



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

22 July 2016

Excellency,

In accordance with General Assembly Resolution 70/290, I convened an informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing on 18 July as part of the preparatory process towards the high-level meeting of the plenary of the General Assembly to address large movements of refugees and migrants on 19 September 2016.

Please find attached the summary from the hearing.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mogens Lykketoft', written in a cursive style.

Mogens Lykketoft

To all Permanent Representatives  
And Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

**Summary of the President of the 70th session of the General Assembly on the  
Informal Interactive Multi-stakeholder hearings in support of the preparatory process  
towards the High-level Plenary Meeting  
on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants on 19 September 2016**

**18 July 2016**

**Conference Room 4  
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

**Overview**

In accordance with General Assembly decision 70/539, a high-level meeting of the plenary of the General Assembly will be convened on 19 September 2016 to address large movements of refugees and migrants. To support the active engagement of non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in the process, the President of the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly convened an informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing on 18 July 2016.

The hearing, organized in partnership with the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and an international Steering Committee of civil society and other stakeholder organizations, provided stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute to the preparatory process of the high-level meeting over the course of one day of interactive panel discussions. The hearing was attended by about 300 representatives of civil society, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, and others. Representatives from Member States and numerous international organizations were also present.

**Opening segment**

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, noted that more people than ever were on the move in today's globalized world: in 2015 there were 244 million international migrants. The number of displaced persons was disturbingly high: more than 40 million within countries and more than 20 million across borders. He called for a more global, equitable and transparent sharing of responsibilities for receiving and hosting refugees and migrants.

The President of the General Assembly expressed the hope that at the 19 September high-level meeting, Member States would adopt a strong political declaration and take concrete steps toward adopting a global compact on responsibility-sharing for refugees and a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration. The meeting would allow Member States to make concrete commitments towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda cautioned that forced displacement could reverse development progress made in recent years. Noting that the relationship between the United Nations and civil society was critically important, he underscored that the views and ideas from all stakeholders for finding solutions to large movements of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants were most welcome.

H.E. Mr. David Donoghue, Permanent Representative of Ireland, and a co-facilitator for the high-level meeting, noted the historic opportunity to improve refugee protection and strengthen migrant rights. He welcomed stakeholders' contributions to the preparatory process by taking part in the present hearing and in the informal dialogues with civil society organized by the co-facilitators as well as providing written submissions. Ambassador Donoghue explained that informal consultations on the outcome document were currently underway among Member States, focusing both on a draft political declaration and a draft global compact on responsibility-sharing for refugees. Civil society played an important role in challenging the views of governments and in raising expectations. However, for some Member States, meeting existing commitments already presented substantial challenges.

The Secretary General's Special Adviser on the Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, Ms. Karen AbuZayd underscored the importance of including the voices of civil society and other non-governmental actors for achieving a successful outcome at the high-level meeting. She presented the three pillars included in the Secretary-General's report prepared for the high-level meeting, namely (a) upholding safety and dignity in large movements of both refugees and migrants; (b) adopting a global compact on responsibility-sharing for refugees; and (c) developing a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration. She also highlighted the special attention given in the report to the inclusion of refugees and migrants and underscored that the negative tone of public discourse on migrants and refugees would become the subject of a United Nations-led global campaign to counter xenophobia and promote diversity. She was pleased to see that the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report had been taken into account by Member States negotiating the outcome document of the high-level meeting. She thanked the co-facilitators for their strong efforts to develop an outcome document through an inclusive and consultative manner. When discussing issues related to refugees and migrants it was critically important to cooperate, consult, and listen to one another in an open-minded manner.

Ms. Nadia Murat Basee Taha, refugee and advocate for refugee rights and for victims of trafficking, delivered a compelling presentation on behalf of the 60 million forcibly displaced people and refugees who had lost everything and were now living without shelter, protection, education, access to health services, food or protection of their basic human rights. She shed light on the most vulnerable, women, children and those taking care of families, and shared the experience of having lost eighteen family members and being forced to flee from Iraq two years ago. The global community should do everything possible to end terrorism, conflict and war and to create employment opportunities for displaced persons. She warned about the threats posed by trafficking of persons and sexual and gender based violence, especially for women, children and widows.

Ms. Michele LeVoy, Director of the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) observed that many people who were forced to move had found that the status of migrant or refugee was actually a continuum and that attempting to categorize refugees and migrants as distinct categories of human beings was unhelpful, leading to and supporting negative discourses about those deserving of protection versus those undeserving of protection. She highlighted that all people are deserving of the protection of their fundamental rights. Ms. LeVoy urged all states to ratify the nine core human rights conventions, international humanitarian and refugee law as these instruments represent the cornerstone for policies. She also welcomed the global campaign

against xenophobia and strongly urged countering the stigmatizing language which criminalized refugees and migrants.

