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**“Labour mobility and the better management of global migration”**

Side event during the fourth round of intergovernmental negotiations on the  
Global Compact for Migration

**Monday 14 May 2018, 13:15PM**

**Conference Room 2 – UN Headquarters, New York**

Excellencies, esteemed colleagues and friends,

I am happy to welcome you to this side event organized by my office, in collaboration with the Center of Global Development, and co-chaired by the Permanent Missions of Germany and the Philippines.

We are now halfway into the negotiations on the global compact for safe orderly and regular migration. It’s encouraging to see that there is strong continued engagement from all regions and a clear desire for mutual incentives to strengthen multilateral cooperation.

While this compact is an opportunity to address migration’s challenges, it is also an opportunity to harness its many benefits and to enhance the contributions that migrants make to their host communities and to the sustainable development of their country of origin.

It is at the juncture of both, that issues around labour mobility come to the fore. In particular, I would add my voice to the many who stress the importance of exploring diverse ways by which to maximize the benefits of labour mobility, provide hope and opportunity to the largest number of prospective migrants, and meet societies’ labour market needs.

Work opportunities and aspirations for a better life, economic opportunities and skills development are major drivers of international migration. As stated in SDG 10, reducing inequalities within and between countries – for instance the imbalance in employment opportunities – will require global solutions.

Demographic trends and economic indicators suggest that labour considerations are and will remain key to shaping the development of well-managed international migration.

Over the next few decades many countries will undergo significant demographic changes. In some countries, a dramatic decline is expected in the share of the working-age population. In



other countries the working-age population is likely to grow significantly by 2050. A failure to manage how best these two dynamics can be brought to bear to offset each other is in no-one's interests. Rather it risks bringing about precisely what we seek to avert: growing economic and social stresses and heightened, unregulated and chaotic mobility.

Besides demographic trends, factors such as climate change and the transformation of the workplace through technology and artificial intelligence are already having and promise – in some instances, threaten – profound impact in the decades to come..

In this environment, the call to discuss innovative approaches to labour mobility is indeed compelling.

I would suggest that one way – not sufficient on its own, but vital, to address labour market needs, and improve the circulation of skills between states in a safe and orderly fashion – is to provide opportunities to prospective migrants in an environment that protects both their interests and those of national workers, while meeting a state's labour needs at all skills levels which it cannot fulfill domestically. Failing that, recourse to irregular pathways is likely to fill the void, with its well-known pitfalls.

This is not, to stress, a single-shot solution in addressing migration's challenges. We must recognize that the demand for access through immigration to labour markets in wealthier countries is unlikely to be fully accommodated at any point in time. Indeed, this imbalance is set to increase in the coming decades and difficult choices will have to be made.

But, equally, more can be done in this regard. Central to this is a more open, and better informed, discourse on what is meant by labour mobility. There are many models, some of which will be discussed today; and it is wrong to conflate such mobility simply as being a pathway to permanence. Rather, the history of migration is as much about the continuous circulation of people as it is about permanent resettlement.

As importantly, we should not forget that immigration-fueled diversity is good for economic growth. Increased openness to workers from as many origins as possible, will reap large benefits for host societies by providing an increased range of skills, ideas and innovative solutions from which to draw.

The global compact provides a unique opportunity to deepen our understanding of this issue, as well as others, and identify options, from which states can take inspiration according to their particular needs, current and projected.



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As a corollary of reaping the economic benefits of increased mobility, I believe that heightened inter-state cooperation on this issue will lead to fewer irregular border crossings, fewer migrants working outside the law and fewer abuses of irregular migrants.

Expanding pathways is not the sole answer to irregular migration but it will be central to any ultimately successful approach in addressing this problem.

Let me conclude by stressing that the question we face is not whether migration will occur but under what conditions it will. Only sound policies will determine whether it will occur via black markets on a scale not yet seen, with the inevitable threats to human rights and security that this entails? Or whether it will occur through new, expanded lawful channels for regular mobility, designed to maximize the benefits of migration for all?

This is our task, and it will only work if it is a truly common project.

Thank you