

## **REMARKS**

**Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General  
International Organization for Migration**

**GFMD Thematic Workshop  
“Migration for Peace, Stability, and Growth”**

**19 July 2016, New York**

*Speaking time: 5 minutes*

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct honor and privilege to be invited to this Thematic Workshop of the Global Forum on Migration and Development on ‘Migration for Peace, Stability and Growth.’ I wish to thank my distinguished colleague and friend, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque, and the GFMD team for organizing this important event and giving me the opportunity to offer some introductory remarks.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted here in the General Assembly less than one year ago, recognized the positive contribution of migrants and migration to inclusive growth and sustainable development. This historic recognition rectified the omission in the 2000 Millennium Development Goals, and reflects the tremendous progress in understanding that has emerged on migration in the intervening fifteen years. The nearly 500 billion US dollars of remittances annually to developing countries alone far exceeds official development assistance and is on a par with foreign direct investment, can be said to have opened the eyes of the development community to this link. However, as we in the migration community know, that is just the tip of the iceberg. Remittances, while private funds, are often accompanied by investment in the

creation of small businesses and jobs, in community development projects, particularly when matched by pooled funds generated by home town associations and diaspora organizations in the hosting countries. Beyond remittances, migrants create knowledge and trade networks, fostering the exchange of know-how, and bring home much needed skills and connections as well as enhanced financial and other forms of cultural literacy. Economists at the World Bank and elsewhere have highlighted that global gains from further liberalizing the movement of people even very modestly would far outstrip global gains from liberalizing any other forms of cross-border movements, for example of goods, capital and services.

Moreover, and frequently under-reported but not to be overlooked are the tremendous contributions that migrants make to their host countries – filling skills and labour gaps at all skills levels, bringing innovation and entrepreneurship. Migrants, as we all know, are capable, resilient and dynamic actors, who by coming to a new country have already demonstrated a remarkable degree of ingenuity, resilience and determination – personal characteristics which bode well for continuing contributions and innovations in their host societies, not just in the economic sphere but in terms of the cultural richness, diversity and dynamism they bring.

More than the benefits they bring to home and host country development, migration is first and foremost an opportunity for *human development* for the millions of persons who migrate each year, as was so eloquently articulated in UNDP's 2009 Human Development Report. Freedom from want and freedom from need are possible for migrants and their families who achieve an opportunity for safety, enhanced educational and work opportunities, and more in their new homes, whether temporary or permanent.

But these facts and this narrative stand in stark contrast to the prevailing narrative on migration in the media, in national political debates, and indeed in the human and labour rights communities. Much migration today takes place not as a matter of genuine choice but of desperate necessity. Conflict, human rights abuses, natural disasters, increasing effects of climate change, extreme poverty and lack of opportunity are just some of the factors that compel people to leave their homes. And far too often, whether because of these factors or because of the lack of adequate regular migration opportunities, they migrate in unsafe and often exploitative ways. Criminal smugglers and human traffickers are just some of the most visible negative actors preying on their desperation and subjecting the persons in vulnerable situations to tremendous exploitation and abuse, as we regularly see in the media headlines, with unthinkable numbers of persons losing their lives in the process. Unscrupulous recruiters and employers also take advantage by charging illegal and unreasonable fees, provide substandard working contracts and conditions, and in too many cases effectively creating situations of indentured servitude. Moreover, discrimination and abuse often continues in host countries, who, far from welcoming these newcomers, routinely see them as threats to jobs, cultural values and ways of life, and subject many to serious discrimination, violence, and racist attacks, again as we see daily in the media headlines.

To a certain extent, the focus on the forces that compel people to leave their homes is both appropriate and understandable. We live in an era of **unprecedented simultaneous, complex and protracted crises and humanitarian emergencies including** economic collapse and natural disasters,.

Not surprisingly, these have led to much displacement or irregular movement. As a result, there are currently some **65 million** people who have

been displaced by persecution, war, conflict or disaster – the most we have seen in the post-World War 2 era.

These large population movements are at the heart of much public and political anxiety. There is, for instance, discomfort about the economic strains or social stresses that arise when newcomers arrive; the supposed competition for jobs; the perceived unfair demands on social welfare. Migrant advocates worry, rightly, about a lack of leadership or vision, an erosion of international moral authority when it comes to addressing human needs and human rights; and there is a visible decline in public confidence in governments' ability to manage mass movements of population.

One of the greatest challenges for those who wish to foster **a rational debate** on migration is therefore to prevent migration from becoming – in the words of IOM's World Migration Report 2011 – “a convenient surrogate” for other political, social and economic issues that create discomfort for societies faced with change in a globalizing world. Migration is all too often the catch-all issue that masks broader fears and uncertainties in a world that has changed and is continuing to change rapidly. Governments have a legitimate right to know and determine which non-nationals enter their territories, and therefore need to be able to manage migration. There is a desperate need to restore a sense of balance to the debate. A debate that does not portray migration as having benefits without costs but establishes its rightful place in our interconnected societies, and bridges the tremendous gap between the potential of migration – the vision articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of facilitating migration that is safe, regular and orderly, and that ensures humane treatment and human rights for all migrants – and the glaringly negative reality faced by many migrants today coupled with the unfounded fear and demonization of migrants and migration in far too many societies.

Let us make the most of this opportunity to reflect on the contributions of migration to peace, stability and growth. Let us recall then that historically migration has contributed enormously to social and economic development. The challenge, for the international community is to maximize these benefits through sound governance. Reflecting some of the important conceptual orientations laid out in the 2030 SDGs, the background paper prepared for this thematic meeting reminds us that there are three important clusters of policy measures that need to be put into place if the international community is to address migration with the purposefulness and coherence that have been achieved in other comparable “trans-boundary issues such as the environment, trade or finance.

- The first is the creation of a comprehensive set of safe and regular options for people to move from one country to another. I am keenly interested in finding out what suggestions will come out of the breakout sessions on this topic.
- The second is an essential complement to the first, but whose thrust may appear, at first glance, to contradict the first. It is about the effective management of borders and about action towards the prevention and prosecution of smuggling and trafficking.
- Finally, the international community must continue to develop its policy toolkit to respond to mobility arising of crises and emergencies, whether natural or man-made. Significant progress has been made in recent years, notably through the Migrants In Countries In Crisis and Nansen Initiatives, but there is considerable work remaining to be done to put into practice the principles laid out in the MICIC and Nansen action plans.

To conclude, if the international community is to be successful in ensuring that migration contributes to global peace, security and growth it has to develop a **comprehensive framework that addresses all forms of international migration**. IOM Member States have already signified their intention to approach migration governance from a broad and balanced perspective through the adoption of the Migration Governance Framework. A short-term, crisis-mode response focused primarily on security is not likely to achieve the longer term objective of regular, humane and orderly flows. Disjointed piecemeal approaches will not work. Solutions can only be found within a wider, coherent and long-term policy framework that addresses all aspects of migration. A collective response to the development of a comprehensive approach to migration governance is both a humanitarian and an economic imperative. We must and can do so. We must work to make migration a genuine choice and not a desperate necessity. And we must work together as we develop a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration to put migrants -- their rights and their dignity -- at the center of our efforts.