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**UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for**  
**International Migration**  
**Keynote Address**

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**Towards a global response to migration**

**Overseas Development Institute (ODI)**

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**Dear colleagues and friends,**

**It is an immense pleasure to join all of you here today. I would like to thank ODI not only for this invitation, but also for its valuable contribution to the preparatory process leading to the adoption of a global compact on migration.**

**Your intellectual and policy-smart contributions to the debate set the gold standard. In particular, your briefings on Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development help us disentangle the complex relationship between migration and sustainable development. This is a point I'll return to in a minute.**

**In addition, Marta did a tremendous job as thematic expert during a session of the General Assembly on contributions of migrants and diasporas to all dimensions of sustainable development in July. So successful was she that we've called on her again to moderate a key session of the stocktaking meeting taking place early next month in December.**

**We look forward to working with you all towards a successful compact.**

**Let me first share with you a few observations emerging from the process so far. We have just finished the regional consultations, mandated as part of the preparatory phase of this process. This has brought home to me the variety and complexity of the ways in which migration issue present themselves on the global scene. From Filipino women migrant workers in Gulf countries to regularization exercises in Morocco, there are a multiplicity of both problems and solutions that are easily obscured when a western-centric point of view dominates the analysis.**

**Even within the West, emphasis moves from preoccupations with “flows” of migrants in Europe, to “stocks” of irregular migrants in the US. I pause here to comment on the use of language, through which we often perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes, if not worse. This technical language of “stock and flow” is not the worst and I believe is quite innocent. But I can’t help but be aware of how it analogizes migrants to merchandise or livestock. There are many other expressions that I believe are less innocent but deliberately invidious as they aim to poison public opinion: “illegal” rather than “irregular” migrants”, “hordes”, “waves” and “swarms”, rather than simply “large numbers”; “contract workers” rather than migrant workers”, so as to conveniently obscure the vulnerabilities that come from being a foreigner. But I digress.**

**Approaching the global compact as a truly global issue will be one of its many challenges as well as its key opportunity. The challenge will be to be relevant to all without drowning in detailed specificities. The opportunity will be to rise above the exaggerated importance of issues that are place and time sensitive, and to put in place a framework that will serve all of us well, now and in the future.**

**A second observation on my part is how the approach to migration through the GCM so far has re-centered the conversation around development issues, rather than around security concerns, where it occupied I believe an exaggerated space at least in many corners of western public opinion.**

**Finally, and before I return to some of these development-related considerations, and in line with my previous comments about the choice of vocabulary, I believe that the last year or so has contributed to the beginning of a change of narrative. In this field, as in many others nowadays, the reality is much better than perception.**

**And that reality is gaining ground. Outside informed circles such as this one, knowledge about the impact of remittances, for instance, was often limited. Yet when I, like many of you, had opportunities to discuss this issue with political decision-makers, I found that some were not particularly well-informed about some important aspects of migration.**

**For instance, did they know that the \$429 billion in remittances that migrants made to developing countries in 2016 represented some 15% of their earnings and about 3 times the total ODA? Often not.**

**Surely, they knew that remittances often amounted to more than 20% of GDP in some countries. Really?**

**Had they considered what this impact would be if we could actually reduce the cost of these money transfers from an average of 7.5% to 3% as we promised to do? No again.**

**And they often had no idea that we actually know how to do that, and that much of it is up to them. Increase competition among money transfer providers, and reduce the oversight requirements, which, as part of money laundering and financing of terrorism preoccupations, have taken the banks out of a business too cumbersome to be lucrative.**

**And did they know, while we're at it, that if we could improve financial awareness on the part of the recipients of these individually modest sums of money, the impact on developing countries would be even greater. Guess.**

**But this is now good news. Because this reality, among others, brings the conversation about migration to a much better place. In making sound policy, the foundations must be made of fact, not perception, fiction, myths and stereotypes.**

**So, let me now return to the subject of development more broadly.**

**The relationship between migration and development is at once obvious and deceptive. We have an immensely useful starting point here as migration is not only explicitly included in the SDGs, but it is actually recognized as a tool to achieve maybe the most surprising universally accepted development objective: that of reducing inequalities within and between countries (SDG10).**

**So here is the link between migration and development: we will facilitate safe, orderly, regular migration as a way of redressing inequalities within and between countries.**

**That much is clearly stated. What is not always so clearly stated, but is often implied in many policy discussions, is that development is good because it will reduce migration.**

**Well, you might ask, which one is it? I would suggest the following: Improved, inclusive development may, in time, change the configuration of migratory patterns. As people are lifted out of poverty, their life choices improve, including the choice of whether to migrate, either to improve their skills or seek greater economic opportunities abroad. Their departure then opens work opportunities for others in their country of origin, thereby accelerating, alongside the increased financial and other – often intangible – transfers of benefits, the development potential. And as long as their migration takes place in a well- regulated environment, it benefits countries of destination as well, thereby contributing to their own development (in developed countries this is usually called prosperity).**



**Further development progress therefore offers more opportunities at home and may in time reduce the impetus to leave. It may also serve as an incentive to return for the many who will have by then lived and worked abroad and who may see opportunities to transfer their skills back home. This may also be the case for some who may wish to return in retirement, particularly if they may carry with them their accrued benefits - such as pension or medical insurance - that they have earned abroad.**

**So, it can go either way, depending on a wide range of contextual circumstances. Development may increase or reduce migration, at any given point in time, in any given country. What matters is that migration be managed as a way of maximizing its development and other positive economic impacts, among other objectives, some more personal to the migrants themselves.**

**In order to do so we must be true to the mantra: “Migration by choice, not by necessity”. But we must be also very clear about what that has to mean: reduce necessity, increase choices. nWe should not obscure the reality of what we really mean when we say “Everyone has the fundamental right to leave his or her country” as it is also clear that no one has the fundamental right to go anywhere else.**

**Of course, there is much more behind the pressing need for a global compact on migration than migration’s undoubted development potential. It will have to deal with the challenge of so-called mixed flows; begin to anticipate more keenly some of the likely impacts of climate change; acknowledge the need for greater efforts to uphold labour standards; and recognize that in managing more effectively the integration of long-term migrants in host communities, the needs of those communities, too, must also be addressed.**

**But even as stripped down to a development question, the role migration plays is one that is unquestionably positive. I hope these brief introductory remarks to our conversation today will have convinced you, assuming you needed convincing, that the need for a global framework for international cooperation on human mobility is self-evident and long overdue. A successful compact has the potential to have a meaningful impact on the lives of millions of migrants and million others in their new and old communities.**

**The compact itself will be the result of many months of governmental negotiations starting early next year, based on a zero-draft presented by the co-facilitators of this process (Mexico and Switzerland). It should be agreed upon by July next year and will be formally adopted at an inter-governmental conference in December 2018.**

**The months ahead provide us with a unique opportunity to change the narrative further, from perception to reality, mobilizing open-minded citizens everywhere towards harnessing the benefits of human mobility for the greater good.**

**I hope to see you again during that process.**

**Thank you.**