler in Colombia and soon found themselves at the entrance to the Darién jungle. As many of you know, the Darién jungle is a vast and challenging region of more than 5,000 square kilometres of tropical wilderness. The area is known for its dense vegetation, steep mountains and swamps. There are no roads. It is an extremely dangerous territory for those who dare to cross it and the journey can take up to 10 days – particularly for vulnerable individuals – with multiple natural hazards including fast-flowing rivers, insects, snakes, infections, dehydration and criminal groups.

This woman's mother could no longer walk. She could no longer eat or even use the toilet without assistance, so when they got to the jungle, they bundled her into a bed sheet and the woman's husband and son carried her through that jungle. When I met her in a shelter in Mexico, she described the trauma of that journey, constantly worried about being sent home or worse. Somehow, they made it through the jungle, they made it through Panama, Costa Rica and the rest of Central America into Mexico, utterly exhausted, utterly broken. Tragically, soon after arriving in Mexico, the woman's mother died.

I share this story, not because it is a sad story, but because it illustrates the millions of stories that we hear all around the world. Every single day, our IOM colleagues meet desperate people who make choices that sometimes might seem to us sitting in our comfortable chairs here in Geneva to be illogical choices to search for something better than what they have at home. We meet families, we meet communities who will sell everything they have to send their sons and daughters to distant shores by paying a smuggler. They do not understand asylum laws. They do not understand the complicated migration systems of each country they will pass through along the way. They only know that they are facing an unsustainable future at home and somehow it is worth risking everything they have, risking the lives of their sons and their daughters to make this journey.

I share this story because this is not what we believe in, this not what we want to see as a community. We do not want to believe that there are people who would wrap their ailing mother in a bedsheet, people who would leave behind a job to take their mother through a treacherous jungle to seek health care. We do not want to believe that there are hundreds of thousands of people who are taking their

small children, their sons and their daughters, risking dying in deserts or on the seas, risking being kidnapped and held for ransom and, ultimately, if they make it through all of that, arriving at borders unannounced and unwelcome.

Yet, we have effectively created this system. We have created a system in which people are incentivized to take the most dangerous paths that exist, which are also the most lucrative for criminals. I think everyone, every single person here in this room, agrees that it is not tolerable. It is not consistent with our values. It is not consistent with our common belief in the human rights of all people, and it is not consistent with the right of every country to manage their own borders. If we want to collectively end irregular migration – and I know so many of you in this room want to do just that – we need to take a hard and honest look at why people move today.

When we do so, at least three things become apparent. One, the reasons people move are complex, they are numerous and they are overlapping. There is no one magic intervention that is going to end irregular migration. Two, for the communities we serve, poor development outcomes fuel migration, but conversely, migration also fuels development. Three, migration is human. If the pressures become too great to stay at home, people move, regardless of whether they are moving through a legal option or an irregular one. People in desperate situations will risk everything, including their lives, in the hope of a better future for themselves and for their families.

Our work here at IOM is premised on the urgent need for a new model of migration. One that avoids the human cost of policy failures and broken asylum systems. One where we avoid the chaos at borders, whether they are at land or at sea, and the needless loss of lives. And one where communities can leverage the tremendously powerful and positive force of migration. To meet this challenge, we at IOM have been moving as quickly as we can. We are using the resources we have as strategically and as smartly as we can to bring a holistic approach across the deeply interconnected areas of humanitarian aid, development and peace, responding to a range of emerging needs. But given the magnitude and the scope of these needs, and the speed at which they are increasing, we need to keep up, we need to move faster than ever. We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. As Martin Luther King so famously said, “we are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.”

Over the past year, since I took up the role of the Director General, my Leadership Team and I have travelled to over 65 countries and territories in every region of the world. My team told me today that I have been to at least 1,000 meetings in the last year. We launched our Strategic Plan and we have tailored it to regional dynamics. I thank you because your feedback has been extremely useful to us as we have fine-tuned our plans.

Our aim has been to engage with as many of you as possible, to benefit from your advice and your honest feedback, to strengthen our partnership, and to make sure that the work we are doing is relevant and effective where it matters most: on the ground, making a real difference in the lives of migrants, their communities and the communities that they come from. Today, I would like to share with you some of my takeaways from this intense and productive year, highlighting just a few of our achievements in delivering on our Strategic Plan and reaffirming our priorities going forward.

