

---

UN/POP/MIG-15CM/2017/18  
10 February 2017

---

**FIFTEENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations Secretariat  
New York, 16-17 February 2017

**CONTRIBUTION  
TO THE FIFTEENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION<sup>1</sup>**

*International Civil Society Action Committee*

---

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

## A. 2016 HIGH-LEVEL SUMMIT ON REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

With over 150 Heads-of-state gathered at the unprecedented *High-level Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants* that the UN General Assembly held 19 September 2016, 193 UN member states unanimously set in motion a once-in-a-generation set of commitments to try to fix migration, with respect both to the movement itself and to responsibility-sharing for refugee solutions.

States and others, including many in civil society, saw the commitments as a categorical recognition that more organized cooperation—not just enforcement—is needed to respond to current trends: near-historic displacement and suffering by migrants of all kinds on the move and stranded, unprecedented labour market and demographic imbalances, and ineffective government policies and systems. In a word, not crisis but chaos—and not just in Europe, but worldwide.

Articulated in the UN General Assembly's [New York Declaration for refugees and Migrants](#), the commitments include the development, over the years 2017-2018, of not one, but two “Global Compacts” on people on the move (one on “responsibility-sharing” for refugees, another for “safe, orderly and regular migration”), the development of guidelines and practices for the protection of migrants in vulnerable situations—as many in civil society see it, beginning with children, and the expansion of a global campaign against xenophobia.

## B. ACTION COMMITTEE AND GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY TOWARDS THE SUMMIT

From every region of the world, civil society actors across the board—NGOs, human rights and development groups, migrant and diaspora associations, trade unions and other workers organizations, academics and even the private sector—emphatically pressed the governments to make the commitments, in direct and daily advocacy between May and September.

Stepping up to this once-in-a-generation moment to secure these commitments at the UN General Assembly, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) formed a global civil society [“Action Committee”](#), specifically for unified message and advocacy towards the Summit. Co-convened with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), which is the world's premiere consortium of refugee protection NGOs, and the principal coalition of NGOs working on migration at the UN in New York, the NGO Committee on Migration, the Action Committee immediately attracted active membership of 22 leading civil society organizations and networks around the world engaged in both refugee protection and work on migrant rights.<sup>2</sup>

ICMC identified, hired and posted full-time in New York an expert with five years experience convening civil society from around the world in unified migration political strategy and advocacy. She was joined part-time by other ICMC communications and programme staff and volunteers.

Between May and September 2016 the Action Committee organized: 11 meetings of the Action Committee, 10 newsletters, 3 consolidated civil society statements, 2 strategy conferences of global civil society at the UN in New York<sup>3</sup>, a global survey for civil society perspectives towards the

---

<sup>2</sup> Members of the Action Committee [“\*” = convenors]: the Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform (ADEPT); Amnesty International; Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN); Asylum Access; Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI); CARE-International; Caritas Internationalis; Danish Refugee Council (DRC); Global Coalition on Migration; \*International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC); \*International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA); International Detention Coalition (IDC); International Rescue Committee (IRC); Lutheran World Federation (LWF); Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA); \*NGO Committee on Migration (New York); Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC); Oxfam International; Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM); Save the Children; Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN); Terre des Hommes International

<sup>3</sup> Two meetings were organised in New York, the first a [preparatory meeting](#) the day before the 18 July UN multi-stakeholder Hearing in New York, and the other a [pre-Summit strategy meeting](#) the day before the Summit. Both were attended by over 100 civil society actors, including refugees, migrants and members of the diaspora, with some key messages being carried over by civil society speakers to the Hearing and Summit the following days.

Summit, travel and hotel support for some 30 civil society participants to some 40-hours of Summit-related sessions and interaction with states in the 2016 Global Forum on Migration and Development in Bangladesh; two global webinars, formal and informal meetings with more than 40 governments, and a dedicated website to communicate and document it all: [www.refugees-migrants-civilsociety.org](http://www.refugees-migrants-civilsociety.org).

Diplomats, agency people and foundations as well as the civil society actors themselves pointed to the Action Committee's smart and sustained advocacy as influential in the consultations and negotiations that led up to the final commitments. For example, a twitter blitz and relentless advocacy by the Action Committee and its members in the final week (even extra days) of negotiations in July-August was said to be instrumental in a decision to back down on an effort to worsen language in the final Declaration that already threatened to water down the international prohibition against detention of children for immigration purposes.

At the same time, even as many of the commitments in the Declaration were considered dynamic, they were also thought to be far from perfect. Many of the 90 paragraphs of the Declaration were propelled as 'considerations' to be applied 'as appropriate', and language in a few places opens possibilities to undercut certain human rights standards that already exist, e.g., regarding return as well as child detention. Across civil society there was strong concern that the Declaration lacked adequate urgency, timelines, accountability and indicators.

### C. KEY COMMON MESSAGES AND STATEMENTS FROM THE ACTION COMMITTEE IN 2016

Among many written and verbal inputs, including several consolidated inputs gathered from civil society actors around the world, the Action Committee prepared two major civil society statements for advocacy directly with UN member states in their Summit negotiations. The first – [a New Deal for Refugees, Migrants and Societies](#) – was an important expression of baselines that civil society saw for the start and heart of the states' commitments. The New Deal became an important advocacy tool and reference along the way, used to measure progress or the opposite in the negotiations.

