

**FOURTEENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**
(10 a.m., 25 February 2016)

Agenda item II
The United Nations migration agenda one year from now:
Expectations and priorities

“GA Plenary Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants”

Talking points of Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd
Special Adviser for the Summit
on Addressing Large Movements of Refugee and Migrants

I am grateful to Peter Sutherland for making my life easier this morning with his excellent overview of challenges and opportunities in 2016.

I shall speak more specifically about the General Assembly’s September Plenary Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.

On 22 December last year, the General Assembly adopted a decision announcing that it will convene a ‘high-level plenary meeting’ on 19 September 2016 to ‘address large movements of refugees and migrants.’ The decision also requests the UN Secretary-General to issue a comprehensive report in May to underpin the Summit.

The General Assembly has never before called for a discussion of this topic at such a high level.

We believe it is becoming more widely understood that migrant and refugees make a positive contribution to growth and sustainable development. However, to maximize that positive impact and minimize the human costs associated with large movements of people, States must have a ‘coherent and comprehensive’ approach that promotes safe, orderly and regular movement, with full respect for the human rights of those on the move.

As recent developments in Europe have confirmed, one State’s policies, or a change in those policies, has consequences—both intended and unintended—for refugees and migrants, as well as for other States. While the temptation to act alone in a perceived national interest is high, when it comes to migration, States simply cannot work in isolation from one another.

Most Member States I have begun to consult have referred to the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a basis for our conversation on 19 September and the Secretary General's report.

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals regarding migration, refugees and development, countries of origin, transit and destination must cooperate around a series of common principles and approaches.

The 19 September Summit presents an opportunity for UN Member States to work together to decide how this can be done. Achieving the goals on migration set in the Sustainable Development Agenda will require States to work both individually and in concert. What should they be doing?

In my role as Special Adviser, I am charged with preparing the Secretary-General's report, which will set out recommendations about what we should try to achieve at the Summit. At this stage, I am consulting with Member States, UN entities and civil society to understand everyone's concerns and ideas.

In my conversations to date, I have been encouraged to be 'bold and ambitious,' but I have also been advised to be 'realistic'. Navigating these two approaches is a challenge, especially when considering today's difficult global context.

With regard to this context, what concerns me most over the coming months leading up to the Summit is the negative discourse about refugees and migrants. In many countries, the rhetoric is coloured by a narrative of wariness about the numbers and background of those seeking migrant or refugee status, about threats to security, identity, and jobs. We hear of a 'crisis situation', which too often has its origins in the fear of the outsider, and is not based on facts or evidence. An uneasiness has become part of mainstream discourse. We must challenge this in the most forceful terms.

We need to shift the discussion to one that is based on facts and on the confidence that practical solutions are within our common reach, if States opt to cooperate more effectively. As one of the goals of the Secretary-General's report, this reinforces the philosophy of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. We must ponder how States work can work together to manage large flows of refugees and migrants in a rights-respecting way, consistent with the Sustainable Development Agenda.

As we map out the report, we begin by examining the reasons people leave their homes, the dangers they face on the journey, the uncertain reception they may receive in countries of transit and destination. We are also contemplating how to build on the rich array of State-led initiatives over the past two years and in 2016, and we intend to suggest concrete steps that might be taken.

The recommendations that will appear in the Secretary General's report are still a work in progress, but fortunately most of them suggest a global convergence of approaches to the humanitarian challenges of our day, including large movements of refugees and migrants.

To summarize some of the messages:

Root causes and reasons for large-scale movements must be defined and addressed.

Refugees and migrants have important roles to play in contributing to development of their host societies and their countries of origin.

States need to develop more effective collaborative approaches to address large movements of refugees and migrants to ensure no one is left behind.

Ad hoc responses by individual States cannot tackle sufficiently the challenges of poverty or sustainable development. New global approaches are needed which bring States together in ways which incorporate the contributions of international, regional and local organizations, as well as the private sector, social partners, trade unions, and civil society.

On Refugees, based on what I have learned in discussions with stakeholders, it is clear that Member States are willing to go beyond a simple reaffirmation of the 1951 Refugee Convention to make a commitment to implement it fully. This would mean lifting reservations that impair the enjoyment of all of the rights the Convention confers on refugees.

However, since States need support in hosting large numbers of refugees, more equitable and predictable systems for sharing responsibility for refugees among States must be constructed.

On migration, the Summit faces different challenges. Many concerns have been expressed. For all States, the question of who is authorized to enter or remain in their territories is an attribute of national sovereignty. Cooperation between and among States on the movement of migrants tends to play out bilaterally or at regional levels. In such cases, national interests often prevail over the collective. Emphasis on international law and international human rights law, which pertain to all people, wherever they are, is often ignored or forgotten.

Many stakeholders speak of associating the International Organization for Migration more closely with the United Nations as one way of keeping migration on the agenda of the UN and taking forward a common framework on governance of migration. There are also suggestions about how we could enhance the protection of migrants at risk, migrants stranded in countries undergoing crises, others displaced by natural disasters or climate change, or those fleeing criminal gangs and transnational organized crime.

In my discussions on migration, I hear colleagues from Member States, UN entities and civil society refer repeatedly to the Sustainable Development Agenda. Once again, it is clear that we, as an international community, have made a commitment not to leave migrants and refugees behind.

The Summit in September is an opportunity to work toward meeting this goal. We must strengthen international cooperation for safe and orderly migration that involves full respect for human rights and humane treatment of migrants.

I look forward to hearing your ideas in the course of this DESA coordination meeting on International Migration about what the United Nations should aim to achieve at the September Summit.

My hope is that we will begin an even more robust process toward full implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda with respect to refugees and migrants by the year 2030.

I thank you.