Our first objective is always going to be saving lives and protecting people on the move. When people are in danger or crisis or when they are fleeing conflict, instability, climate disasters or other crises – or even a combination of all of the above – our first and most important job is to provide them with life-saving assistance. We are doing just that. Last year, we supported almost 32 million people in 168 different countries. We expanded our programmes to support internally displaced people in over 20

countries. We are doing it by collecting data on displacement needs and the vulnerabilities of the communities who are impacted. These data are used by everyone in the humanitarian community. They are used by all our partners who respond, and they are essential to make sure that the aid reaches those who need it most, no matter why people are on the move, whether they are fleeing war or poverty or climate disaster. It is essential right now in Lebanon, for example, to identify where communities are moving and what assistance they need.

We are doing it by providing shelter and protection for displaced families in places like the Philippines, Yemen and Gaza. We are adapting materials as fast as possible for different uses and to withstand harsh conditions. We are doing it by providing camp coordination and camp management. For example, last May, in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, I saw our teams working closely with the Government of Bangladesh to improve the temporary shelters of the Rohingya people to better withstand the natural disasters that are also hitting them, including fierce storms, fires and flooding. In August, I had the chance to visit our teams in Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where protracted conflict has displaced over 7 million people, some of them multiple times. There we are providing camp coordination and camp management to hundreds of thousands of people who are internally displaced in the east of the country, providing more stable shelters for those who are vulnerable. Our health teams are working to address the alarming upsurge in the mpox virus, which adds to the needs and the vulnerabilities of those who are displaced.

We are doing it by providing emergency assistance, distributing shelter kits, family tents, essential non-food items to displaced populations and communities in places like the Sudan, which I visited last month, a country where 11 million people have been displaced. People are suffering not just the impacts of a brutal conflict, but the impacts of a changing climate. IOM has provided relief to some 1.2 million people so far, but it is not enough. When the Adre border crossing finally opened in August thanks to the engagement of the Government of the Sudan, our trucks were the first to cross over from Chad into the Sudan. But it is not enough.

We are doing it to provide support to people and communities to find employment, to access livelihoods even in times of war. In Ukraine just this year we provided support to nearly 5,000 people, including grants for microenterprises, vocational training and livelihoods. I had the chance to speak with President Zelenskyy himself, and he told me the people of Ukraine will suffer more if they do not have a way to continue to make a living even while they are fending off attacks on their communities and infrastructure.

We are doing it by protecting communities from sexual exploitation and abuse. We are the one agency that has done a risk analysis across the entire system where we serve and put dedicated sexual exploitation and abuse focal points into those communities based on their risk profile. We now have more people assigned to work on sexual exploitation and abuse than any other agency.

But it is simply not enough. That is why this year we are pre-positioning goods in strategic locations in more than 10 countries. We are increasing our delivery through a common pipeline. To give just one example, in Barbados, this year when we saw Hurricane Beryl come through, we were able to get out fast to provide life-saving support to those hit by the hurricane. We are working with private sector partners, like Airbnb, who are providing housing for people who are displaced in the short term, whether it is because of the conflict in Ukraine or as a result of the earthquakes that hit Türkiye. As part of our Global Appeal – and I know it is bold to ask you all for money, but if we are not bold in setting out what we aim to do, we are not going to do it – so as part of our Global Appeal, we are asking

for more support to strengthen and scale up our responses, whether in Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, the Philippines, the Sudan, Yemen or Gaza. These are just a few of the places where IOM is providing life-saving support. Just to remind you, there are over 120 armed conflicts going on right now, involving more than 60 States; most of them you do not even know about because they are so far from the headlines.

Looking ahead, we are going to keep up this work, we are going to strengthen our humanitarian response, we are going to strengthen our protection capacities here at Headquarters, but more importantly in the places where we work around the world to make sure no one is left behind. We are including new positions on disability inclusion, counter-trafficking in crisis situations, accountability to the people we serve and mental health and psychosocial support. When we talk about why people move, meeting their needs in these most dangerous, life-threatening situations is and will continue to be our number one job.

