

**Speech by Mrs. Helmen Kütt
Member of the parliament of Estonia
at the 138th IPU Assembly General debate**

***Strengthening the global regime
for migrants and refugees: the need for evidence-based policy solutions***

Geneva, Switzerland / March 24-28, 2018

Honourable President of the Assembly,
Secretary General,
Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Humankind has witnessed the migration and movement of people in large numbers since its very existence and these processes will continue in the future. The scale of migration has increased in the last 18 years by more than 25 percent: in the year 2000, migrants made up 2,8% of the world's population. In 2017 they accounted for 3,5%, and we must take into account the global population growth. We must be ready for the challenges and opportunities migration and the movement of people offer us.

Dear Members of Parliaments,

Challenges we face are related to the global socio-political, security, climate and other conditions in the countries of origin of migrants and refugees.

By committing ourselves to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and eliminating poverty, we must contribute jointly to remove global inequality and increase security, in order to allow every single person to have the possibility to build his or her future in one's homeland.

For Estonia, similarly to all the member states of the European Union, it is of utmost importance to secure the adherence to and protection of human rights for both migrants and refugees, regardless of their status. Special attention must be turned to vulnerable groups, especially to women and children, and to youth and youth empowerment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We condemn all the heinous crimes that cause human suffering, violate human rights and break international law. We emphasize the importance of public diplomacy and political dialogue in preventing conflicts and solving protracted crises, which are often the root causes of migration and waves of refugees.

In this context, the Syrian war and the refugee wave it caused is one of the hardest ordeals the humankind has seen in many decades. It has caused suffering to millions of Syrians, but also created challenges for the neighbouring countries, as well as for the European Union. Another example is the situation of rohingyas that concerns us deeply, as the current balance in the region remains delicate and the situation is very challenging.

In addition, we have sources of distress here in Europe. Fighting continues in eastern part of Ukraine, we have illegal annexation of Crimea, as well as occupied territories in Georgia. Lawlessness and harassing legal constraints, inaccessibility of education and health services, xenophobia and fear are the reasons why people are forced to leave their homes. There are several million people, who need humanitarian aid every day. We are particularly concerned about the situation of children in these areas. These are just a few examples of conflict-affected countries.

Dear colleagues,

We welcome the fact that the migration discussion at the IPU contributes to the *Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration*, and to the *Global Compact for refugees*, two ongoing distinct processes that complement each other and are due to be completed by the end of this year.

Global Compact on Migration is to enhance international cooperation on safe, orderly and regular migration and reduce irregular migration while also addressing the negative implications the migration has for countries of origin, transit, and destination as well as for migrants themselves. In this regard, we firmly believe that the compact should address also the responsibility of states towards their own citizens. This includes addressing drivers of irregular migration and creating opportunities for all, in particular the youth. Moreover, international development cooperation plays a key role in creating good living conditions for people in their home countries. This responsibility also entails the obligation of states – under international law – to take back their nationals without any conditions and actively cooperate to facilitate returns and readmission. With regard to irregular migration, it is also our common duty to fight against human trafficking and smuggling.

Human-centred approach has to be at the heart of the future migration and refugee compacts. The Global Compact on Migration, based on international law and standards, including the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should strengthen the global migration management, while taking into account the principle of national sovereignty.

Estonia stresses the focus on human rights and the close link between UN Agenda 2030 and sustainable development objectives, including the root causes of migration. Estonia supports the development and deployment of digital technologies and services in the countries of origin, as they contribute to economic growth and sustainable development and reduce the pressure of irregular migration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We consider it important to improve the quality of the management of data on migration in order to contribute to the development of evidence-based migration policies. We emphasize that data collection and analysis should be based on the principle of low administrative burden and maximize the use of existing data and statistics on national, regional and global levels. In this regard, we stress the importance of interoperability of relevant data in the UN and regional disposal, with full respect to data protection.

We are determined to find solutions to improve the lives of millions of people while focussing on human rights and human-centred approach, with particular attention to children and gender. We need to promote communication with host communities, increase tolerance, strengthen respect for fundamental freedoms, and avoid discrimination.

Dear colleagues,

If migration is a choice, not a compulsion, then it enriches culture and promotes knowledge and development. We need engagement and offer opportunities, because migration can support the economy due to the goods and skills traveling with people.

An example of horizontal approach is the ILO celebrating its century next year, and ILO's focus on the future of work. Migration policies must contribute to facilitating legal migration in partnership between countries of origin and destination in order to contribute to meeting the needs of the global labour market. There is no need to fear brain drain. Young people should be given the opportunity for a better future, and here, the primary responsibility lies with the national governments of each country and in how one shapes its domestic policies. If we can ensure this, we will create the basis for a positive return of migrants and refugees.

Thank you for your attention.
