



**United Nations High Level Meeting of the General Assembly  
On Addressing Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants  
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Plenary Session**

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies,

As the Secretary-General of the only intergovernmental organization with an exclusive mandate on democracy, I am convinced that the international community should boldly address three priorities:

- First, to meet the immediate needs of the millions of migrants and refugees on the move. They are women and men, children and youth whose lives are at risk and whose future is jeopardized because of insufficient international responses.
- Secondly, to address the root causes of the violent conflicts and the conditions of poverty at the basis of the flows of migrants and refugees. The General Assembly should turn the deeds on the adoption and implementation of a “Comprehensive Refugees Response Framework” and a “Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration” into reality.
- Thirdly, to jointly promote an effective counternarrative demystifying the lies of populism and identifying the opportunities provided by the current crisis to our societies. Looking beyond ‘the refugee crisis’, can migrants and refugees be the new agents of democratization and development, and active subjects for enhancing the quality of our institutions?

A few years before the Second World War, the Italian politician and philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote in one of his prison notebooks: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” Today, we truly live in a time of such morbid symptoms. The dangers of inaction are real. Against this background, why should refugees be considered, following Hannah Arendt’s analysis, like stateless, rightless “scum of the earth”, as they were considered at that time?

As noted by many speakers today, the current crisis stems from civil wars and violent conflicts. The international community is yet unable to address and resolve them. We witness unprecedented flows of about 65 million refugees and migrants. They include both people escaping wars and those who cannot cope with autocratic rule or extreme poverty. The inter-linkages between violent extremism, fundamentalism and the scourge of international terrorism pose serious security threats. The rise of populism in “established” democracies, at a time of protracted economic downturn, is an indicator of the closing down of public spaces in which the prevailing narrative is one of fear, anger and intolerance.

Smart and cynical politicians cash their electoral fortunes on riding petty nationalism and xenophobic feelings. Migrants and refugees become the culprits of all that goes wrong. They are turned into a threat to a supposedly comfortable status quo. Many governments pursue easy ways out of the crisis. These include the adoption of legislation that risks, in the name of security, to contradict long-held human rights commitments. Others favor the enforcement of measures much more restrictive on the movement of people than the movement of goods and commodities.

In the turn of a few years, in many countries the bridge-building rhetoric has been replaced by policies prompted by narrow-minded, short-term electoral concerns. Their results are before our eyes: the proliferation of barbed wired border fences and even new walls reminiscent of the shaken foundations of XX century international relations; and “realpolitik” agreements aiming at curbing movements and flows, even at the cost of compromising on human rights standards. We should reverse such worrisome trends.

As history has shown us over and over again, migration is not a threat to nation-states, let alone democracies; but intolerance and hatred undoubtedly are. The common objective of the international community ought to be to build a future for the next generations, not to combat migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We need the wisdom to collectively question short-term solutions that produce negligible results at huge human costs and bring about immense long-term social, economic and political damage and human suffering.

In conclusion, we need to build together a new vision placing the energy and the potentials of today’s migrants and refugees within the framework of tomorrow’s unfolding development outcomes, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Thank you.