

30 September 2015

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High Level Side Event on Strengthening cooperation on
migration and refugee movements in the perspective of the new
development agenda**

Heads of State and Government, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening.

Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for convening this meeting at such a crucial moment.

Ladies and gentlemen, the current crisis that the world is facing, related to migration and refugees, has been called the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War.

If that is the case then we have to realize that Business as Usual will simply not do. That we have to find a response that is commensurate with the challenge. We will in short have to rethink, evaluate and possibly reorganize our way of managing this crisis, while we are addressing it.

That is one of the main messages that we have heard today and over the last few days.

Let me at the outset also encourage Member states to be careful and mindful of how the terms “migrant and refugee” are being used. As you all know, refugees are covered by a specific legal framework from which the mandate of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees predominantly emanates. Countries have to offer protection to refugees in accordance with this. That’s not the case with migrants. Countries decide their own migration schemes and can reject people moving in irregular ways. But that doesn’t mean that migrants are without protection. All migrants are entitled to protection under human rights law.

That means that all people, regardless of their migration status must be treated in a humane manner with full protection of their human rights. Migrants advance human development, enrich human capital and can bring significant social, cultural and economic benefits for countries of origin and destination. That’s the reason why many countries have ambitious migration schemes and arrangements.

Further to our discussions today, it seems clear there is scope to discuss ways to improve cooperation and effectively manage migration. We need better tools to support countries in advancing coherent and comprehensive migration policies. These policies must take into account that migration occurs in the context of complex societies and situations in receiving countries.

As many of you remarked, the commitments and aspirations outlined in the 2030 Agenda are to be extended to all people, in all countries. The principle of leaving no-one behind says that we cannot ignore our most vulnerable, in fact we must prioritise them.

But while the 2030 Agenda addresses many of the causes of displacement, it will not provide us with immediate solutions to the global crisis we are facing today.

This is a crucial point.

Today's crisis is unprecedented. It is global in scope, presenting challenges in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas. No country or region can address it on its own. We must all contribute to solving this crisis, whether we feel distant, or face the challenges of proximity.

Action is needed now.

We must ensure that this crisis continues to receive our focus and engagement and is our utmost priority. We must not allow our commitment to weaken. I have heard this message from all leaders during his week.

First, we need to ensure comprehensive engagement by the UN system to advance global solutions to these complex situations.

In this regard, the UN and other institutions and agencies must be provided with the financial and operational support needed to fulfil their mandates.

We must also review how our humanitarian operations are funded. It is time to establish a coherent and sustainable system to respond to humanitarian crises. As it stands, it is always too little too late. Media headlines must not decide who from the vulnerable and displaced, will receive assistance and shelter.

Second, all countries must meet their obligations under international refugee law – by protecting and by caring for refugees. It is not a crime to seek asylum, it is a legal right. And I encourage all countries to actively participate in voluntary resettlement programmes and, if possible, increase their resettlement capacity.

Saving lives is our priority, therefore we must also increase capacities for search and rescue operations at sea.

We must in addition support countries affected by the arrival of refugees, particularly Syria's neighbours who require urgent funding to fully, promptly and humanely care for those in need.

And we must find ways to expand and intensify global cooperation in the area of migration. The International Organization for Migration, which is outside the UN System, must be brought in to this discussion.

Finally, the international community must do all it can to find lasting solutions to conflicts and violence around the world – whether in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe or elsewhere. Unless we address the root causes behind this global crisis, we will remain in response mode – with challenges only ever increasing.

During the course of this 70th anniversary, working together with all of you, with the Secretary General and other stakeholders, I will do all I can to support solutions, to raise awareness and maintain the focus on the plight of migrants, refugees and internally displaced people.

In the coming period, I will convene a GA meeting on this matter, which can discuss the challenges raised today, including possible operational implications and ways to empower the UN system to develop a comprehensive approach to this crisis. I also stand ready to organise regular briefings as required.

10 days from now, I will also raise the need for a comprehensive approach to financing humanitarian responses, when I address finance ministers at the meeting of the World Bank and IMF Development Committee in Lima.

And in May, we will review our collective response and the future of the humanitarian system at the World Humanitarian Summit.

These solutions are not easy.

But the UN was created 70 years ago with the fundamental purpose of promoting peace, protecting vulnerable populations and ensuring their human rights.

If we, the international community, continue to idle and hesitate, we will fail those we are entrusted to protect.

I hope you will join me in ensuring that we do not allow this to happen.

I thank you.