**Panel 1: Reframing the narrative on migration and refugees in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda**

Moderated by Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UN DESA, the panel focused on the importance of combating xenophobia and discrimination and on building a strong narrative that recognized the positive contribution of migrants and refugees for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Panellists were asked to comment on how national and global leaders (political, social, economic and religious) and the media could be encouraged to promote a more positive narrative on migration and refugees. The question of how NGOs and civil society, including the private sector and academia could contribute to a global campaign to counter xenophobia, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report for the high-level meeting, was also addressed.

Panellists expressed support for a global campaign to promote diversity, counter discrimination, and foster inclusion of refugees and migrants in host communities and countries. Panellists agreed that leadership was central to all these efforts, and a starting point would be by refusing to use incendiary language in any discussions of refugees and migrants. They called on governments to craft and implement anti-discrimination policies and national action plans to secure inclusion of refugees and migrants. These efforts should go hand in hand with social and economic policies designed to integrate migrants and refugees in host communities. While the national level is important, leadership was needed equally at the regional and local level. Broader engagement with local communities would increase empathy towards newcomers. Direct, face-to-face contact and interaction were mentioned as among the best practices to overcome prejudice and move towards a sense of shared humanity. In this context, panellists mentioned the importance of bottom-up approaches involving migrants, refugees and the host community.

Panellists also stressed the need to engage the media and private sector to make the 'business case' for migrants and refugees since these communities are major contributors to the gross national incomes of host countries as well as remittance providers. Facts, data and figures could help to tell their story and increase understanding.

It was suggested the International Labour Organization (ILO) should be included in the follow-up to the high-level meeting, given that the Office was well positioned to prepare guidelines for decent work and social protection for refugees and migrants. The special needs of groups facing multiple discrimination in the labour market should also be taken into account. Access to reproductive health services and information was mentioned as crucially important for the empowerment of women migrants and refugees. Panellists mentioned the need to take into account skill shortages in refugee-hosting countries and observed that the integration of refugees and migrants could benefit the economies in those countries as well as equip refugees and migrants with digital skills and training in new technologies. In this regard, the private sector could be very important, especially where it can leverage core competencies. The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) could also be a suitable platform to promote the inclusion of migrants and refugees.

Civil society participants emphasized that they had a key role to play in reframing the narrative and that collaboration among all partners was important. In this regard, employers of newcomers played a key role in overcoming unconscious biases. Partnerships between governments and the private sector could prove very important. Non-governmental organizations, due to their important field presence, could focus on building bridges between host communities and newcomers, for example through social activities or events.

Participants from the floor shared best practices with respect to integrating migrants into labour markets, which could counter xenophobia, such as anti-racism action plans. It was suggested that migrants and refugees themselves – young people in particular – should be included in any campaign because they were highly ‘connected’, energetic, and engaged with global issues. Some commentators from the floor observed that changing the narrative should take account of worsening economic conditions in many countries following the financial crisis. There was also a call to address the drivers of migration in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Participants observed that development models should include all perspectives – those of migrants, refugees, countries of origin and countries of destination. Participants also noted the importance of ending criminalization and detention practices for refugees and migrants, especially for those in situations of particular vulnerability such as women, children, persons with disabilities and asylum seekers.

## **Panel 2: Upholding and protecting the human rights and dignity of all refugees and migrants in the context of large movements**

Moderated by Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), panellists and participants were asked to identify deficiencies in international cooperation, including in the United Nations system, with regard to protecting human rights and dignity as well as the empowerment of refugees and migrants in the context of large movements. Several participants emphasized that a wide range of international rights conventions and standards already exist, and are applicable to all migrants, regardless of their motivation for migrating, their circumstance or any particular immigration status. Further, some migrants have additional rights under other international and regional conventions and treaties—also widely ratified—arising from their particular characteristics, e.g., refugees and asylum-seekers, children, victims of torture or human trafficking. Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for more consistent recognition of this full net of protection: universal human rights plus the further specific rights.

Panellists underscored that implementation of conventions protecting the rights of refugees and migrants, including commitments under the 1951 Refugee Convention, had fallen short: there is a need to strengthen the collaboration between host governments and the United Nations system in identifying and protecting refugees and other vulnerable migrants in need.

It was important to remember that all those compelled to move, whether or not they were in need of international protection, such as refugees, were entitled to human rights and dignity. Panellists highlighted the meaning of dignity in the context of large movements of migrants and refugees, which referred to respect for the life of refugees and migrants, empowerment and autonomy enabling people to make their own decisions with regard to their future and the education of their children. Panellists also highlighted gender considerations, noting that women often faced additional burdens and vulnerabilities in mass movements. A high priority was ending detention of migrants, in particular children,

in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments.