The second – [Act Now Joint Statement and Scorecard](#) – was a response to and measurement of the commitments actually adopted in the New York Declaration. The statement pointed to seven actions world leaders urgently need to take to make a new deal for refugees, migrants and societies a reality, specifically:

1. Make an implementation plan by the end of the year, and act now
2. Deliver equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing and refugee protection mechanisms
3. Review national border policies to uphold the human rights of all people at international borders, and commit to developing and implementing gender- and age-sensitive guidelines to protect migrants in vulnerable situations
4. Fulfill the commitment to end the practice of child immigration detention in accordance with the best interests of the child
5. Commit to the development of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
6. Implement policies and vigorous campaigns at national and local levels to counter xenophobia, discrimination and racism
7. Agree on concrete measures to improve the protection and assistance for internally displaced people.

On a negative-positive scale, the Scorecard rated the New York Declaration against tests of success that the Action Committee had set and advocated to states throughout the negotiations.

- negative: responsibility-sharing for refugees
- somewhat negative: best interest of the child (i.e., no detention)
- both negative and positive: refugee and human rights law, and IDPs; and migrants in vulnerable situations
- somewhat positive: the Global Compact for Safe Migration, and Action for social inclusion and against xenophobia
- and overall: negative; expressly because “implementation, time-lines and accountability mechanisms for many of the commitments are unclear”, with many commitments “mere ‘considerations’ to be applied ‘as appropriate’” and “modalities of civil society participation in follow up ... as yet unclear” as well.

Both were signed by over 100 civil society organisations, and continued to have relevance for civil society in advocacy moments after the Summit, in spaces such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Held in Bangladesh in December 2016, the GFMD was the first major international conferences to focus prominently on the commitments in the New York Declaration. The Civil Society Days component of the GFMD, organized by ICMC-[MADE \(Migration and Development\) civil society network](#), devoted more than 25 hours discussing follow-up to the Declaration, across multiple plenaries and working and special sessions. All 200 civil society participants further joined the 500 government representatives in *Common Space* for another nearly 5 hours of focus, largely on the Global Compact on Safe Orderly and Regular Migration, which a number of government sessions took forward for another 10 hours in plenary and roundtables .

#### D. ACTION COMMITTEE AND GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY 2017 - 2018

The original idea of the Action Committee—formalized in its written Terms of Reference and agreed by all members in May—was for it to come together and work towards the 19 September High-level Summit, then debrief after and disband. However, just before the Summit and through yearend, Action Committee members like Terre des Hommes, Save the Children, Oxfam and the diaspora group ADEPT, as well as ICMC’s co-convenors, called for the Action Committee to take forward its strategic communications, convening, uniting and advocacy roles—to push for, participate in and ensure proper *implementation* of the commitments in the New York Declaration.

One of the primary arguments repeatedly put forward to continue the Action Committee was that “the Action Committee was the first time that refugee protection NGOs and migrants rights NGO really worked together”—and that such collective work was both productive and needed to achieve the New York Declaration and its implementation.

Agreeing to picking up that charge however, the co-convenors and members were in further accord that the Action Committee needed to go “wider but lighter” in its work the next two years. Wider, to add to the refugees-and-migrants mix of members and focus the “third focus” on xenophobia; lighter, in now being more able to defer to—but help bridge—pre-existing civil society networks and any new working groups stepping up to take the New York Declaration forward, especially in the three areas of refugee, migrants and xenophobia.

So compared to its work in 2016, what will be most different going forward is the Action Committee’s strategic emphasis on connecting, not controlling, civil society networks and movements that are working on the commitments in the Declaration, in particular the two Compacts, the guidelines on migrants in vulnerable situations and xenophobia. For example, the Initiative on Child Rights in the Global Compacts, and initiatives that the NGO networks ICVA, InterAction, the Quakers and ICMC have begun to convene. With most of the principal networks active members of the Action

Committee, the Committee will be positioned to strengthen and reinforce that work where helpful, with unique capacity to cross-fertilize, magnify and propel common elements (like safe migration, children, and mechanisms for implementation, to name a few) in joint civil society messages, strategies and advocacy. A major focus will be advocacy in capitals—a lesson civil society learned in the story recounted earlier as well as other work around the Summit last year.

As last year, but now in this momentous and fast two-year period of follow-up on those Summit commitments, the Action Committee aims to provide cross-civil society, sum of the parts value added.

Across the two Compacts and other commitments in the Declaration, the Action Committee and civil society worldwide will have a particular role pushing for:

- coherence and consistency in content, especially in cross-cutting components (e.g. integration and durable solutions, children on the move, people on the move in vulnerable situations), and
- a truly comprehensive and participative approach with all stakeholders, enabling civil society to contribute essential perspectives from lived experience and practical response.

The Action Committee will actively promote these imperatives by sharing information, analyses and updates; organizing joint civil society advocacy pieces and common messages; linking New York Declaration follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals and processes, raising global profile of the work with donors and countries; convening strategic consultations, briefings, negotiations and webinars; facilitating civil society working groups on each of the compacts plus the xenophobia campaign; and monitoring implementation of Summit outcomes.

In 2017, the Action Committee will expand to up to 30 members, and will engage a focal person to support its work, including maintenance of the dedicated website, communications and other activities. In 2018, the Action Committee and focal person will again serve as a central resource for civil society organizing and advocacy in the course negotiations among UN member states, which will then revolve around the two Compacts and the UN General Assembly in New York.