



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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IPU President's opening remarks

2018 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

Senator Gabriela Cuevas Barron

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Your Excellency Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd General Assembly,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Dear guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to participate in this hearing, for the first time as President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on an issue that is so close to my heart and on which I have devoted many efforts over the years.

International migration has been a common element of humankind history, but it is a distinctive and essential component of contemporary societies. We know the current facts. 258 million people today are living outside their countries of birth. An estimated 50 million are "irregular", meaning they lack proper status to be where they currently are. Each year, up to 10 million persons leave their country of birth to work abroad.

The problem today is that, on numerous occasions, migrants are forced to look for alternative - often dangerous - routes, as too many countries have set up obstacles for their entry, which in turn have aggravated the perils they have to overcome on their journey. We also know that more than 630 migrants have died while trying to reach their destination worldwide during the first two months of 2018, according to the Missing Migrants Project.

Even when they reach their destination, migrants often face stigmatization and stereotypes fueled by discriminatory policies and narratives that increase their vulnerability and expose them to human rights violations, in spite that their economic and cultural contributions to both origin and destination countries are self-evident.

It is rather clear that no State can address by itself this phenomenon, and so I am glad that this year's hearing is dedicated to a process, developed under the auspices of the United Nations, that was long overdue. In spite of previous efforts, the world still lacks a fundamental framework to bring all countries on the same page when it comes to the practical arrangements needed to make migration safe, orderly and regular.

A couple of weeks ago, the co-facilitators of the preparatory process for the Global Compact on this matter presented the "zero draft" which builds upon the diverse inputs received during the first two phases of this process. On this regard, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ambassadors Juan José Gómez Camacho from Mexico and Jürg Lauber from Switzerland in bringing the international community one step further into addressing international migration in all its dimensions under a comprehensive approach. I sincerely wish them the utmost success on the last stage of this process.

As it is noted on this draft, the Global Compact will be - and I quote - "a milestone, but not the end of our efforts". By proposing actionable commitments around the objectives stated on the New York Declaration, as well as a mechanism for follow-up and review, it calls for collective ownership and joint implementation of its provisions.

On this regard, the Inter-Parliamentary Union can count on the vision developed throughout the IPU Strategy 2017-2021 and its core values as a guidance tool. Advancing gender equality and respect for women's rights, and enhancing youth participation, as well as protecting and promoting human rights, as well as contributing to peace building, conflict prevention and security, not only are key objectives of this strategy but also fundamental goals contemplated in the new IPU Presidency's working plan.

My fellow parliamentarians,

Legislative action, approval of treaties, oversight and allocation of resources, these are all crucial tasks for the enforcement of international commitments at the domestic level.

By representing more than 6.5 billion persons, we hold a great deal of responsibility, but we also are in a unique position to bolster real change in each of our countries and every corner of the world. Even more so, just as the "zero draft" is subject of intergovernmental negotiations which are taking place next door as we speak, we have the unique responsibility of bringing the voices of those who we represent into the table.

As parliamentarians, we are responsible of using accurate and reliable data when developing and discussing new laws, and operationalizing international frameworks. We are also key players when it comes to harmonizing national legislation and the provisions agreed on international treaties. Providing migrants with identity documentation, regardless of their migratory status, has been identified as a best practice, and it sure contributes to foster access to public services and their inclusion. We have an important role to play on that field especially at the local level.

Let's not forget that every step towards the goal of changing the world, should always start from our community.

The possibilities are many, and these are just a few examples of the areas on which we can exercise the functions attributed to our mandates. But in the end, we must hold on to the most essential premise, as the 133rd IPU Assembly clearly stated in 2015 after its General Debate: "(...) migrants are not numbers, but human beings. As rights-bearers, they are to be treated with dignity and with respect for their human rights, regardless of their motive for leaving their homes or their status as regular or irregular migrants."

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests,

There is no doubt around States' prerogatives to determine their immigration policies which, let's not forget, need to be designed and enforced in accordance to international human rights law. However, multiple voices have recently called into question the benefits of multilateralism. Also, xenophobic and discriminatory rhetoric has received an impulse in different parts of the world.

But make no mistake. Migrants, in spite of what some irresponsible world leaders believe, are not criminals. Far from that, they are always part of the strength of all receiving countries and the international community should act accordingly. Further, migration is currently less the result of an option and much more the outcome of a true necessity.

Josefa is a grandmother of four who last year left her homeland, a country located in Central America, and tried to travel to the United States with her family. "We went because we had to go", she explained after being sent back by the authorities of one of the countries in the route. It did not matter that her aim was to escape the outrageous violence in her home country, where her daughter was kidnapped and raped, it did not matter that she managed to cross the border several times in extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, it did not matter that they were only looking for a peaceful place to live and work. They were sent back after being labeled as undocumented and because the policy of prioritizing deportations over protecting migrants is a harsh and painful global reality that we must contribute to change.

I wish you all a highly productive hearing not only focused on the traditional perspective of protecting migrants, eliminating discrimination and creating conditions for them to access social services but also taking decisive steps towards a new and much needed approach endorsed by the draft zero: their empowerment and their full inclusion in welcoming societies, as ways of promoting both a new perception and a new global reality.

Thank you very much.