

Global Refugee Forum 2019

DG Michael Spindelegger, Plenary Session

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Chairman, Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is a pleasure and special honour for me to deliver this statement on behalf of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. Representing an European migration organisation that over the years has expanded its activities from Europe to many other regions of the world, I am very much aware of the significance of the issue of solidarity and responsibility sharing and the importance of better functioning solutions for refugees.

We all know that international migrants form only a small share of the world population, but we also know that this share is growing. Among them there are 25 million refugees and there are more than 41 million people who have been internally displaced. We all agree that these people deserve our utmost attention and support and that it is our obligation to do our best to help them and to help their host countries. Currently, however, only three percent of the global refugee population have access to the so called durable solutions of repatriation, resettlement and local integration. This basic fact should set the frame for all our action. It should inform us *where* we have to improve and *how much* we have to improve in the coming years.

The Global Compact on Refugees and the first Global Refugee Forum play a particular role in this regard. The Global Compact aims at transforming the way the world responds to refugee situations. It wants to ease the pressure on host societies, enhance the self-reliance of refugees, expand access to third country solutions, and improve the conditions for safe and dignified return. The role of the Global Forum is to take stock and to discuss the concrete contributions made by states and other relevant stakeholders with regard to the objectives of the compact. Thus, it provides a reality check, where we can see whether the concrete actions live up to the political commitments that have been made before.

As ICMPD, this approach is very close to our way of thinking and to our way of working. Our aim has always been to promote the link between political dialogue and actions on the ground, to combine targeted research and systematic capacity building, and to establish partnerships between States and other important actors on the basis of trust and mutual respect.

Today, we can conclude that the Global Compact has helped us a lot in lifting these partnerships to a new level. Let me just quote a few examples for actions that we have developed together with our partners and that directly relate to the objectives of the Compact.

One example is our research on complementary pathways that should use possible employment opportunities for refugees as the basis for third country solutions. In 2020, the next phase of the programme will bring the research findings into practice and pilot the first concrete actions. We are promoting protection-sensitive border management systems in our capacity building activities, for instance together with our friends in Lebanon. We will cooperate closely with the African Union to support its Member States in creating better conditions for the return and reintegration of refugees. At the city level, we will continue our work with local authorities and promote policy coherence in the Mediterranean region. And very recently we have started a large-scale programme for Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey that should promote the employment of these Syrians by training, partnerships with the private sector and the support of start-up businesses.

Those are only a few examples of very recent initiatives that our organisation is involved in and that are closely related to the objectives of the Refugee Compact. I see them as a confirmation that, despite all political differences, the issues of solidarity and burden sharing play an increasing role in the attempts of the global community to find better solutions for refugees. This is a very good sign.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all know that International migration and protection are highly political issues. There is still a long way to go before we reach a fully functioning and a fully accepted global system for the governance of protection. But in all the political controversy and heated public debate we should remember one thing. It is not only interests which shape the governance of migration and protection. Ideas and principles play an equally important role. A sense of solidarity between humans and a deeply rooted urge to help others who are in need of support continue to drive our debate. Humanity and global responsibility remain high on our agenda as much as the search for functioning practical solutions.

The Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Refugee Forum are living proof that these fundamental requirements can be brought together. Our discussions should continue to search for solutions that are realistic and idealistic at the same time. Ultimately, they will only work if they improve the situation of refugees, increase the level of solidarity and responsibility sharing among States and find the support of our governments and citizens. We all should work in that direction.

Mr. Chairman, it only remains for me to thank once again UNHCR, the Government of Switzerland and the co-conveners of this first Global Refugee Forum for involving ICMPD and for inviting me to address this plenary. I wish you success in your deliberations and look forward to continued collaboration and engagement in 2020 and beyond.

Thank you.