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**71<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly**

**Keynote Address by H.E. Peter Thomson,  
Sixty-fifth Anniversary of the International Organization for Migration**

Director General, Ambassador William Lacy Swing,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you in Geneva today to mark the 65th anniversary of the International Organization for Migration. It is an occasion for both celebration and reflection.

When the IOM was established in 1951, it was in the aftermath of the Second World War – a time of upheaval and mass displacement of people.

Much has changed for the better over the intervening decades, yet here we are today, with the world experiencing the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis since the war.

It is self-apparent that the phenomenon of migration is not a new one. It has of course been a feature of humanity since the days our ancestors walked out of Africa to spread around the globe.

However, in a world of seven to nine billion people, demographic pressures mean we must now bring order to the process, so that migration takes place in a way that upholds the dignity, well-being and fundamental human rights of migrants.

This challenge requires all of us to work collaboratively and compassionately. It is one that requires us to apply the golden rule – to treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves.

It is a challenge that IOM has been dedicated to since its inception, with a steadfast dedication to humane and orderly migration benefitting all.

On this your 65th anniversary, for your service to humanity, I express the thanks of the United Nations to all who have and are working within IOM. Merci beaucoup,

Muchas gracias, xie xie, spasibo, shukraan, thank you.

I'm glad to know, that throughout it all, the United Nations and IOM have enjoyed a close working relationship.

I was honoured in September to preside over the historic UN Summit on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, where the relationship was further strengthened through the signing of the UN-IOM Agreement, formally establishing IOM as a related organization of the United Nations.

The agreement will lead to even greater cooperation between our two global organizations in the years ahead.

Excellencies,

Throughout human history – long before borders existed, or maps looked the way they currently do – people have been on the move, searching for peace, security, prosperity and opportunity.

To the places in which we settled, migrants have brought new skills, new energy, new perspectives and experiences. Migrants have helped to drive economic growth and have enriched the cultural tapestry of their new communities.

For countries of origin, migrants have – through remittances – bolstered economies, and helped to build social and cultural bonds between nations.

While the global story of migration has been largely a positive one, the experience for migrants themselves has never been straightforward.

For most migrants, the decision to move away from families, communities and familiar surrounds is not an easy one.

And once embarked, far too many migrants experience exploitation, have their rights and protections overlooked, and find that their differences with local populations are politicized to drive fear and xenophobia.

For all of these hurdles and disincentives, the global movement of people is occurring in these times in an unprecedented scale.

Urbanization is changing our demographic landscapes, as people move on mass to cities – within their own countries, into neighboring nations, and to places further afield.

One in five international migrants live in the twenty largest cities in the world, with findings showing that international migrants tend to concentrate in global gateway cities.

By 2030, around 60 percent of the world's population is expected to live in cities, with 95 percent of urban expansion expected to take place in the developing world over the next few decades.

And we see that migration between developing countries is occurring in ever increasing numbers.

It is in this broader global context that we must consider how best to manage migration – to address root causes, to protect the rights of migrants, and to establish global ground-rules for the movement of people.

Excellencies,

Humanity is currently on a path towards a precipice of unsustainability. One need just think of Climate Change to appreciate the veracity of that statement, for we are still progressing towards a 3 to 4 degree world, a world in which rising sea levels and rampant desertification will displace untold millions of people from traditional habitats.

The message of hope is one that comes with an imperative for urgency and universality. The message of hope is the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which together with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and other key multilateral agreements adopted in the last 14 months, sets out a universal masterplan to bend humanity's path away from the precipice ahead.

Within the 2030 Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Not only will the achievement of these goals give our children a sustainable place on this planet; if implemented in their entirety, they will transform our way of life for the better.

And they will improve the daily realities for migrants, and address many of the root causes driving people to leave their homes in the first place. They will eliminate extreme poverty, reduce inequalities, increase prosperity, improve access to education, build peaceful and inclusive societies, empower women and girls, protect human rights and the natural environment, and combat climate change.

