

UNITED NATIONS



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**Remarks by Louise Arbour, Special Representative
of the Secretary-General for International Migration**

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9 December 2018, Marrakesh

We thank the Kingdom of Morocco for its generosity in hosting this intergovernmental conference on the GCM.

We are on the eve of a truly remarkable moment in the pursuit of the better management of international migration – a singular issue of our time; and for multilateralism – our collective ability to cooperate around global issues in a respectful, consensual manner, sensitive to national and regional specificities.

This Conference is the culmination of a transparent, intensive, 18-months process leading up to a negotiated agreement on the text for the Global Compact, last July, to be formally adopted tomorrow.

Over 150 States are registered to attend. They are joined by over 400 partners: from UN system, civil society, private sector, academe. And a press corps numbering well over 700.

The GCM was developed as an initiative of Member States as governments felt compelled to respond to the increasingly clear need to ensure that global migration is better managed.

This emerged from the intolerable sight of large numbers of migrants losing their lives, and of a growing perception that governments had lost control of their borders.

This is what led to the 2016 New York Declaration, which called for the process leading to the two Compacts: The Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration.

This Compact is not a compact for migration, but for safe, orderly and regular migration.

The Compact's essential strength is that it is a cooperative – not binding – document. It is a reaffirmation of collective commitments – to national sovereignty and to universal human rights – in the pursuit of an approach to international migration that benefits all.

It covers all aspects of migration, from the need to reduce the drivers of irregular migration, to the protection of migrants in transit and in destination countries, and to the need for safe and sustainable return procedures, drawing from best practices that States may choose to utilize to implement their own national migration priorities.

It is global in outlook. It acknowledges that each State experiences migration differently and reinforces each State's prerogative to manage its own migration policies as it sees fit.

Let me address two issues up front.

First, how, precisely, will this Compact make a difference to peoples' lives?

- The Compact was a State initiative. Its implementation will also rest primarily with States, particularly in matters that require national actions. The United Nations, the private sector, civil society, labour unions will all have important role to play on many issues.**

- **Many challenges still stand in the way of implementation – not least the toxic, ill-informed narrative that too often persists when it comes to migrants. But for those willing to take on the challenges and harvest the benefits of human mobility, the Compact will provide useful guidance for workable initiatives and solutions.**
- **Through its combination of practical approaches and aspirational goals, the Global Compact provides a reference point for action, now and into the future. Some objectives are long term, some short term.**

Second, a few States have indicated that they will not adopt the Compact; a smaller number have said their final decision must await further internal deliberation.

It is regrettable whenever any State withdraws from a multilateral process, on a global issue, the outcome of which has generated overwhelming support. It is particularly regrettable when a State pulls out from a negotiated agreement in which it actively participated a short time before.

Finally, it is surprising that there has been so much misinformation about what the Compact is and what the text says:

- **It creates no right to migrate;**
- **It places no imposition on States;**
- **It does not constitute so-called ‘soft’ law: it is not legally binding;**

- **It expressly permits States to distinguish – as they see fit – between regular and irregular migrants, in accordance with existing international law.**

This is not my interpretation of the text; it is the text.

It is my belief that this Compact will stand the test of time; that through its effective implementation, it will come to be universally recognized as a framework by which States can better manage migration, not so as to threaten their sovereign interests but, to quite the contrary, to best secure their mutual interests through cooperation rather than confrontation; and, significantly to enhance the wellbeing of people the world over, migrants and host communities alike.

Thank you.