

UNITED NATIONS



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STATEMENT

Ms. Louise Arbour

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General on
International Migration**

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Human Rights Day

**and launch of the year-long campaign for the 70th
Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

New York, 11 December 2017

Dear Excellencies,

Esteemed guests,

I am happy to be here with all of you today in two capacities: as one of the former UN High Commissioners for Human Rights, with my esteemed colleague Ms. Pillay, and in my current capacity as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration. There is obviously a strong human rights component in my current work.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights reminds us of “the dignity and worth of the human person and that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”...”.

Despite this universal birthright, most people today have to fight to ensure their equality, and many have to struggle to access their freedom.

And there may be few greater determinants of inequality than the place of one’s birth. This was addressed bluntly and very progressively in the SDGs – particularly in SDG 10 which articulates clearly the need to reduce inequalities within and between countries and posits that “safe, orderly and regular migration” will contribute to reducing such inequalities.

While communication technology and the ease of transportation has and will continue to invite and facilitate human mobility, the legal and political environment is barely catching up.

So almost 70 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Member States are in the process of developing a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: a global compact, I hope, that will have substantive meaning for millions of people on the move, those they left behind and their host communities.

There is still today, unfortunately, significant, widespread hostility towards migrants - irrespective of their status - in many countries. Human rights violations against migrants including discrimination with respect to access to justice, health, education and housing, and are often linked to deep-seated attitudes of prejudice and xenophobia.

When the discourse on migration policy reverts to feverish debates which demonize migrants as burdens or threats to society or perpetuates inaccuracies, the factual and overwhelmingly positive contributions migrants make to our societies and economies are overshadowed, and sometimes they spill over into acts of violence or

intimidation against them, and against other minority groups.

It is incumbent on all of us to take the lead in enacting migration policies that will contribute to changing the negative perceptions of migration. Migrants are not a burden. Even less so are they a threat.

The Universal Declaration also reminds us that human beings “are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Siblinghood might be a better term in 2017. Let us make the global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration an expression of that siblinghood and recognize that human mobility is often the pathway to equality and freedom. The adoption of a Global Compact for Migration in December 2018 will be very fitting way to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.