



**MR. JOHN WILMOTH
DIRECTOR, POPULATION DIVISION**

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

United Nations expert group meeting

Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

New York, 7-8 September 2017

Dear colleagues,
Distinguished experts,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you to this expert group meeting on “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. The meeting has been organized by the Population Division¹ with the kind assistance of colleagues from the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners in the UN system for their valuable support.

Over the next two days, we will hear presentations and discussions of the concepts, definitions and data sources used for the analysis of migration and urbanization, and we will review the latest evidence regarding trends in migration and urbanization for different parts of the world. We will also discuss how migration and urbanization are linked and how these two processes have important impacts on development, and vice versa. Lastly, we will review the role of migrants in

¹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

cities and the role of cities in the lives of migrants, leading naturally to a discussion of policy implications, governance and planning issues.

As we all know, the world has become increasingly urban, and it is widely expected that this trend will continue in the same direction over the next few decades. Trends in human migration, however, are more complex and less predictable. The number of migrants worldwide has grown consistently in recent decades, but political reactions or events can create a strong countervailing force. Thanks mostly to the successes of development, some countries have experienced a reversal in the direction of migratory flows into or out of the country.

As we will observe in this meeting, the steady, relentless drive toward higher levels of urbanization is closely connected to the more complex and unpredictable process of migration, both internal and international. There is a simple reason for this connection: migrants gravitate toward cities. Cities are magnets for migrants because there they can find others from their home country and community, and because cities are often hotbeds of economic activity and opportunity.

Migrant populations present special challenges for local authorities, such as providing services for a diverse and ever-changing population. Although national authorities can at least try to control the movement of people into their countries, local authorities have little choice but to accept the influx of people from near and far and its impact on local budgets and programmes. Yet despite this lack of control, local authorities often recognize better than their national counterparts the many benefits of migration, which are also predominantly local, and they also see more clearly the faces of the persons involved.

There is today an increasing awareness of the significance of both migration and urbanization as critical elements of sustainable development. While each offers much promise, there is also a potential for adverse impacts if these two processes are managed poorly, or not at all. Keeping a focus on the positive elements, this

meeting will examine the important synergies between urbanization and migration as drivers of development.

These topics have been discussed and dissected in a series of landmark documents, which together present the global normative framework that currently exists and that guides government policies on these topics throughout the world. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) from Cairo in 1994, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted here in New York in 2015, the New Urban Agenda adopted in 2016 at the Habitat III Conference in Quito, and the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants also adopted in 2016 – these are probably the most important internationally agreed texts addressing these topics. In your discussions, we have asked you, the participants, to link your analysis of urbanization and migration, where possible, to these pillars of the global development agenda.

As you know, this meeting has been convened in preparation for the upcoming session of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2018, for which the chosen theme is identical to the subject of this meeting: “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. The Population Division is tasked with preparing a report of the Secretary-General on this topic to be presented at the session next April. The report will inform discussions among Member States, including their negotiations on a resolution addressing this theme. The resolution, if agreed by consensus and adopted by the Commission, will contribute to the further construction of the global normative framework on these topics. Our task in this meeting is to lay a foundation for the eventual negotiations that is based on facts, evidence and impartial scientific analysis.

With this objective in mind, please do not hesitate to put forward concrete recommendations when making presentations or discussing topics during this meeting. After a further process of investigation and consultation both within and outside the UN system, some of the recommendations that emerge from this

meeting will likely be included in the report of the Secretary-General that will guide the work of the Commission on Population and Development next Spring.

In this context, I would also like to introduce Professor Ronald Skeldon of the University of Maastrich. Professor Skeldon, who will make a presentation in the first session, has kindly agreed to serve also as the rapporteur of this meeting and to summarize its main conclusions at the end of the meeting tomorrow afternoon. Prof. Skeldon, thank you for taking on this challenging task, and we look forward to hearing from you both this morning and again on Friday afternoon.

Before I conclude, let me point out that the Population Division will co-host, together with the Permanent Missions of Romania and South Africa, a briefing for Member States to present the main conclusions of this meeting including a discussion of the policy relevance of these topics in the context of the global development agenda. The briefing will take place in Conference Room 1 tomorrow from 1:15 until 2:30 in the afternoon. I am grateful that several colleagues from various parts of the UN system – UNFPA, UN-Habitat and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration – have kindly agreed to participate in the briefing to share their insights on this discussion. Although the primary intended audience for the briefing consists of delegates from Member States, all of you are welcome to attend as well.

Let me conclude by saying that I look forward to many colourful presentations and insightful discussions over the next two days. Our hope is that the interactions during this meeting will both inspire and enable you to provide useful conclusions and recommendations on the topics at hand.

Once again, I welcome you to this gathering and wish you an enjoyable and productive meeting.