



Ms. Louise Arbour
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
International Migration
Remarks at GFMD Civil Society Days

29 June 2017

Dear colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today at the GFMD civil society days and reflect with you on how civil society could be best engaged throughout the journey towards a Global Compact on for safe, orderly and regular migration.

At a time when xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments are on the rise in many parts of the world, civil society has often been a critical voice in counteracting the toxic and dangerous atmosphere created by this expression of ignorance and hatred. Despite overt hostility towards newcomers – be it refugees or migrants - private citizens, NGOs and business have been stepping up to respond with great solidarity and admirable courage. From rescuing at sea, to providing medical services, distributing food or providing shelter, civil society partners in the humanitarian sector have been instrumental in coping with the arrivals of refugees and

migrants in many parts of the world. I would like to use this opportunity to thank you and the thousands of people your organisations represent, for the work you are doing on a daily basis with the aim of protecting the rights and improving the lives of people on the move.

I know that the Civil Society Days are a crucial platform for you to develop and refine messages and joint advocacy to Member States towards a common agenda on migration. I would like to commend you on the working methods you have developed over the years since the inception of the forum. While the GFMD as a forum outside the UN is very different from a process in the UN General Assembly, I equally count on you to bring your first-hand experience, your expertise and commitment to the global compact process. This will be important for the negotiations phase next year but is even more so for the preparatory process currently underway.

Last week in Geneva, we concluded the third out of the six informal thematic sessions of the UN General Assembly. The thematic sessions are aimed at gathering substantive input and concrete recommendations to inform the development of the global compact. I have appreciated the contributions of civil society representatives to the session and have listened carefully to your messages in the informal dialogue with the co-facilitators.

Let me offer you some observations I have drawn from the process so far.

First and foremost, the New York Declaration presents a unique opportunity and we cannot afford to fall short in the expectations created by the Global Compact on Migration. By launching an intergovernmental process on international migration at the UN General Assembly for the first time in history, Member States have acknowledged that a new framework for cooperation on international migration is necessary. This framework will include cooperation between states but will also need the expertise and participation of non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, parliaments, diaspora communities, the private sector, national human rights institutions, migrant organizations and migrants themselves.

I therefore call upon you to seize this opportunity, to capitalize in particular on your unique field experience and grassroots involvement, to be strategic in your advocacy and to formulate concrete, action oriented proposals. It is imperative that we move from a purely normative approach of listing, restating and reaffirming fundamental rights and principles, and shift towards concrete recommendations and deliverables that could form the basis of a global compact. In this regard I am pleased to see that you will focus on discussing practical *mechanisms*, including policies,

programs and partnerships to implement safe, orderly and regular migration during your interaction with governments.

Secondly, I count on you to bring the diversity and richness of views and voices from civil society practitioners and experts at the regional and national level, from grassroots organizations and migrants themselves, to this process. In particular, I would encourage you to bring the often neglected voice of migrant women and to help highlight not only migrant women's vulnerabilities, but also their leadership and contributions to sustainable development processes. Such views and experiences are necessary to change the narrative and the many misperceptions about migration in public opinion. Better than anyone you can attest that migration has an overwhelmingly positive social, economic and cultural impact on countries of origin, as well as destination, and can present an empowering experience for migrants themselves. Civil society can help inform the migration debate with evidence rather than misperceptions as well as a recollection of best practices and lessons learnt, much of which is being brought to the discussions by stakeholders, including by academia and the private sector.

Further, and this is my third point, we need to build on existing mechanisms and lessons learnt from the GFMD as a multi-stakeholder platform and think of how this can be used for the Global Compact for migration.

Enormous progress has been made over the last two decades on framing challenges and discussing opportunities of international migration in large part thanks to the trust and confidence built among states as well as between states and other stakeholders in the GFMD and the two High-Level Dialogues at the United Nations. Much of this progress has been inspired by my predecessor, Peter Sutherland, who has played a pivotal role in shaping this forum, advocating for a global agenda on international migration while mobilizing the expertise of all stakeholders.

All of you, as GFMD civil society actors, have developed and mobilized common messages and joint advocacy to Member States since 2007. Over the years we have seen closer collaboration and convergence among civil society organizations and networks, inclusion of migrants, refugees and members of diaspora. Examples of your convergence are the 5-point action plan to follow-up the Second High-Level Dialogue in 2013, the Civil Society Stockholm Agenda related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Deal for Migrants, Refugees and Societies at last year's UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants. It will be crucial to discuss how those agendas can be aligned with the follow-up to the Global Compact.

Going forward, we also need to think about how to bring the substantive knowledge, the repository of good practices and lessons learnt of strengthened cooperation and convergence of agendas in the GFMD to a process, which is held under the auspices of the UN General Assembly.

Coming back on how to best contribute to the process for the global compact more concretely, I urge you to think creatively on where your respective organisation might best influence the discussions and offer its expertise in a specific area. Civil society is uniquely placed to target gaps in Member States discussions and frame issues where real progress can be made.

As you know, four days of multi- stakeholder hearings will be held from April 2017 to June 2018 presided by the President of the General Assembly. Those hearings are designed to gather views of civil society in this process. A civil society steering committee has been established based on regional, sectorial and gender balance, which is tasked to support the preparations for the multi-stakeholder hearings including the selection of civil society speakers.

I can assure you that the Office of the President of the General Assembly, my office and the co-facilitators are committed to ensure that the process is being conducted in the most open and transparent way. This is why we have decided to make all your written submissions from the

thematic sessions and the hearings available on our website. In my role as the Secretary-General of the 2018 conference, I would be pleased to hear from you if you have ideas and suggestions beyond your written submissions that you wish to bring to my attention directly. We need bold ideas and visionary thinking ahead of the start of the negotiations.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that I count on civil society actions and commitments in the development and implementation of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

I wish you success for your deliberations today.

Thank you.