But we all know that if we stop there, if we give someone a tarp and consider our job well done, we are failing. We have failed. Collectively, as the humanitarian community, we have failed. We have failed to enable people to move away from relying on humanitarian support. We have failed in supporting communities to be empowered to make their own way. We have all seen it. Millions of people who have been living in protracted displacement, unable to go home, get a job or find the stability they need to move on and build a new life. We have all seen it. That is why we have been partnering with Robert Piper, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement, to address the challenges faced by internally displaced persons. With our partners at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme, we have agreed that we are going to be part of a long-term solution, a long-term core group that is focused on meeting the needs of internally displaced persons, and we gladly welcome the engagement of other United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations. That is why the second objective of our Strategic Plan is to drive solutions to displacement. This means we do not consider it a job well done just because we have responded to the immediate problem. It means that we need to anticipate and mitigate risks and enhance our preparedness to respond.

Preventing displacement from happening is not easy; it is hard to measure and it is hard to get funding for it. You do not see the person in crisis – we are trying to prevent the person from being in crisis – but we know that if we do not do this work, we will see millions more in crisis. That is why we were at the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the last two weeks, focusing on making sure the communities who need the money get it. We supported our Member States to agree on the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage. We at IOM were acknowledged as a key entity that could be consulted on funding arrangements, and we are going to continue to advocate for climate finance, because this is how we can avert, minimize and address displacement, including in the framework of the Fund.

We also know that climate mobility has two different parts. It means supporting people who have to move because of climate change, but also providing opportunities for people to stay at home by building resilience and preventing displacement. If you have not had a chance to visit the various booths that were put up yesterday as part of the International Dialogue on Migration, I encourage you to do so. You will see how many of the projects focus on improving resilience to climate disasters. It is not a lot of money, in some cases it is just a tiny amount of money, but what we are doing with communities is enabling them to stay home, to avoid being displaced.

To this end, we are also engaging in various regional declarations on climate mobility, including the expanded Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change and the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility. We are working with small island developing States to leverage climate mobility for sustainable development. Under my leadership, we moved IOM's Pacific Islands regional coordination function from Canberra, Australia, to the Pacific Islands, to Fiji, strengthening our presence. We are now present on 10 Pacific Islands and we are actively recruiting national staff from the islands, making sure that people's needs are at the centre of what we are doing.

We also see the need for a holistic approach and data-driven solutions to internal displacement, and we are putting this at the centre of the work we are doing. I encourage you to visit the International Dialogue on Migration booth on the Periodic Global Report on the State of Solutions to Internal Displacement 2024. This report looks at communities of displacement in 30 different countries – double the number in the report we did last year – and we are using the input of the communities themselves to design and deliver solutions that will be responsive and effective.

Data will be at the centre of our work, so we are increasing our investments in data, forecasting and anticipation and early warning systems, including by partnering with other United Nations agencies and the private sector. As just one more example, we have established our Climate Mobility Innovation Labs for Asia and Africa. The goal here is to start small. We co-create practical, field-tested solutions, and if they work, we scale them up. We build partnerships across diverse sectors. All of the work we are doing is underpinned by data. This is the work we are going to strengthen in the years ahead. We are going to continue to build on our Global Data Institute, including through the data hubs in regional offices around the world. Our goal is to make sure that we are not operating based on anecdote, conjecture or bias, but on high-quality evidence and rights-based information to create policy and innovative programming.

The third objective of our Strategic Plan is the one that aims to ensure that migration is well managed, but also that its full potential is nurtured and utilized to drive growth and prosperity for the benefit of everyone. It is this third objective that holds the key to avoiding the chaos of irregular migration, and to providing stable solutions to both communities of origin and communities of destination. It takes into account the complex and multiple reasons why people move and the better able we are to deliver on this objective, the better outcomes we will get for people like the woman I met in Mexico. This objective is facilitating pathways for regular migration.

I know that in today's polarized political discourse around migration, this topic is politically sensitive, and it is often misunderstood. We know, we have heard from many countries in this room that have received migrants, that you have real and legitimate concerns, from housing, to health care, to social cohesion. We know that nobody wants to see chaos at their land or sea borders. I know, because some of you here have told me, when you hear "facilitate regular pathways" you only hear the word "pathway", you do not recognize all the work that is going into creating incentives for people to choose a regular pathway to move, instead of an irregular pathway. Let me be clear, for IOM, facilitating pathways means that we make sure States have a meaningful way to manage their borders. We have decades of experience working with our Member States to improve border management and we know that this work is more important than ever. Just this last year, our border management projects have benefitted 121 countries. The Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS), which is our flagship border management system, is now being used in 34 countries, covering over 270 border posts. In Yemen, for example, we helped upgrade and roll out the e-visa system at the Aden International Airport. In the Pacific Islands, we have provided support for MIDAS in Fiji, Tonga and

Vanuatu. We are also working with our Member States to have more humanitarian border management and improve search and rescue operations. We are now working with over 20 different countries.

