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Statement

MS. LOUISE ARBOUR

**SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE**

**LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN EXPERT MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION PREPARATORY TO THE GLOBAL
COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION**

30-31 August 2017, Santiago

Ms. Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean,

Distinguished co-facilitator, Ambassador Gomez Camacho,

Ms. Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General of IOM,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Estimados amigos, estimadas amigas,

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Santiago today at the first of the five regional preparatory meetings organized by the UN Regional Commissions.

I thank the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for their invitation, and thank also the co-organizers, IOM and UNDESA, and all the distinguished participants for joining this timely discussion.

Today's consultations follow the UN General Assembly's decision in September last year to develop a *global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration* to be adopted in 2018.

This significant decision taken in the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* presented the first ever comprehensive international agreement on international migration under the auspices of the United Nations.

While the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, fully integrates international migration in a global development framework adopted by the UN General Assembly, the New York Declaration took that commitment one step further by recognizing that no one state alone can deliver on better governing migration.

We can thus not miss this opportunity for collaboration towards addressing human mobility in a people-centered, cooperative and forward-looking manner.

Over the past months, many of you have actively contributed to the thematic sessions and the multi-stakeholder hearings of the General Assembly where we have discussed a variety of issues at the global level. I have listened attentively to your views and messages and will continue to do so today and in the coming months.

Now we embark on a journey to examine key regional and sub-regional aspects of international migration. I am looking forward to hearing the experiences and lessons learnt from the Latin American and Caribbean experts first hand.

Allow me, in my introductory remarks, to highlight a few issues that have emerged so far and that I consider particularly important for the development of the global compact.

Migration is the story of humanity since its earliest times. It is the story of some of us in this room and that of many other women, men and children who have sought new horizons, safety or dignity abroad. Current demographics and other factors such as climate change, indicate that it will continue and even probably intensify in the future.

Migration can make an important contribution to addressing some of the worlds challenges, including climate change, sustainable development, gender equality and, population decline and ageing. It also has an overwhelmingly positive social, economic and cultural impact on countries of origin and destination and presents an empowering experience for millions of migrants and their families.

Most of the 244 million international migrants in the world today move in a regular fashion – that is an important point to bear in mind. But nor should it obscure the reality that many move, live and work in the shadows, vulnerable to marginalization and abuse.

We are witnessing daily the desperation of many women, men and children, facing life-threatening obstacles to reach safety and dignity. In 2017 alone, more than 3,400 individuals died on migratory routes worldwide, including more than 380 in the Americas. Uncounted others, faced kidnapping, extortion, sexual and **gender-based violence and abuse.**

The motivations for these journeys are ever more complex. While many move through genuine free choice, others are compelled to leave their homes. Some seek safety from conflict and persecution. Others escape poverty, violence, insecurity, discrimination, climate-change related disasters or a combination of these factors. Many find themselves in acute need of assistance and protection in the course of what is often a long journey to an uncertain destination. This is particularly true for children, notably unaccompanied migrant children.

To design comprehensive, people-centered and **gender-sensitive** responses, it is essential that we seek to understand and assess why people move and address fully the protection needs they encounter.

Yet, efforts to curtail irregular migration tend to focus exclusively on repressive border governance measures such as criminalization of migrants and even of those providing humanitarian assistance, punitive forms of detention, or fast-tracked returns. These policies have shown themselves to be ineffective often only intensifying migrant vulnerabilities.

Indeed, labelling and treating individuals as “illegal” unduly stigmatizes migrants and fails to recognize both the complexity of reasons that compel people to move and the variety of circumstances that contribute to their irregular situation. The same has become true of the term “economic migrants”, which has taken on an increasingly pejorative connotation.

Many migrants today work in informal sectors under exploitative conditions, face barriers to access fundamental services, and are unable or unwilling to seek protection from the state due to their migratory status.

There is clear need for principled and collaborative migration governance at the global, regional and national levels.

Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to migration governance require the participation and partnership of all relevant ministries, levels of government and multiple stakeholders.

However, while migration governance starts at the national level with sound public policy grounded in evidence, regional mechanisms are also crucial.

In previous thematic sessions, many delegations confirmed that national coherence was the basis for effective complementary regional policies. They recognized that the migration policy of one country inevitably influences other countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A successful compact, with principled and operational deliverables, will indeed enhance human rights, development and peace and security – the founding pillars of the UN system.

It will mean greater human rights protection; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all migrants; better matching of labour needs with available skills; leveraging of remittances for development; and ultimately an enhanced framework of international cooperation within and among all countries to facilitate mobility in a safe, orderly and regular fashion.

While we cannot expect some of the public opinion to change dramatically in the short timeframe given for the adoption of the compact, we depend on leadership, including yours, in the political and public sphere, to anchor the debate on facts and ground it in reality. We depend on political support if we do not want to perpetuate the present crisis of solidarity and fail people on the move and the millions of others who depend on them.

I am persuaded that this discussion will enable the Latin American and Caribbean countries and stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the preparatory process of the global compact.

I thank you and look forward to a fruitful discussion in the next two days.