Panellists offered suggestions for strengthening international cooperation to provide greater protection and support to migrants. They stressed in particular the need to strengthen implementation of United Nations and ILO conventions pertaining to the protection of refugees, the human rights of migrants, and the protection of migrant workers. While consulting with civil society was a first step, action was needed to prevent continued violation of the human rights of migrants. There was a need to improve the conditions of refugees and migrants living in camps and in urban areas. Strategic partnerships among civil society, the private sector, governments and the international system could form the basis for research and advocacy. Partnerships could also help to improve livelihood opportunities in countries of origin by addressing the root causes of forced displacement. Panellists and participants encouraged refugees and migrants living in destination countries to document the difficulty of life, so that prospective migrants and refugees would be able to make informed decisions before deciding to embark on a dangerous journey. Cooperation between United Nations agencies responsible for assisting refugees and migrants should be improved.

Participants from the floor stressed the importance of including refugees, migrants and the diaspora directly and meaningfully in all international discussions and decision-making frameworks, beginning with the need to listen to their testimonies. Refugees were not passive recipients of aid, but individuals who should have a voice in shaping solutions to their own plight. Participants also highlighted vulnerabilities caused by insufficient regular, safe and orderly channels of migration. The lack of such channels left migrants and refugees vulnerable to taking enormous risks in their migration journeys and exploitation by criminal networks, including smugglers or traffickers. Civil society and the United Nations system must encourage governments to strengthen laws combating these heinous crimes while not punishing refugees and migrants who use smugglers in their search for safe passage. Participants further stressed that migrants and refugees should not be detained at international borders.

Participants echoed the call made by panellists to ensure that solutions integrated the perspectives and needs of both women and men. Additionally, the needs of children, the chronically ill or disabled, and other marginalized groups should be taken into account. The right to education for refugees and migrants must be upheld, as well as access to decent work and social protection.

Specific and favourable reference was made to two sections of the second draft of the outcome document that called for the development of guidelines for assistance to vulnerable migrants.

### **Panel 3: Achieving a global compact for responsibility-sharing for refugees**

The third panel focused on achieving a global compact for responsibility-sharing for refugees. It was moderated by Ms. Christine Matthews, Deputy Director, New York Liaison Office, UNHCR. Participants highlighted the need for a global compact that included refugees and diaspora organizations and that would provide concrete, action-oriented plans. Such a compact should center on a reaffirmation of the 1951 Refugee Convention, with particular emphasis on the prohibition against refoulement under

international law, and clear recognition of the full range of rights that refugees have under existing human rights and labour conventions. Also highlighted were the special needs of women and girls' access to health services, including reproductive health services, and the critical need for a quality education.

Panellists underscored the need to develop a concrete mechanism based on relevant, objective criteria and equitable sharing of responsibility for refugees. The global compact should commit Member States, the United Nations system, civil society, the business community, and other actors, including migrants, refugees, and diaspora groups, to develop a "Plan of Action" with clearly defined, time-bound goals. The compact should trigger action and effect real change in protecting refugees.

Panellists objected to characterizing refugees (and other migrants) as "burdens" and the subject of "burden-sharing", because there was strong evidence that refugees contribute to economic and social development in their country of refuge and destination. Several civil society participants urged Member States to instead use the term "responsibility-sharing" or "solution-sharing". A new 'business model' for a responsibility-sharing framework was suggested. It would have four pillars: (i) more resettlement and alternative pathways for admitting refugees to different countries; (ii) better policy support for self-reliance of refugees in host countries; (iii) robust support to host countries; and (iv) better responses and preparation to secondary movements.

Panellists pointed out that over 80 per cent of refugees were hosted by developing countries and that these countries needed more support to assist and integrate refugees. Because many refugee situations had become protracted, coordination between humanitarian and development actors must be improved in order to provide continued support for refugees. The majority of refugees were living outside camps. Host countries were called upon to provide freedom of movement and access to employment for refugees to promote their local integration.

The global compact should address the heightened risk of exposure to violence and exploitation of women and girls by including meaningful actions for their protection and advancement. Women and girls also need access to basic services, including education, employment opportunities and reproductive health care, and protection from gender-based and sexual violence.

Panellists pointed out that local civil society organizations were the first to respond to a disaster or crisis, whether natural or man-made. There was particular need for education of refugee children and language instruction for refugees. The private sector and civil society organizations were urged to provide such services, so that refugees had a chance to better integrate into the host society and become more self-reliant. Quality education also had significant peace-building benefits.

