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**Statement by Louise Arbour, Special Representative
of the Secretary-General for International Migration**

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Opening Remarks at multi-stakeholder hearing

New York, 21 February 2018

**Your Excellency, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the
General Assembly,
Distinguished Co-facilitators,
Excellencies,
Partners and colleagues,**

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today.

As the Member States of the United Nations begin their negotiations this week for what we hope to be a successful Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, this hearing provides an opportune moment to underscore the importance of having a fact-based narrative on migration.

Throughout the consultation phase of this global compact process, I was pleased to hear so many Member States calling for increased and improved data on migration to support evidence-based policymaking. And as the Secretary-General highlighted in his report “Making Migration Work for All”, we must ensure that accurate data inform policy debates about migration, including its impacts on States, migrants and host communities.

Decades' worth of studies and research inform us of the multitude of benefits that migration brings to migrants, states, host communities and communities left behind. But it's not enough for me to say that they exist, so let me reiterate some of the major facts about international migration:

- There are currently 258 million international migrants today, a figure expected to increase in the coming decades, yet representing only 3.4% of the global population, an increase from 2.8% in 2000.**
- The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that migrant workers in higher-productivity settings contributed \$6.7 trillion – or 9.4% – to global GDP in 2015. This is \$3 trillion more than they would have produced in their countries of origin.**
- In 2017, nearly \$600 billion was remitted internationally – three times greater than all development assistance. Approximately \$450 billion of that was sent to developing countries. And even with these large sums, migrants put 85% of their earnings back into host countries through taxes and spending.**

- **48% of migrants are women. 67% of female migrants work (compared to 51% of women worldwide) and send home a higher percentage of their earnings as remittances than men.**
- **Migrants are frequently presented as security threats, but they are statistically less likely to be involved in crime than local populations.**

There are, of course, those instances when international migration might have negative impacts: when large inflows of migrants have short-term destabilizing effects on local labour markets if they are not properly regulated, or when large numbers of skilled migrants leave a country for work elsewhere, it can be difficult to fill resulting labour gaps.

But over the long-term the evidence is clear: the benefits of migration vastly outweigh the challenges. And without a clear understanding of migration, negative narratives surround migrants. If, for example, the migration debate singularly focuses on security concerns, then misguided migration policies will continue to reduce rather than enhance migration's benefits. Given the many proven positive outcomes from migration, making migration work for all is the impetus for why we need greater international cooperation on migration, not less.

Yet despite international advancements on migration, perceptions of migrants as burdens or threats continue, moving from the fringes to the mainstream. We must not allow xenophobic political narratives about migration distort our objective to enhance international cooperation on migration. It is only with facts and context that we can have a respectful and realistic discussion about migration, one that pushes back on the many inaccurate and negative narratives being touted for short-term political gains and misguided policies.

Migration is about people's lives and is a complex, life-changing experience for generations – for both migrants and host communities. Properly understood and conveyed, their stories are nuanced, and deeply personal. Community engagement is the best method to prevent xenophobia and false narratives about the impact of migrants.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that data cannot fully capture the different perspectives and concerns about migration. While migration is global and most countries are simultaneously countries of origin, transit and destination, we must recognize that different countries and host communities have diverging perspectives of migration, as well as differing priorities and challenges. Sometimes, even the most persuasive, fact-based arguments for migration cannot compete with deeply held personal concerns about migration's cultural and social impacts. We must take seriously and address the concerns by states and host communities even if – in fact particularly if - they are misguided.

In order to address misperceptions about migration and the discriminatory, xenophobic and intolerant views those misperceptions can foster, we need to create a more open, balanced and comprehensive discourse on the topic, and improve the public perception of migrants through factual information about their positive contributions.

We have a responsibility not to exacerbate prejudices and tensions with misleading information and biased terminology, including through our use of social media. It is our responsibility to not just broaden the opportunities that migration offers to all, but to provide evidence of those benefits while tackling the challenges.

So as governments all around the world begin to negotiate a global compact on migration, we need – more than ever before – an accurate portrayal of migrants, and of migration, to help shape public discourse and policy. It is up to all of us – the UN system, civil society, academia, the private sector, media, migrants and host communities - to engage responsibly in what has become a marketplace of facts about migrants and migration. This can be our greatest support to Member States in their efforts towards a global compact that makes migration work for all.