

United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, New York, 19 September 2019

Roundtable on root causes

Adama Dieng

Esteemed delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Not since the Second World War have people fled their homes in such large numbers. While the suffering – and deaths - of migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea have been well documented, less attention has been paid to the exploitation and abuse they are vulnerable to as they travel through transit countries, or to the situations that have forced them to leave to seek a place of greater safety.

In many cases, migrants and refugees are seeking to escape situations of violence and grave human rights violations that in some cases may amount to atrocity crimes, by which I mean genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

When we speak about the root causes of forced displacement, we are speaking about situations that are characterised by armed conflict or other forms of instability; by serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including persistent patterns of discrimination that often target particular communities on the basis of identity; by economic deprivation and related disparities in access to resources, and by weaknesses in State structures.

If we are to prevent these situations and provide the kind of targeted assistance that would allow people to live fulfilled lives in peace and security, we need to focus our efforts on strategies designed to help to build national resilience. The principle objective is the creation of State structures and institutions that are functioning and legitimate, respect human rights and the rule of law, deliver services equitably, and can address or defuse sources of tension before they escalate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that by investing in programmes that address the root causes set out here, we will also be contributing to preventing forced migration.

My Office – the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect – has developed a Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes that sets out the risk factors I have highlighted in greater detail and has been issued as an official United Nations document. I invite all of you present to use the Framework of Analysis, not only as a tool to analyse situations at risk of atrocity crimes, but also to encourage targeted support to States that are facing crises of different kinds, in order to provide better protection for their populations and prevent the conditions that are conducive to forced displacement.

I would like to conclude by inviting all of you to a side event to the High Level segment of the 71st session of the General Assembly my office is organising on 23 September at 3pm. The event, titled: “Bearing witness: combating human trafficking and forced migration” is designed to complement this Summit and will have two parts, the first focusing on the voices of witnesses and victims of human trafficking and forced displacement; and the second on the role of Faith Based Organisations in responding to these phenomena.

I thank you for your attention.