

Intervention of the OSCE SG

High Level Meeting of the Plenary of the General Assembly to address large movements of refugees and migrants

New York, 19 September 2016

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A phenomenon as old as mankind, the international movement of people has become a deeply contentious issue, showing the potential to polarize the public, dividing rather than uniting our international community. This development is very unfortunate and must be reversed. We are meeting today at this milestone Summit to reject any form of manipulation of the issue of migration and reaffirm the crucial role it has played in the development of our societies. We are also here to underscore the responsibility of the international community as a whole for the protection of refugees and the human rights of all.

The international movement of people is a defining feature of our interconnected world. We cannot address it as if it were a temporary phenomenon. Nor can we exclusively focus on the emergency. We need to combine a renewed impetus on the humanitarian side with a strategic approach tackling the root causes. Conflict, poverty, and the quest for a better life remain lead drivers. Yet, the relative weight of each and the profile of the people on the move are constantly changing. A growing number, many under-aged, are blurring the difference between refugees and migrants since they come from countries suffering from devastating economic crises or the collapse of state structures. To respond to changing realities, including the growing impact of climate change as driver for migration, we need to be able to devise new approaches.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The mission of the OSCE is to build bridges between countries within our diverse region, and to find ways to replace confrontation with dialogue. That is why migration is increasingly at the centre of our action and I expect that it will be high on the OSCE agenda for the long term. Our 57 participating States and 11 Mediterranean and Asian Partners, including key countries of destination, transit and origin countries, have a clear stake in transforming the challenge of large, unregulated flows into an opportunity for mobilizing cooperation and solidarity. Although we must acknowledge and address the security factors related to migration, we cannot let migration become another fault line.

We need to work together to ensure that human rights will be at the centre of our action. We also need to join forces to target those who exploit people on the move. The OSCE is proud of its contribution to the fight against organized crime, including human trafficking. A long-term approach also aims at successful integration. It is our plan to continue working in the field of labour migration policy reform, supporting the expansion of legal channels. We are also committed to promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, including by building on our track record in dealing with national minorities.

An example of a contribution by a regional organization like the OSCE could be the commitment by all its members to introduce in their national legislation the provisions of the Palermo Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and of its protocols, as a significant step in the fight against traffickers and smugglers.

In concluding, it is my belief that States should seize the initiative, taking advantage of today's momentum to set new global principles. As the largest regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE stands ready to work with other regional organizations to ensure the regional application of new global guidelines. As part of the Summit's follow-up, we can outline a roadmap in which regional organizations act as gateways to global action.