

Statement

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Regional Consultation on International Migration in the Arab Region
In preparation for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration

Beirut, 26-27 September 2017

Dr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Ms. Enas El Fergany, Director of Refugees, Expatriates and Migration Affairs Department at the League of Arab States,

Distinguished co-facilitator, Ambassador Lauber,

Ambassador Swing, Director-General of IOM,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today in Beirut, at the second of the regional consultations organized by the UN Regional Commissions.

The discussions that will take place today and tomorrow will provide critical insights into the process leading to the adoption in 2018, of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

In launching this process last year through the adoption of the New York Declaration, Member States recognized that on a topic as far-reaching as migration, no one state can operate in isolation. More than maybe any other issue, migration brings together the prerogatives of state sovereignty and the reality of state interdependence.

There is everything to gain in developing a strong state cooperation system for the better management of human mobility. This should benefit the migrants themselves, of course, but also their countries of origin and the communities that receive them.

Over the past months, we have discussed a variety of issues at the global level, during the thematic sessions and the multistakeholder hearings organized under the auspices of the UN

General Assembly. These have proven very useful in developing a common understanding of the complexity of the many facets of migration, and in exploring options to address them.

Today's consultation is an opportunity to analyze migratory trends, challenges and opportunities at the regional and sub-regional levels, and I look forward to hearing your expert views and learning from your experiences within the Arab region.

Allow me now to share some observations I have drawn from the discussions so far and that I consider particularly important for the development of the global compact.

First, migration is not a trend – it has been with us since time immemorial and will remain a constant as long as women, men and children continue to move in search of new horizons, better economic opportunities, or greater safety and dignity.

We should embrace this reality because migration is an overwhelmingly positive story, with significant social, economic and cultural benefits for all involved. Explicitly grounded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, well managed migration holds the promise of even greater benefits.

Second, the large majority of today's 244 million migrants move through safe, orderly and regular channels. Yet many others find themselves with little choice but to move, and often to live and work, in precarious conditions of irregularity. The motivations for these journeys are complex and multi-faceted. Some flee persecution and conflict and may obtain refugee status protection. Others seek to escape severe hardship: food insecurity, poverty, the adverse effects of climate change, or some combination of the above.

Improved understanding of the reasons that compel people to move is required if effective, people-centered measures are to be put in place both to better manage their journey and to fully respond to their protection needs.

This leads me to my third point. Unsafe and irregular migration needs to be addressed. Large scale irregular migration feeds informal labour markets where migrants are often exploited; may create downward pressures on wages in the formal markets; makes it difficult for States to know who is on their territory; and adds fuel to fear and intolerance.

Faced with the reality of the strong impulses to leave, current demographic projections, and the attraction of perceived opportunities elsewhere, we must expand access to a spectrum of regular pathways for migration, such as family reunification, study, and access to work at all skills levels, including through circular, temporary or permanent schemes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To address these challenges and maximize the benefits of cross-border mobility for all, the global compact will depend on principled and collaborative migration governance at the national, regional and global levels.

Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to migration governance will require the expertise and participation of non-governmental organizations, civil society, academic institutions, parliaments, diaspora communities, the private sector, national human rights institutions, migrant organizations and migrants themselves.

And while migration governance starts at the national level, regional mechanisms like this one play a key role, since the migration policy of one country inevitably influences that of others and since the bulk of cross-border migration is regional.

It is also crucial to remember that in today's world – the Arab region is a good example of this – most States are at once states of origin, transit and destination. In other words, there is more commonality of interest between States than may be first apparent.

In closing, a successful global compact should yield real operational deliverables that will, in a sustainable way, facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration. It should mean greater protection for the vulnerable; an easing of strain on asylum systems; better matching of labour needs with available skills at all levels; and greater leveraging of remittances for development.

To succeed, we depend on strong leadership: to ground the debate in facts and dispel the many misperceptions and often hostile reactions to these issues. Improved policy responses must rest on a sober understanding of reality and on the existing imperatives of international law. This is essential if we do not want to perpetuate the present mode of *ad hoc* crisis management and ultimately fail people on the move and the millions of others who depend on them.

You have undertaken an important challenge in seeking to develop a global compact that will enhance human rights, development and peace and security – the founding pillars of the UN system – and improve the security and wellbeing of millions of people.

I thank you and offer my continued support to you in this important endeavour.
