

Remarks at the GFMD 2016 Thematic Meeting on Migration for Peace, Stability and Growth

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2016 is a year of opportunity for the international system to finally take meaningful steps toward better governance of international Migration. The stakes are high, both because international migration is right on top of the policy agenda in a great many individual states and because failure to take meaningful steps will put the credibility of those organization in jeopardy.

Fifteen years ago, Secretary-General Kofi Annan came to the conclusion that the UN would have to address international migration, as one of the great issues of the day, if the UN was to remain relevant. I was privileged to be part of the working group that he assembled under Professor Michael Doyle. One for the options that we put forward was to bring the International Organization for Migration into the UN system. This option now seems close to realization, and will at least give the UN real capacity on migration, working alongside UNCHR to address the full spectrum of the movement of people. We predicted substantial bureaucratic resistance from within the system – and we were not wrong about this. But the evolution of IOM within the UN system is really up to the member states, who sit in the IOM Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations. It is up to them to assign to IOM the tasks that are necessary to bring greater order safety and benefit to migration – and to make sure that it has the resources, both human and financial, to do its work.

Many governments, however, still are ambivalent about greater international governance of migration. They desire more international cooperation because they recognize that optimal outcomes are beyond the reach of states acting unilaterally. But they fear it because they know that other states whose cooperation they need have different and sometimes incompatible goals. But this should not be an obstacle to cooperation. There are enough common goals on which all states, and other stakeholders, can agree. All can agree on the need for more knowledge and better understanding of migration. All recognize the imperative for fewer deaths of migrants at sea, in the desert, and at the hands of ruthless smugglers. All aspire to a reduction of the influence of criminal networks. All see the importance of minimizing the tensions between migrants and host communities, and of securing greater safety and dignity for migrants. All wish to pursue greater national security, and greater capacity for states to implement the policies that they have adopted. These goals in themselves make up a formidable agenda for international cooperation on the governance of migration, and there are many others.

The reservations that still exist among states about governance of international migration often have to do with a fear of constraints on sovereign control over who enters and remains on their territories. This is not unreasonable. It is a right and responsibility of states to defend their borders and implement rule of law within their territory. But I think the threat to national sovereignty in this sphere is often

misunderstood. Today, the actions that individual states can take on migration are not constrained by institutions of global governance or even by other states, but by *reality*. States are buffeted by forces and prospects that defy unilateral control by even the most powerful. These forces are global, whether private capital movements that can undermine a nation's economy or climate change that can destabilize the environment on which a country's productivity and quality of life depend.

States turn to international governance – or, more simply, collaboration – when unilateralism fails them, and they come to believe that their purposes can be better served by cooperating with others. Surely we have reached that point, and this year's series of international conferences, culminating here at the UN on September 19, 2016, shows that states have recognized this turning point.

But bringing more effective governance to international migration is no easy task. International migration is a disrupter, in similar ways to other great disrupters like technological change or changing gender roles. These disruptions on a global scale bring great, transformative benefits over all – but they also create winners and losers. The ambitions of the 2030 Global Development Agenda is to “leave no one behind.” This, of course, includes migrants and refugees, who are often the most likely to be left behind. But I respectfully suggest to you that among those who must not be left behind are also the people who are, or feel themselves to be, disadvantaged by the impact of international migration. We have seen enough populist backlash against migration in the last few years, including in wealthy but divided countries, to understand the risks of ignoring or simply condemning the concerns of the disaffected. Migration may not be the real source of their problems, but it is the most visible face of globalization, and it will be a target if globalization cannot be made to work for everyone – or at least for a much broader swath of the world's people, migrants included.

What will be reassuring for polities all over the world is visible movement toward the SDG target 10.7: migration that is safe, orderly, responsible and regular. That word “regular” is a bit confusing. Regular migration is understood to mean legal or authorized migration. But I would like to think of regular in its everyday meaning—that is ‘normal.’ An outcome of the 200 agenda should be to make migration normal, an activity that many people engage in without experiencing trauma or provoking anxiety.

With governments finding it increasingly difficult to regulate migration, the debate about international governance should be framed not in terms of ceding sovereignty but rather in terms of reclaiming it and exercising it collectively in a manner consistent with the needs of labor markets, the integrative capacity of host societies, the development potential of migration for countries of origin, humanitarian norms and the obligation to protect the human rights of migrants. Above all, the frameworks established for cooperative evolution of international migration governance must work with rather than against the realities of globalization. People do not move as easily as financial capital perhaps, but unlike money or traded goods and services, people move of their own volition. A migration policy or a system of governance whose success depends on the ability to defeat both market forces and human ingenuity is doomed to failure—and it should not be our path.