

Plenary Statement of Francesco Rocca, President, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to the Inter-Governmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 10-11 December 2018

Mr/Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the floor.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies welcomes the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. We see it as an important step toward improving the protection and assistance of migrants, and it could not come at a more important time.

As a global humanitarian network present in over 190 countries, we witness the enormous, unacceptable suffering -- and even death -- that many migrants face along their journeys. This is why our volunteers are doing what they can to bring what help they can, through health and psychosocial services, food, shelter, information and much more.

The Fundamental Principle of Humanity guides us to respond to migrants' humanitarian needs, irrespective of their legal status. We do this without seeking to encourage, discourage or prevent migration. Our concern and support also goes to persons in need in host communities, whether at home, in transit or at their destinations. It is critical that we not artificially place these needs, and these vulnerable people, in opposition to each other.

We have come together, as a united Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, together with our sister agency ICRC, to call on States to prioritise and implement the humanitarian commitments in the Global Compact. We also want you to know that you can count on us to support you to accomplish this.

We are calling for the first priority to be saving lives. We must protect migrants -- whoever they are, wherever they come from, and however they arrived -- from death, disappearance, family separation and other violations of their rights. So much of this could be avoided with more investment in rescue efforts, better information, a more victim-centred approach to preventing trafficking and smuggling, and a more supportive policy toward humanitarian aid. Certainly, we must never stand in the way of those trying to save migrants' lives, and never consider such humanitarian efforts a

crime. Despite our century-and-a-half of humanitarian tradition, some of our own members are finding the access to these people in need curtailed.

Secondly, we must support the human dignity of every migrant. This means guaranteeing that migrants, irrespective of legal status, have effective access to essential services. Pregnant women must be able to get health care. Children must be able to go to school. Older persons must be able to access shelter. Families must have access to food.

Through our humanitarian service points, we look to cooperate with the authorities to meet critical needs while preserving the humanitarian space that allows migrants to access essential services without fear of detention or arrest. The state parties to the Geneva Conventions already solemnly committed to provide us with this humanitarian space in Resolution 3 of the 2011 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. But, since then, some have wavered in practice.

Thirdly, we need to focus most on the needs of most vulnerable migrants. Our recent report, *Alone and Unsafe*, describes the horrors of sexual and gender-based violence that is perpetrated against thousands of unaccompanied and separated children on the move. We must do a better job in protecting them. We must also stop sending people back to persecution and danger, upholding the right of non-refoulement.

Finally, we urge states never to use detention except as a last resort. We know that immigration detention is not only harmful for individuals, it is also costly for societies. Its impact is especially heavy on children, who suffer irreparable damage to their well-being.

We welcome that these priorities are well captured in the Global Compact and urge States to now turn their commitments into reality. We also call on those States not choosing to adopt the Compact to nevertheless commit to progress on these urgent humanitarian priorities.

We intend to play our part, as auxiliaries to public authorities in the humanitarian field, in supporting states to implement the Global Compact. We look forward to working closely with all of you to do this.

Thank you, Mr/Madam Chair
