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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address you today, although I am disappointed not to be with you in person.

I wish at the outset to congratulate colleagues from OECD, UN-DESA and IOM for organizing this first ever forum on migration statistics.

Your gathering could not be more timely as Member States will next month begin negotiations towards a global compact on migration.

And just last week, the Secretary-General issued his report as an input to the zero draft of the compact, which in turn will be tabled by the co-facilitators in early February.

In the consultation phase of this process towards a global compact on migration, states have repeatedly pointed to the need for reliable, timely and internationally comparable migration data as key needs.

Before I turn to a number of issues of particular relevance to this call for more and better data I wish, first, to take this opportunity to situate my comments in the broader

context of the Secretary-General's vision for the global compact, as outlined in his report.

First, the Secretary-General's report underscores that the global compact must address international migration for what it truly is: a global phenomenon. The opportunities and challenges that human mobility presents are not exclusive to any one part of the world, yet they present themselves with important regional specificities that need to be understood and addressed.

In doing so, the compact must reinforce at the same time a commitment to multilateralism and respect for state sovereignty.

Built on a strong platform of inter-state cooperation, the compact should be sufficiently flexible to be relevant both for the current and future realities of migration, and we will be best served if we are properly equipped to anticipate change and prepare policy responses accordingly.

Second, the Secretary-General emphasises throughout the need for our collective focus to remain squarely on facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration. Our project is not a futile attempt to curtail migration, let alone to attempt to stop it altogether.

The report maps out what facilitating safe and orderly migration should look like, what key obstacles currently prevent us from reaching this goal, and what solutions are available to overcome these hurdles.

First, we must improve regular migration.

It is crucial to keep in mind that most of the world's 258 million migrants move in a completely regular fashion. Their economic impact and contribution to reducing inequalities between and among countries is well recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals.

And, further: beyond its contribution to sustainable development, you yourselves know only too well migration's utility as a tool to offset demographic trends of population growth or decline in many countries.

Despite the many positive impacts of migration, current restrictive labour policies, coupled with other legal and practical barriers often hinder migrants' potential to contribute fully to our societies.

In this regard, the Secretary-General urges Member States to open and diversify the various legal pathways for migration including as a tool to reduce irregular migration.

There are several advantages to such an approach.

More legal avenues for migration will reduce the incentives for individuals to enter or stay in a country irregularly, thereby protecting migrants from exploitation. At the same time, a variety of open pathways will ensure that actual labour market needs for foreign workers in many countries are met, and not only in the informal economy, as is often the case today.

The Secretary-General also highlights the situation of migrants in vulnerable situations, particularly those who, having tried to escape insecurity, human rights violations, environmental degradation, or general lack of opportunities, have undertaken a journey in perilous conditions, often as part of large population movements.

For many of those, while asylum under the Refugee Convention is not an option, return is often also not realistic.

We are currently ill-equipped to address this issue, thus the need for increased international cooperation which should yield practical, sustainable and humane solutions for them.

Finally, the report stresses the Secretary-General's ambition to reconsider the working methods of the United Nations system on international migration in order to support the implementation of the global compact in the best possible way, in line with his proposed UN management reform and strengthening of the development system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now address a few elements I would like to highlight in the context of your discussion on migration data.

The global compact should seek to launch an era of implementation where real progress can be made on the many commitments already made to the tangible benefit of millions of individuals.

I'm sure I don't have to convince anyone in this room that well-managed migration policies must be evidence-based and informed by the best data available.

To this end, the global compact will need to be supported by an increased effort to invest in data collection, analysis and research, on the broadest possible thematic and geographic basis.

Availability of timely, disaggregated data is so crucial to the design of appropriate migration policies, both nationally and internationally. Credible economic and social indicators are the best way to counteract myths and assumptions which cannot be the basis for sound public policy.

While more scientific evidence and research on international migration is clearly required, , we must also acknowledge the current environment in which we will seek to deploy these efforts. There is an increase in public distrust towards government institutions in many countries, and privacy protection concerns are also rising .

It will be critical for the scientific community and for political leaders to stress the importance of data gathering exercises such as population censuses, and to reiterate the proper handling of such information.

I was particularly pleased to see that your deliberations include a panel supporting on-going endeavours to correct the narrative on international migration, while focusing on the existing tension between popular perception and the reality of migration: a reality which – as you all know – is much better than public rhetoric in many countries would suggest.

Finally, as outlined earlier, the compact should be viewed essentially as an agreement to cooperate. Success will largely depend on political leadership and the willingness of states to enhance cooperation, not only between themselves, but also in partnership with other stakeholders including civil society, academia and the scientific community, the private sector, and others.

In this spirit of cooperation, I am delighted to see that your discussion focuses on capacity building and collaboration with a variety of stakeholders to explore innovative ideas to improve migration data.

In closing, let me reiterate that the global compact process presents a unique opportunity to prioritize investments in data collection and research, and to mobilize resources and funding needed for a better understanding of all aspects of international migration.

I wish you all the best in your deliberations and I look forward to hearing the results of this splendid initiative.

Thank you.