In response to the panel presentations, participants from the floor emphasized that Member States should implement strong accountability mechanisms and that a call for the development of a "Plan of Action" to be included in the Refugee Compact. The global compact for responsibility-sharing for refugees should also address the issue of refugee security. It should not be presumed that refugees pose a risk to host communities; rather, refugees themselves are victims of terror, war and other crisis, and they need protection. The linking of refugee arrivals to "security threats" to States is inaccurate and marginalizes

refugees and migrants. The better protected and integrated refugees are, the less likely it is that they will fall prey to recruiters from terrorist groups.

The role of local organizations and the private sector was acknowledged as critical to responsibility-sharing. Thus far, the language in the global compact being negotiated on this issue was rather weak. Clearly defined rights must be articulated in order to devise durable solutions. Participants echoed the concerns of the panellists regarding the urgent need to include refugee education in the global compact. Access to quality education should be considered a life-saving humanitarian intervention. Member States, the United Nations system, civil society organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders should provide education in emergency situations.

Member States should develop better systems and instruments to address displacement caused by natural disasters. Participants stressed that language regarding the non-detention of migrants and asylum-seekers and re-affirming other fundamental rights, including freedom of movement, should be strengthened in the global compact. Several welcomed mention of access to sexual and reproductive health services for migrant and refugee women and girls in the draft compact.

#### **Panel 4: Achieving a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration**

Moderated by Ms. Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General of IOM, the fourth panel focused on root causes of forced migration and displacement, the need for enhanced international cooperation on migration and displacement, and the role of non-state actors in the formulation of a global compact on migration. Participants emphasized the need for a paradigm shift towards a human rights-based and gender-sensitive approach that protected the rights of migrants and expanded legal pathways for migration that allow for family unification and are embedded with the respect and promotion of fundamental labour and human rights.

Focusing on the root causes of forced migration and displacement, participants agreed that there were a wide range of factors driving people from their homes, including conflict, gender violence, structural inequalities, poverty, lack of decent work, disasters, environmental degradation and climate change. Yet, while the root causes were generally well-known, they were not adequately taken into account in the formulation of migration policies, which tended to focus on punitive and deterrent measures to limit cross-border migration. Understanding of root causes was needed in order to move beyond the current approach, which emphasized criminalization of migrants. Demographic data were a valuable tool for understanding migration and displacement. It was proposed to develop a global migration survey programme in order to generate a clear understanding of the phenomenon.

Concerning a future global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration, participants called for an agreement that would respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of migrants, one that was holistic in nature, and provided for safe migration channels and legal pathways that adhere to international labour standards and human rights. Participants recommended using respectful and human rights-based language. Language that does not qualify refugees and migrants as a burden, and stresses not only the challenges but, at the same time, the opportunities and positive contribution that migrants and refugees may represent to inclusive growth and sustainable development. Concerns were also expressed with

reference only to the return of migrants, as proposed in the draft document and the lack of reference on the right of the migrants to stay in the host country. Gender equality must be at the core of policies addressing refugees and migrants, particularly in light of the distinct needs and challenges faced by women and girls on the move, including the risk of sexual violence and exploitation. Women migrants contributed significantly to their countries of origin and destination through labour market participation and transfer of remittances. While acknowledging the economic contributions of migrants, some participants cautioned against defining migration in economic terms only.

Addressing the question of how to strengthen international cooperation related to issues of migration and displacement, participants noted that, on the whole, current international law and widely ratified treaties provide sufficient basis for international cooperation. They called on States to strengthen their commitment to support and implement existing conventions and other legal instruments. Speakers emphasized the need for greater global cooperation in the area of protection of labour and human rights, access to justice, reform of recruitment practices, regularization initiatives, and labour market access. Participants recalled that migrants were also exploited when moving through regular channels. It should therefore be stated that legal does not necessarily always mean fair or safe. Arguing for a paradigm shift towards the empowerment of migrants, participants urged for an end to the prevailing “framework of deterrence,” including punitive policies of detention and mass deportation.

Regarding the role of civil society, the private sector, and academia in the preparatory process for the global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration, participants emphasized the extensive responsibilities shouldered by civil society organizations in supporting migrants and displaced people. In light of their grassroots expertise, civil society organizations had important experiences to share. In light of their complementary role, the private sector has also made important contributions. Both could contribute actively and become partners in the preparations for the high-level meeting and its follow-up. In this context, many speakers underscored the need for a bottom-up, consultative approach whereby migrant communities were genuinely involved from the outset.

### **Closing segment**

In closing, the President of the General Assembly thanked all participants for their valuable and insightful contributions to the multi-stakeholder hearing and re-emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of migrants and refugees. He reiterated the importance of focusing on the structural causes of migration and displacement, the positive contribution of migrants and refugees to host societies, and the need to better communicate the benefits of mobility and diversity through a changed migration narrative.