

Opening remarks by H.E. Mr Mogens Lykketoft, President of the 70th session of the General Assembly, at interactive hearings on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants

18 July 2016

Excellencies, Distinguished Co-facilitators, Representatives of Non-Governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the General Assembly, it is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this informal, multi-stakeholder hearing.

I particularly welcome those who have travelled from far and those who are visiting the United Nations for the first time.

Let me also extend my sincere appreciation to the members of the steering committee who have worked hard over the past few months to develop the programme and to select the speakers for today.

Ladies and gentlemen, civil society and other actors are critical partners of the United Nations, both in short-term humanitarian actions as well as in long-term development projects; working across the three pillars of the UN and in the many inter-governmental processes that take place in New York, Geneva and elsewhere.

This is the day that you take center stage.

I am also very pleased to see that many Member States have taken the time to listen to your views.

And my report on this hearing will ensure that all Member States can benefit from your insights.

The movement of people is one of the few constant phenomena of human history.

It is part of our past and it will most certainly remain part of our future.

People have always moved: in search of a better life, to make use of their skills, to join family or relatives abroad, to escape conflict or other forms adversity.

Indeed, as Ambassador Donoghue will know, there is a wonderful piece of art in the rose garden of the UN that reminds us of this, called "Arrival".

It is a gift from the government and the people of Ireland in the form of a ship, depicting Irish migrants coming ashore to build a better future here in the United States – some perhaps refugees escaping famine; others economic migrants in search of a better future.

In today's globalized world, more people are on the move than ever.

The number of international migrants — persons living in a country other than where they were born — reached 244 million in 2015, an increase of 71 million, or 41 per cent, compared to 2000.

But what brings us together today first and foremost is the disturbingly high level of people being displaced: more than 40 million within countries and more than 20 million across borders.

Millions of refugees linger in refugee camps for years, if not decades, creating an enormous drain on less and least developed countries.

We must find ways and means for a more global, equitable and transparent sharing of responsibilities in receiving and hosting refugees and other destitute migrants, and in supporting countries that, purely of their geography, are overwhelmed by new arrivals.

We must do much much more to meet our moral and legal obligations to both migrants and refugees.

And we must change the narrative on migration – for despite the enormous contribution of migrants and refugees to both countries of origin and destination, the movement of people continues to inspire passionate debates, create political tensions and, sadly, discrimination, xenophobia and racism.

On 19 September, the High Level Meeting is an opportunity to begin to address these issues in a measured and considered way.

It is my hope that member states will adopt a strong political declaration and take concrete steps towards both a global compact on responsibility sharing for refugees and a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration.

Indeed, we are already seeing progress on one important issue, namely the relationship between the UN and the IOM.

Ladies and gentlemen, a successful meeting in September will be a timely contribution to the commitments made by member states in September 2015 in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Indeed, the Agenda cautions that forced displacement may actually reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.

We must not allow this to happen.

And we must not fail those who are displaced around the world any longer.

In closing, let me say once again how thrilled I am that you have gathered in order to find solutions to large movements of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.

Your views and ideas before the Summit are most welcome.

And your commitment to work with us to implement the results of the Summit will be equally critical.

Thank you.