

Remarks

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Third Thematic Workshop “Migration for Peace, Stability and Growth”

We find ourselves at a critical inflection point in history—a moment when our most fundamental principles are being challenged, when our democratic and multi-lateral institutions are under serious strain, and when the post-WWII order more generally is fraying.

The global refugee crisis is a potent symbol of all this. Today, 65 million people have been displaced from their homes, by far the highest number since the Second World War.

Conflict is rife; compassion is in short supply. Our understanding of why we established institutions to protect refugees has faded.

In Europe, the chaos of the past year has allowed xenophobic, nationalist parties to surge in popularity. Anti-migrant crimes are rampant. Newcomers have become the scapegoats for economic, political, and social shortcomings that have little to do with them.

And now, after Brexit, the crowning achievement of the post-war peace, the European Union, is at risk of disintegration.

No one can doubt that the refugee crisis and immigration figured mightily in the debate and the Brexit outcome.

But it would be an epic mistake to take the wrong message away from it.

While many voters across Europe are deeply unsettled by the perceived scale and speed of immigration, they are more concerned by the seeming ineffectiveness of their governments in the face of the crisis.

This comes less than 12 months after world leaders gathered at the United Nations and committed to cooperate internationally to ensure and facilitate safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration.

I am speaking of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, of course.

This is an agenda that recognizes the benefits of migration for economic growth, inclusive development, and human advancement.

It is an agenda that asserts that the human rights of migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons will be protected.

And it is an agenda that commits not to leave migrants—or anyone else—behind.

Contrary to the wisdom that went into the 2030 Agenda, political leaders have nurtured a misguided belief that safeguarding sovereignty means acting unilaterally; governments have resisted a collective approach to migration.

But as events in the Mediterranean have starkly demonstrated, this approach is self-defeating.

It leads to paper-tiger sovereignty, undermines the credibility of democratic governments, of institutions for regional cooperation, and of the international system; instead, it empowers smugglers and authoritarian populists.

Reversing these trends is not only essential for reducing human suffering, but also for maintaining our liberal democratic societies and the freedoms that depend on them.

That is why the Summit on large movements of refugees and migrants is so important.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that this Summit, and the “global compact” it will endorse, do not become exercises in merely restating or, worse, renegotiating, hard-won achievements.

Instead, the process must be geared towards making further progress, operationalizing existing obligations, and establishing the institutional conditions for doing so.

Bringing IOM into the UN is a good starting point for enhancing coherence and coordination on migration. It is important that the IOM be given the leading role that is required for it to effectively improve how the UN addresses migration.

Looking beyond the institutional set-up of the UN, and drawing on the commitments and the spirit of the 2030 agenda, the Global Compact also needs to:

Promote migration and development, by facilitating the mobility of migrants, as ensuring their inclusion in destination countries, and allowing them to keep what they earn.

It also needs to address irregular migration, by enhancing the orderliness of migration and combatting smuggling and trafficking of human beings. This also means ensuring the protection of migrants in vulnerable situations and full protection of the human rights of migrants, as well as their right to return to their countries of origin.

And it needs to address the displacement and the crisis dimensions of migration, including mixed migration flows.

Later this year, I will be issuing a report making clear that, if we want to make progress on these fronts, greater international cooperation is essential.

I hope that this report can inspire the negotiations that will lead to the adoption of the global compact on migration.

Thank you very much!