Facilitating pathways also means that we are working with regional bodies and economic communities. For example, we are working with the East African Community to develop and implement a labour migration policy, and with our African Union Member States to ensure migrants have access to legal identity solutions and services. It also means supporting the work of the European Commission and the European Union Member States in implementing their Pact on Migration and Asylum; an agreement that we welcome. We know that it was hard to negotiate it, we know that the challenges are not over, and we believe that if it is properly implemented, it will go a long way to help ensure the integrity of borders and to help protect the rights of people on the move.

Facilitating pathways also means that we are countering trafficking, it means that we are countering the smuggling of people and other organized crime. We are working with the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme to detect and respond to serious crimes and terrorism, using advance passenger information and passenger name record data. This work is in line with Security Council resolutions and we are doing it in Georgia, Kenya and Nigeria. In some cases we also support the safe, dignified and voluntary return of people back home when they do not have a regular pathway available to them. Critically, we help with their sustainable reintegration so that they can live productive lives, building on their experiences, many of which they have obtained working and living abroad.

But these activities are just pieces of a much bigger picture, and despite the prevailing complex political environment, we welcome the leadership that we are seeing from States to demonstrate innovative ways to use migration as an important policy tool. Spain has been a leader in this domain, as well as Italy. At the last meeting of the Group of Seven (G7), the G7 leaders brought a three-pronged approach to preventing and countering the smuggling of migrants: tackling the root causes, countering crime and building regular pathways. Even if we do not always want to articulate it, we know that countries know that they need migration, and we know that facilitating regular pathways is the best way to reduce the risk of exploitation, to uphold the human rights of migrants, including labour rights, and to provide access to essential services.

We also know, because the evidence is overwhelming, that migration is a powerful catalyst for sustainable development, both where the migrants are coming from and where they are going. Many of the wealthiest economies currently have critical labour market gaps, for example in the health-care sector. Many of these countries are experiencing demographic shifts towards an ageing and shrinking population. Migration offers a solution and diaspora members, including those who ultimately return home, can bring the benefits of their experiences, skills and finances to their countries of origin.

To make this partnership work, we have got to work together, and we have been doing that to expand the range of stakeholders that are part of the work we are doing. We are working with the European Union on the Talent Partnerships. We are working with countries like Egypt, Italy, Morocco and Tunisia. We are strengthening our partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries in places like Australia, Canada, Ireland and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We are working with the World Bank, establishing Skills Mobility Partnerships in 11 countries around the world. We are building partnerships with the Tent Partnership for Refugees, which is a global network of more than 350 businesses that have made a commitment to hire and integrate migrants and refugees into their workplaces.

These are just a few examples of the work we have been doing, and our challenge is to boost these partnerships, not just with you in the room – you are important, but you are not enough. The challenge is to boost our partnerships with the diaspora, young people and the private sector, leading to the creation of innovative solutions that will have sustained impact and contribute to real change.

I am really proud to say that this year we successfully facilitated safe and regular pathways for more than 1 million migrants and refugees. We supported the resettlement, relocation and humanitarian admission of more than 290,000 individuals to 29 countries. There are many complementary parts to the bigger picture of IOM's whole-of-society approach, so this is my message, our message, to all of you sitting in this room with us today: to effectively manage irregular migration and curb the abuses and overload of the current system, you need a comprehensive and strategic approach, one that combines development, support to hosting communities and, critically, available pathways for people to migrate legally. This means that you need development investments that give would-be migrants better opportunities to stay and thrive at home to make sure they have real choices about whether they move. Given the critical importance of this issue and the current context, this is going to be the subject of our high-level segment today and I very much look forward to hearing the input of our Member States. Our goal here is to understand how we can achieve this. How do we create a system that is people-focused, rights-based and accessible particularly to those who are the most vulnerable? A system that is safe, ethical and sustainable. Our goal is to identify together key policy, operational and technical solutions that we need to implement throughout the migration cycle.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, to make sure we are fit to deliver on the three ambitious objectives of our Strategic Plan, we are working hard to put our own house in order, strengthen our structure and put the right systems in place to make sure we have the human resources and policies and practices to deliver on what we have told you we will deliver. It is a responsibility that I take – we all take – incredibly seriously. It is a responsibility that we know is indispensable for gaining and maintaining your trust, the trust of everyone in this room, whether you are a donor, a partner, a Global Compact champion country or you represent the people we serve. We have to hold ourselves accountable. We have to hold ourselves to the highest standards. There is too much on the line if we fail.

