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**Panel Discussion on
“Comprehensive, Planned National Migration Systems:
Taking Steps to Reduce Irregular Migration”**

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**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank the government of Canada for organizing this meeting. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak with you today.

Your support for a vision of the future of migration, originating in the New York Declaration adopted at the General Assembly one year ago, has contributed immensely to where we are today. We count on Members States that encourage an open, frank and constructive dialogue on migration, to push boundaries and to pave the road towards a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

Allow me to share a few ideas related to the issues raised in the concept note for today's discussion.

First and foremost, I would like to stress that the movement of people across borders highlights the connection between state sovereignty and state interdependence.

Successfully planned migration systems therefore depend on a country's willingness to enhance cooperation at the regional and international level. In today's world, most countries are at the same time countries of origin, transit and destination and there is often more commonality among them than we might have perceived at first glance.

By anchoring migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development the international community has recognised that international migration, despite occasional strains, has an overwhelmingly positive economic, social and cultural impact.

Most migrants move through regular channels and they do so for a variety of reasons, mainly in search of job opportunities, to pursue studies or to be reunited with their families. They contribute to the tax and social security systems in countries of destination, fill labour gaps at all skills levels and send home remittances in large sums that exceed official development aid.

Drawing on this reality – and this is my second point – well-planned national migration systems must be designed through a development lens.

The relationship between migration and development is a cycle that reinforces itself in a number of ways and immigration policies shall aim at maximizing the benefits of both. On the one hand, inclusive development can stimulate migration by lifting people out of poverty, multiplying their choices, including the possibility to move abroad. On the other hand, development can create more opportunities at home, reducing the impetus to leave or serve as incentive for return home.

Development progress also means prospective migrants can more likely make rational decisions about their future. This is what we often refer to as migration by “choice”, rather than by “necessity”. This expression, however can be misleading. For migration to be “by choice” there needs to be somewhere for the prospective migrant to go.

As a consequence - and this is my third point - successful migration systems as envisaged in the global compact should focus on reducing irregular migration through the expansion of legal pathways, both in variety and scale, rather than by restricting them.

The current inadequacy of legal pathways inevitably encourages irregular migration. In turn, the existence of a substantial informal economy in many host countries contributes to keeping and attracting irregular migrants, an undesirable situation for a host of reasons.

Yet efforts to tackle irregular migration have disproportionately favoured a repressive, law enforcement approach unlikely to be effective in the long term, unless accompanied by a more comprehensive immigration policy where legal pathways will replace illegal routes of entry or irregular stay. Worse still, some repressive operations increase the migrants' exposure to danger and to exploitation by smugglers and traffickers along the route.

Addressing the mixed motives of migrants, and in particular the needs of people in vulnerable situations regardless of their migration status will not only help reduce irregular migration but will also reduce the current pressures on asylum regimes by providing alternatives to those who advance such claims for lack of an alternative.

While States have legitimate security concerns and responsibilities in managing who enters their territories, a proactive approach to designing migration policies which match the needs of today's globalized world will increase security for all.

Increasing legal opportunities for migrants to access labour markets can take many forms based on the national context. They would range from temporary residence, study and work opportunities, multiple short-term entry visas for seasonal work and the like, not all of which need to open a path to citizenship at the outset or even at all.

Similarly, many countries will need to address their existing populations of irregular migrants, many of whom have long been included in the local economy. There, again, a spectrum of regularisation options presents itself, when return is neither feasible nor desirable.

Finally, migration governance which maximizes the benefits of migration and minimizes its challenges, requires policy coherence at the national level involving all ministries linked to migration such as labour, security, health and education, as well as greater coherence at the international level.

In closing, a successful global compact on migration shall be grounded in today's reality, equipped to address tomorrow's and founded on the pillars of the United Nations system: security, development and human rights.

Thank you.