

Remarks by Dr. Madeleine K. Albright
Dialogue – Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact
for Migration
Marrakech, Morocco
Monday, December 10, 2018

Distinguished chairs, your excellencies, I am delighted to be here and pleased to see so many familiar faces, including my friend and former colleague, Secretary General Gurría.

I want to express my appreciation to Special Representative Arbour for inviting me to join this important dialogue. It is a special honor to be here on the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has so much to do with our subject today.

Naturally, this setting reminds me of my own years as America's permanent representative to the United Nations and Secretary of State.

I will always treasure the time that I served my country, but I want to make clear that the thoughts I will offer today are my own; I am not here as an official representative of the United States or anyone else.

And since I long ago ceased being a diplomat, I hope you will permit me to speak bluntly about the topic of migration.

I want to begin on a personal note.

My earliest memories in life are from London, where my family arrived in 1939 as refugees from the Nazi invasion of our native Czechoslovakia.

In the apartment building where we first lived, we met exiles from Poland, Hungary, France and elsewhere across Europe who had comparable stories to tell.

We were thankful for the haven we received but prayed for the day when we could go home.

After the war we did return to Czechoslovakia, but following the Communist coup we were once again forced into exile, this time to the United States of America.

Although we were refugees, I should emphasize that we were lucky ones.

No one threatened to put us in shipping containers, and we arrived in our new homeland on an ocean liner, not an overcrowded raft. In fact, it was 70 years ago last month – November 11, 1948 – that we sailed into New York harbor, past the statue of liberty.

I mention all this because I find it to be impossible to be coldly analytical on the subject of migration. And I also know, from personal experience, that the movement of people from their homes does not occur without good cause.

Most of us would prefer to remain in places where our families live, our names are known, our customs accepted, and our languages spoken.

However, hope is another basic human trait, and so millions of people each year do try to migrate, both legally and illegally.

But we are now well into the twenty-first century and there are more migrants of one type or another – the “international homeless” – than at any time in the past seventy years.

The exodus of people across borders in search of security and the chance for a better life is challenging governments, roiling politics, testing international relief agencies, and raising difficult questions of national identity, social cohesion, fairness, safety, morality and law.

Some blame the present dilemma on migration policies, but the causes of the crisis clearly are much broader than that.

They include poor governance, climate change, and basic economic and demographic realities.

We are also watching as extreme nationalists pit one group against another, poisoning the communal bloodstream with hate towards people who are different – whether in nationality, appearance, or creed.

There are no magic solutions to these challenges, but that does not mean that nothing can be done.

Migration is, by its nature, an international phenomenon which can only be managed through international cooperation. And that is why we are gathered here in Marrakech.

I want to commend all of those who came to Morocco in support of the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Its adoption will represent a significant achievement for multilateralism, and is all the more notable given the current political climate.

Still, even the Compact's strongest supporters will acknowledge that its success ultimately depends on what concrete actions follow, and how well they are integrated with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Today's dialogue is designed to ensure that there is such follow through, so I am pleased to be able to participate in it.

I know that there are representatives from all the key stakeholders – governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and the UN system – who are here to lend their expertise and present constructive ideas.

To help frame those discussions, I would like to emphasize a few points.

First, the most important thing we can do over the long-term is to help more people earn a living in the places from which many now flee.

Technicians and teachers are more affordable by far than rockets and guns; yet global trouble spots are arid in knowledge while awash in the instruments of death.

It is obvious that, should families no longer feel compelled to depart their homelands, the border turbulence would end, and countries could cease putting barbed wire atop walls and packing desperate people into camps.

So our consultations today should reflect the fact that the answer to human flight is human development.

Second, we should recognize that although all nations have a duty to protect borders and enforce laws, that is not their sole responsibility. To be just, a law should recognize that, were Fate to decide differently, each of us might find ourselves outside the gates, clamoring to get in.

The desire to enter a country illegally is not an entitlement to do so; people often want what they cannot get – that is part of the human condition.

But our knowledge that we could be in the shoes of the other should prompt us to ask what we can do to assist those in need.

In other words, we should heed the words of Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, and I quote, that “all human beings are

born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Several conclusions flow from this principle and are worth highlighting.

The opportunity for legal emigration should be available.

The right to refugee status of people with a legitimate fear of persecution should be honored.

Traffickers who raise the hopes of other migrants by lying to them and cheating them out of what little they have should be prosecuted.

Women and children must be shielded from abuse.

Politicians who seek to advance their careers by unfairly castigating immigrant populations should be exposed.

The bottom line is that a person who flees his or her home, for whatever reason, does not shed the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

That is why we need leaders who will help us to understand all sides of the issues, to master our fears, and to recognize that our societies have been enriched immeasurably over time by the contributions of immigrants. I include especially in this category the country to which I pledge allegiance – the United States – a nation whose heritage is traceable to virtually every racial and ethnic group on Earth.

Finally, whatever else can be said of this issue, we should remember that it is not new.

Thirty-five years ago, when the United States was besieged with requests for help by people fleeing unrest in Cuba, Haiti, and Southeast Asia, President Reagan responded without hesitation: “We shall continue America’s tradition as a land that welcomes peoples from other countries. We shall also, with other countries, continue to share in the responsibility of welcoming and resettling those who flee oppression.”

Immigration is one of those complex public policy issues for which there is no single immediate and satisfactory answer. The challenge can still be managed, however, without either hardening our hearts or softening our brains.

Here, a doctrine of shared responsibility such as that described by President Reagan is essential. This can best be realized through the fair representation of diverse interests, informed debate, respect for truth, and the equitable implementation of just laws.

Let me conclude by noting the reason I have come to Marrakech.

Beginning tomorrow, I will be convening a meeting of a group of two-dozen former foreign ministers under the auspices of the Aspen Institute.

Our purpose in coming to Marrakech is to engage in our own dialogue about many of these issues, and we look forward to working with the United Nations and other organizations to help build political support for the objectives laid out in this Compact.

There is no doubt that we live in an era of growing backlash against the forces of globalization. The people assembled in this room are all beneficiaries of globalization, but it has a downside. Globalization is faceless, and it is causing many people to cling even more fiercely to their identity.

We are learning that technology is also double-edged sword. Its benefits are incredible, but it has caused a lot of good jobs to disappear, and social media has been used as a platform to spread hatred, including against migrants.

Amid these new challenges, the institutions that were built after the second world war are no longer working as well as they once did. But they are also more essential than they have ever been.

Challenges such as migration will not be addressed unless countries work together, and the only way they can do that is through instruments such as the Global Compact.

So I commend you all for coming together in the spirit of cooperation to tackle a difficult challenge, and I pledge to do everything I can – including through my network of former foreign ministers – to support your efforts.

Thank you for your kind attention, and I look forward to our dialogue.

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