Earlier this month, I briefed the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance on how we are making investments in our strategic enablers, including through our own budget reform, which is a testament to what this body can do when it comes together in recognition of a common goal. Our efforts have been informed by your advice and your feedback and I want to say thank you for your support. We know that right now our financial future is unpredictable, and we are prepared to adjust as we need to.

We are going to focus on four points, no matter where we go. First, we are going to continue to invest in our own people to make sure that we have a fit-for-purpose workforce. We are going to continue to revamp our recruitment, leadership training and processes for hiring. We have made a lot of progress, but we are going to do better to increase our diversity, especially geographic diversity for underrepresented regions and gender equity at all levels. I am making this commitment to you not because it is the politic thing to say, or because I want you to put a gold star next to my name. I am making this commitment because this is how we deliver. When we have a workforce that understands the challenges that people are facing, the cultural sensitivities and the history and the politics of a community, we can do a better job at meeting the needs of those on the ground.

Second, we are continuing to consolidate our efforts across partnerships, advocacy and communications, at Headquarters, regional and country level. We are seeing some strong results. Over the past year, our Private Sector Partnerships Division has doubled the investments that we have

received from private sector partners. We started at a really low number, but we have doubled it in one year and the prospects for the future are good. We are bringing on Goodwill Ambassadors – we now have 11 – who are helping to boost our visibility and our impact around the world. This is work we are going to continue. I have heard it from you: we cannot continue to rely on the same donors and expect to have ever-increasing resources. So we need to diversify, and I call on every country in this room to be part of these efforts. You do not have to be a wealthy country to contribute to the work that we are doing around the world.

Third, we are making serious efforts to strengthen our internal systems. If you know IOM, you know that we are a projectized agency, and often we do not get the funding we need to build the systems to have the transparency, oversight and accountability that you expect. So, I want to say thank you for those who have given us the resources, especially the unearmarked resources to do just that. Wherever possible, we are investing to build our oversight. We have a new Office of Internal Oversight, Risk Management Committee and IOM Integrity Group, which we hope will take us further in that direction. Because we know that this is not free money. This is money that comes from your taxpayers. This is money for which you have accountability to your own constituents, and we have accountability to you to use it well and wisely.

My fourth point is about money. Not just about the quantity of the money, but the quality of the money. As I said, we are going to be launching our Global Appeal. I know you all think that asking for USD 8.2 billion for this next year is bold. But unless we lay out for you what is ahead and what we think is necessary to meet our objectives, we are not being honest and transparent. We are asking you all to be part of these efforts to help ensure that we have an operational model that works. We are going to remain largely project-based, and we know and have heard from you that that is what you want. But we are asking you to look for funding agreements that are multi-year, unearmarked and give us the flexibility that we need to respond to what could be a very tumultuous next couple of years. Just this last year, we signed multi-year funding agreements with over 50 entities, including with 6 of the multilateral development banks. We are not relying just on traditional donors. We are diversifying and expanding our funding sources with the private sector, international financial institutions, philanthropy and other non-traditional donors. I would like to thank those of you who have been part of those efforts because we need your networks, access and advocacy to communicate to donors, no matter where they are, that investing in IOM is a good investment. I pledge to you that we are going to continue to be agile and flexible in responding to the needs of people all around the world, no matter how we get our funding.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and friends, with your support, we have come a long way, and we are enormously grateful, if a little bit tired. But we are at a pivot point, we are at a defining moment. We are at a time when migration is at the top of every ballot, when migration in all parts of the world is leading governments to look increasingly inward, build walls and pull up their drawbridges. What we need to confront the challenges that we all will face together as a global community is pragmatism and partnership. Our world is inherently interconnected and isolation is simply not going to be a solution to the challenges that we are going to face. The legitimacy of the work we do comes from you, our Member States, so I am calling on all of you to stand together. Hundreds of millions of people around the world need you to continue to stand by us to help us to deliver on the promise of migration, while supporting the world's most vulnerable for the benefit of everyone, everywhere. Simply put, the world needs IOM, and we need you.

Thank you very much.