I put it to you all today, that implementation of the 2030 Agenda must be central to our collective efforts to address the global migration challenge.

Every stakeholder has a role to play in ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved, and that no one is left behind.

For instance, as part of their national SDG implementation plans, we are counting on all Member States to implement targeted strategies to ensure development gains reach migrants in their countries. Attention should also be paid to raising awareness of the SDGs in migrant communities, so that they feel ownership of the 2030 Agenda and help to drive achievement of the goals.

I encourage IOM to support these efforts, including by assisting Member States and partners to understand the needs of migrant communities.

Excellencies,

As part of our collective efforts to better, and more humanely, manage the global movement of people, an important step was taken by the UN General Assembly in September with the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

Beginning with the straight-forward acknowledgement that “since earliest times, humanity has been on the move,” the New York Declaration expresses the international community’s political will to save the lives, and protect the rights, of both refugees and migrants. It reflects our agreement to collectively share responsibility for managing large movements of people across our world and acknowledges the need for a comprehensive global approach to be adopted.

On the specific issue of migrants, the New York Declaration includes two parts of equal importance.

The first part sets out a range of commitments that Member States have undertaken to implement immediately to protect the safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants. It sets out to provide support to migrant communities; to increase educational opportunities for migrant children, and to address drivers of large movements.

I call on all Member States to implement these commitments without delay.

The second part sets out the commitment of Member States to launch an intergovernmental process leading to the adoption in 2018 of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, in addition to a separate global compact on refugees.

Ambitions for the migration compact are high.

Within the New York Declaration, Member States agreed that the global compact on migration should present a framework for comprehensive international cooperation on migrants, including by setting out a range of principles, understandings and commitments regarding international migration, wedded to enhanced global governance and international cooperation.

The timeline for reaching an ambitious and comprehensive outcome for the migration compact is tight. Thus, driving the process forward is one of my key priorities for this General Assembly Session. To this end, I have appointed the Permanent Representatives of Mexico and Switzerland at the UN in New York, to lead the first stage of consultations on modalities for the compact negotiations.

This first stage is well underway and I’m pleased the co-facilitators were able to visit Geneva last week and meet with many of you.

It goes without saying that the Geneva-based agencies must be fully engaged in this process, for their expertise and experience must be captured.

So too the expertise and knowledge of other key stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, diaspora communities, and migrant organizations. Their contribution will assist the realization of an outcome that is informed by realities and the needs of migrant communities, countries of origin, and receiving communities alike.

I have been encouraged by the close collaboration that is already underway between IOM and the UN Secretariat in New York in preparation for the 2018 compact. IOM’s support to the intergovernmental

process will be vital – especially in extending to Member States, through the joint support structure, the technical and policy expertise required.

I encourage all Member States to engage in the negotiations constructively, in order to achieve a robust compact, that will provide a comprehensive global framework for safe, orderly and regular migration.

Excellencies,

Each and every Member State here today has at some time served as a country of origin, transit, and/or settlement.

To address the challenges before us, we must therefore work together – to step up to our responsibilities, strengthen our cooperation, and move towards universal agreement on the management of global migration.

We are, at this stage, advancing well. Now we must move to implement the commitments we made under the New York Declaration. We are putting our shoulders to the wheel for an ambitious and comprehensive global compact on migration in 2018. But most critically of all, we must achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda if we are to provide humanity with a sustainable future.

Altruism, humankind's unique and highest quality, beckons us to engage with the challenges facing migrants and refugees in the 21st century. His Holiness Pope Francis has called upon us all to overcome the globalization of indifference, a message all the more compelling in this year of mercy.

Excellencies,

Here at the International Organization for Migration we have a huge force of people doing good works to meet those high challenges. May your hands be strengthened in your work, may the combination of your minds and hearts prevail over indifference.

I thank you.