

Statement of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the side event on 'Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements in the perspective of the new development agenda', at the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Migration is the story of humanity. At its best, it tells the stories of teachers, doctors, care and construction workers, actors and artists who have found success and enriched their adopted lands.

But today, deaths and violence, closed borders, ever higher fences, and families torn apart tell a story of failure. In large part this is the failure of the international community to prevent the causes of forced movement in the first place. And it is the failure to protect the most vulnerable of the world's migrants as they move.

In these precarious flows, movement is rarely 'voluntary' in the true sense of that term. Refugees fleeing persecution and conflict journey together with migrants fleeing poverty, discrimination and despair. They are not two different kinds of people; 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. They are all human beings.

Excellencies,

Today's failure of migration governance is not inevitable, nor is it defensible.

I challenge the world's leaders to show compassion, and above all, honesty in defining a rights-based agenda for migration in the 21st century. This agenda must acknowledge the humanity and the human rights of all migrants, regardless of their status, and fulfil the obligations of international law. It must recognise the structural need for migrants in many labour markets, and muster the courage to confront the poisonous rhetoric of xenophobes and racists.

The 2030 development agenda promises to govern migration in full respect for human rights and to 'leave no one behind'.

I urge the international community to fulfil this promise for all migrants.