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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
International Migration
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Excellencies,

Colleagues and friends,

Thank you for inviting me to be here today. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak with you.

It is fitting, in this venue, that I acknowledge once again and pay tribute to the work of the previous Special Representative of the Secretary General for International Migration, Peter Sutherland.

Your support for his enlightened vision of the future of migration contributed immensely to where we are today. It is indeed in this forum that he mobilized your expertise and commitment, from which we will continue to draw as we move forward in this new chapter of our journey towards a Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

This journey is now well on its way. Thematic sessions of the UN General Assembly are unfolding, informing our thinking on the key issues that will need to be addressed in the compact by the end of next year.

The progress so far is encouraging. The three thematic sessions that have already taken place, in New York and in Geneva, have elicited ideas as well as

concerns and proposals from which the co-facilitators will draw towards the preparation of the zero draft for negotiations early next year. Time is of the essence: while there will be opportunities to shape and inform the text beyond then, we are working against a tight timeline. This will require strong, principled leadership in bringing publics together and developing effective policies.

These policies must be grounded in evidence; policies driven by perception will likely not work. In my opinion, the main pillar of policy-making must be to facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration, including through an increased variety of legal pathways. Policy-making should not be aimed at stopping migration, not least as both the push factors (conflict, poverty, climate change, etc.) and pull factors (in the case of Europe: prosperity, stability, and labour needs) remain too strong. In such a situation, the impact of policies seeking to stop migration will only encourage recourse to irregular channels and increase the cost of the journey for the individuals concerned (too often, fatally).

My second observation, which will not be new to you but which has not yet fully penetrated public opinion, is that migration is an overwhelmingly positive story. Indeed, for migrants, the communities from which they come and those into which they arrive, the benefits are clear.

Yet the prevailing narrative tends to be the opposite. In order to address misperceptions surrounding migration – and the discriminatory and intolerant views that these misperceptions foster – we need to create a much more open, balanced and comprehensive discourse on the topic: one that moves away from migrants being seen as a burden or a threat, towards one that recognizes the many contributions brought by migration throughout history, to the benefit of countries of origin, destination and transit alike.

At the same time, we should not be deaf to the concerns some communities have about the threat to their livelihood and to their changing identities. These concerns are real and often held in good faith, even if they are ill-founded and misguided. They will be best addressed by a responsible, accurate narrative about migrants and by policies that foster inclusion and respond in concrete ways not only to the needs of migrants but, importantly, to those of the host communities.

A specific aspect of the narrative that we need to change is the assumption that most migrants are young men in search of jobs, while women and children are left behind. In fact, 48% of international migrants are women, and this is neither a new nor temporary phenomenon: in

1960, they already constituted 46% of international migrants.

As a consequence, the global compact must reflect throughout the best interests of women – as they themselves define their best interests. Not only should it address the specific vulnerabilities of women, but it should also promote the empowerment of all women and girls, recognizing the significant contribution and leadership of women in migrant communities.

Thirdly, I have said before and I wish to stress again the critical importance of effective international cooperation and political leadership in this endeavour.

As we aim for the highest, not the lowest common denominator, as we seek to put in place concrete, implementable initiatives, and as we keep our sight on the long-term horizon, courageous, enlightened leadership is critical. As has been demonstrated here over the last few days, this leadership will come from elected officials, civil servants, local authorities, business people, civil society actors and, I believe many in the United Nations who have longstanding expertise in this field.

In fact, the UN Charter, the international human rights framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development provide the framework into which a Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration can find its natural home.

My fourth point is that against this background, the global compact should be a key step towards facilitating regular and legal pathways for migration, not restricting them.

These pathways could be expanded through some combination of increased opportunities for family reunification, study, humanitarian considerations and access to work at all skills levels, including through circular, temporary or permanent migration schemes.

The facilitation of regular and legal pathways for migration should be combined with robust social inclusion programmes that focus on benefitting *all* members of society, keeping in mind that many communities are often as marginalized as the migrants that they are required to host.

Safe, orderly and regular migration also signifies states' ability to identify and prioritize who should enter their countries, for what purpose and for how long. Return and readmission programmes are necessary elements in

this regard. They should be carried out in a dignified manner, with respect for human rights, and within a collaborative framework between states.

My last point is that the compact should prioritize the needs and protection of migrants in the most vulnerable situations.

In fact, Heads of State and Government agreed - through the New York Declaration - to consider developing non-binding guiding principles and voluntary guidelines, consistent with international law, on the treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations, especially unaccompanied and separated children.

How the global compact reflects the mixed and changing motives of those on the move and the grey lines between refugees and some other migrants, will be fundamental to its success. Reasonable access to legal pathways, fair determination of status and equally fair return policies will enhance the effectiveness of the asylum regime by providing alternatives to those who will not qualify as refugees.

I commend this Global Forum for its focus on the historical opportunity that the Global Compact presents. A

year from now, we will be poised to harvest more than a decade of engagement on this issue by many of you present here today. I am persuaded that as you celebrate this accomplishment, you never lose sight of the need for sustainable, holistic, human rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to migration, within the overarching objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you.