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## 2018 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

**Concluding remarks by the IPU President  
23 February 2018**

We have had two days of very rich discussions.

We will be issuing a Report on this Hearing within the next two weeks, which will be circulated among all parliaments and in the UN General Assembly – as a formal parliamentary contribution to the UN negotiations on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).

I would like however, to make a few concluding remarks that capture some of the main messages from our deliberations here.

The overarching objective of this meeting was to create a common understanding of the possible objectives of the Global Compact, to demonstrate the need for it in the context of the current global migration trends. I can confidently say that there was overwhelming consensus in the room that the GCM *is* needed. Too much of migration governance today remains largely *ad hoc*, with countries devising their own solutions to a host of common problems. In terms of sharing the global responsibility toward migrants, we also need to address the current asymmetry between countries based in terms of each country's actual strengths and weaknesses.

We all agree that migration is a reality – a fact of life. The issue is not how to stop migration but how to manage it in a way that benefits all. This must start by making migration safe, orderly and regular, as the GCM proposes to do. Creating more regular pathways to migrate will help reduce irregular migration which, in turn, would pose less of a challenge to those countries that are currently experiencing difficulties in integrating migrants in their societies and labour markets.

At the same time, and as we heard, it is also clear that too much of today's migration is *involuntary*, in the sense that people move because they do not have at home what they need for a fulfilling, peaceful life, or because they are forced out of their countries altogether due to war, climate change, famine, natural disasters or terrorism. Many of you have rightly called attention to the need to address the root causes of migration so that the overall migratory flow can be managed more effectively.

Root causes are not always attributable to bad national policies but also to international developments that do not affect everyone and every country in the same way. Some of you urged a re-think of globalization so that it is less likely to cause poor living standards, low wages and the elimination of workers' rights, and to undermine the role of governments in strengthening safety nets and in providing public goods like education and health care. Many of you also noted how many of today's national conflicts are fomented by foreign actors who then shrug off their own responsibility to assist people fleeing those conflicts.

We all understand that migrants are not numbers, but human beings, who need to be treated with dignity and respect, and so, inevitably, our approach needs to be a people-centered one. One point that emerged very clearly is that all migrants, regular or irregular, permanent or temporary, are entitled to their human rights. The GCM must draw from the international human rights framework while seeking to create new protection and coordination mechanisms.

With regard to the zero draft of the Global Compact, which many of you commented on, I think we can say it provides a good foundation for discussion in that it looks at all the key phases of the migration cycle, from exit to integration and return, as well as all key aspects that can contribute to making migration safe, orderly and regular, such as the security-related aspects. Many of you noted the need for the GCM to clearly spell out a definition of migration and migrants, to avoid the confusion with the definition of refugees, and to address more clearly the needs and circumstances of specific types of migrants.

Let me now highlight some more specific messages from our discussion that will be further elaborated in the final report:

- Communication is key to success – in many cases, the narrative about migrants needs to be changed so as to promote an approach based on facts and accurate information. We need to communicate more and better on the good practices and success stories that can be seen everywhere. Migrants are often portrayed as victims and burdens and not as resources and added values. Ensuring that the positive roles and contributions of migrants are highlighted and made visible in the general discourse is key.
- Integration takes time, and it can be expensive. This is one of the stumbling blocks to countries wanting to admit more migrants. Partnerships with relevant stakeholders – including local government and the private sector – can help facilitate the process. However, integration cannot be ruled from the top down: integration must involve the people from the bottom up, beginning at the local level, engaging local government, communities, schools, workplaces and families. Every single citizen has a role to play. Cities are at the heart of the action and a key stakeholder, as more often than not, migrants remain in urban areas. A good coordination between national and local policies and initiatives is of essence.
- Return policies are also important, particularly when it comes to the re-integration of irregular migrants in home countries. . The GCM should give greater attention to the need for sound policies for the return and reintegration of former migrants.
- The links between migration and development are not automatic. In three key areas of labour migration - recruitment, remittances and return – there can be both positive and negative elements. We should be prepared to develop policies that are informed by evidence from each specific national context.
- Very often, racist and xenophobic reactions toward migrants are the result of self-defeating divisive politics that use migrants as scapegoats for a country's own problems. We need to fight these destructive tendencies in every way we can, beginning by outlawing hate speech. More important, we as MPs must set the example by avoiding inappropriate language. If a government indicates its hostility towards migrants, that sends a message to communities, and makes public hostility more acceptable.
- We need to be attentive to the most vulnerable migrants, including unaccompanied minors, women, and people with disabilities. We must combat human trafficking and all forms of migrant exploitation, including the sexual exploitation of women. The criminalization of irregular migrants is inherently wrong. Children born of irregular migrants should be given proper identification papers to begin their lives on a solid foundation in the countries where they live. In short, our first responsibility as legislators is to avoid human suffering of all people, of our own and of those arriving from abroad.
- Finally, on the key question of voice, and how migrants should be able to contribute to decision-making in the countries where they live, we can draw inspiration from the numerous provisions made by countries and cities to provide migrants with the opportunity to participate in politics, and therefore contribute to public life. Policy-makers grapple with issues such as access to dual citizenship so that migrants can participate where they live without cutting ties to where they come from, and with the appropriate length of residence before migrants can receive the right to vote.

As parliamentarians – and in light of our representative, legislative, budgetary and oversight functions - we have a particular role and responsibility to assist the GCM process. . At the same time, we should all work to make sure that the implementation role of parliamentarians is clearly acknowledged in the GCM itself.

To this effect, I encourage you to remain engaged in this process and to ask for regular briefings on the negotiations from your ambassadors or from the foreign ministers.

As we heard from the President of the UN General Assembly, the international community needs a Global Compact that is pragmatic, effective and achievable on the ground – and the UN is counting on us to provide the essential connection to the people and the realities on the ground.

As I noted yesterday, we will have another opportunity to discuss this issue, as well as that of refugees, at the upcoming 138<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Geneva. In the lead up to that, I invite all of you and your colleagues attending the Assembly to participate in the survey that has been launched today on our website and that is available in the room. The results of the survey will feed into our overall contribution to the UN process.

Thank you.