

UN General Assembly Summit Addressing Large Movements of Refugees (Plenary Meeting)

Speech by Mr Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Audience, Mr. Chairman,

It has already been stated several times today that the International Community is currently faced with the worst refugee crisis since World War II. The exceptionally high numbers of people in need of protection mean that no single country or small group of states alone can fulfil the obligation to protect, to assist and to integrate, without broad international support. They also mean that states that do not seek solutions at the beginning will still have to do so at a later stage. People will move on in search of safety and humane conditions if they don't find them in their first place of refuge. And, in some cases, modern communications technology and means of transportation will help them to reach destinations quite distant from immediate conflict zones. This is a lesson that European states had to learn during last year's "long summer of migration".

But we must not forget that even with the refugee crisis, the majority of migratory flows involve other types of movement and it should be noted that many sectors of the economies and societies in countries of both destination and origin would no longer function without the valuable contributions made by migrants.

However, far too many migrants and refugees have to reach their destinations in an irregular and dangerous way, are vulnerable and prone to exploitation, work under inhumane conditions, or face prejudice, xenophobia and discrimination. And all of this happens in a world that is increasingly inter-linked and depends on constant exchanges of talent, skills, information and know-how.

Today's challenges are global, and today's opportunities are equally global. The challenges require global responses based on joint responsibility; the opportunities will only be harnessed when the vision of "safe, orderly and regular migration" becomes a realistic option for everyone.

The “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants” is both a remarkable and a crucial step in the development of a new and global framework for the protection of refugees and for managing migration in a better and safer way. The Declaration reflects a change in thinking, where the protection of refugees and displaced people is no longer understood as the concern only of countries close to conflicts or situated along migratory routes, but where the global community has to respond, act and support as a whole, and regardless of where a crisis situation emerges.

The Declaration reflects new thinking also when it stresses that these global responses must take into account the varying capacities and resources that different states have at their disposal. None of them should opt out completely, but none of them should be overburdened either.

Last but not least, the Declaration emphasises an understanding of “safe, orderly and regular migration” as an asset not only for individual migrants and their families, but also for states, economies and societies, which benefit significantly from these movements. This approach blurs artificial distinctions between countries of origin, transit and destination, and gives a new impetus to the facilitation and management of people’s mobility as a common task based on shared values and interests.

Notwithstanding this, the Declaration can only be a first step in achieving these goals, a first step that needs to be followed by many others, in order to bring protection to those who need it and assistance to the countries currently hosting a disproportionate number of refugees, globally.

It is a salutary achievement that 193 Member States of the United Nations have succeeded in working together to make strong commitments towards refugees and migrants, and that they acknowledge their shared responsibility for managing migratory movements in a “humane, sensitive, compassionate and people-centred manner”, as the Declaration calls for. But perhaps the greatest achievement lies in the fact that UN Member States will continue to take very concrete steps towards its practical implementation. The adoption of a “global compact on refugees” and a “global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration” by 2018 would be a testament to the UN Member States’ ability to turn words into action.

The coming two years will be decisive in terms of concrete implementation, and ICMPD stands ready and willing to support our Member States and all of our international friends and partners in this crucially important process.

Thank you.