**REMARKS**

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**On behalf of the Director-General, William Lacy Swing**

**20th Anniversary of the Regional Conference on Migration**

**“Integration, Return and Social and Productive Reintegration of Migrants”**

 **XX Vice-ministerial Meeting**

**Regional Conference on Migration**

**11 November 2015, Mexico City**

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start this message, by congratulating the Mexican government for its excellent Pro Tempore Presidency of this Regional Conference on Migration.

It is timely that Mexico is hosting this year’s RCM as it did 20 years ago during the first RCM meeting in the heroic city of Puebla de Zaragoza. Once again, Mexico calls together the countries of this region in order to discuss regional cooperation on migration priorities and, of course, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the creation of the RCM.

I am honored to address you all today on behalf of IOM. You have established one of the first and one of the most developed and successful regional consultative processes on migration in the world. The outcomes of the previous RCMs have allowed you to respond appropriately to the current global migration trends, and it is a good testimony of the good role that RCPs play in addressing not only regional but global migration issues.

1. **Achievements of the RCM**

Twenty years ago, when in many regions migration was still an out-of-bounds subject, this region was already discussing and cooperating on strategies to face complex migration issues. When the RCP was established, many external observers thought it would not be possible for the countries of this region to meet and constructively discuss migration. You have shown that this is indeed possible and have even exceeded expectations.

You have consistently and successfully convened and articulated the views of diverse countries with differing migration interests. You have made a reality the principle of co-responsibility which is a fundamental pillar for the effective governance of any global trend, including migration. As a result of your efforts, the RCM has set an example for the other regions to follow.

This RCM has succeeded in discussing and agreeing on regional strategies and actions to humanely manage unexpected situations that have impacted the countries of the region. Just to mention a few: the flow of Asian migrants during the mid-nineties; the displacement brought about by the effects of hurricane Mitch in 1998; the growth of Asian and African arrivals in 2009, 2010 and 2011, and the ever-present concern of migrant children and refugees.

This RCM has also successfully developed sustainable regional cooperation strategies based on a common understanding and shared principles to protect the most vulnerable migrants and to prevent crimes and abuses against migrants, regardless of their migratory status.

In this regard, the achievements made in combatting human trafficking; promoting consular protection of migrants in transit; addressing the feminization of migration; and, encouraging humane repatriation and integration, return and reintegration of migrants -- all deserve special mention. A very concrete example is the publication of a manual on reintegration of migrants which is the result of RCM conference on “Integration, return and social and productive reintegration of migrants”.

This RCM has also pioneered the inclusion of different sectors in its work. Inclusivity is vital in order to ensure effective migration governance. The active and continuous participation, since 1998, of civil society as well as relevant international organizations, in this RCM, makes this RCP a good benchmark. In this regard, we would like to profit the opportunity to welcome UNICEF as new observer of the RCM. We are certain that UNICEF will make a great contribution to the RCM.

With 9 international organizations as observers: UNICEF, UNHCR, ECLAC, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, SEGIB, SICA, UNFPA, ICRC and IOM; the RCM is today the RCP with the largest group of international organizations being part of a RCP in the world.

In the same vein, the RCM has set a high standard for other RCPs by establishing a regional fund aimed at protecting the most vulnerable migrants by assisting them in voluntarily returning to their countries of origin. This fund has assisted 1,183 unaccompanied children, victims of violence, persons with medical conditions or injuries, elderly, and persons with disabilities. No other RCP in the world has a fund of this kind.

But IOM does not only want to celebrate the past successes of this RCM. We would like also to recognize this RCM’s willingness to construct a better, more effective, and productive future. In this regard, IOM wants to commend RCM’s efforts, under the leadership of Mexico, to undertake a self-analysis. This assessment will help establish new methodologies and mechanisms that will deliver better results by monitoring and evaluating the decisions taken and the agreements made. Establishing a strong evidence base is extremely important to good policies and decision-making. IOM is ready to collaborate with you in this effort should you require our support.

1. **Current Global Migration Trends and Challenges**

I would like to highlight three areas that, from our perspective, should be reflected on by every regional consultative process while analyzing its future:

First, we live in an era of **unprecedented human mobility** -- a period in which more people are on the move than ever before. More than 1 billion in our 7-billion world. Of these, 250 million are international migrants, and 750 million are domestic migrants. International migrants have remained constant at about 3 percent of the world’s population for several decades, but numerically, migrants are more numerous than ever before. And this is because the world’s population quadrupled in the last century – a first that is unlikely to be repeated. Demographic shifts and labour market needs in countries and regions of origin and destination will make internal and international migration inevitable and highly desirable over the next 30 years.

We must therefore manage and plan better, recognizing that migration will continue to be essential for future development.

Second, the **number of people displaced globally by violence and conflict** is the highest since World War ll. At the same time, pandemics, climate change and extreme weather events are increasingly driving migration. At the same time, the number of migrants dying on dangerous journeys and the level of xenophobia and violence and crimes and abuses against migrants are rising at an alarming rate.

This region has been evidently impacted by all these phenomena. Violence-linked migration, migration and health, environmental migration and protection to migrants’ life and integrity, wherever they are and regardless of their migratory status, are all migration realities that must be urgently addressed by the government at all levels -- including cities and towns. None of these can be effectively addressed by a single country. It is clear that regional consultative processes are to play a significant role.

Third, the international community must urgently work together to **change the migration discourse and narrative** into something realistic and, hence, into something largely positive. We have witnessed the cynical and growing anti-migrant sentiment in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, this region is not an exception. We need to be more active in countering these sentiments as there is no other way to uphold the well-being of migrants and to preserve their rights. To do this, we need to highlight the real and concrete contributions of migrants to their host countries, as well as to their countries of origin.

1. **Continued Need for RCPs**

RCPs would not have existed for so long if it has not achieved the objectives it had set. In fact, the number of RCPs has doubled from nine in 2005 to 18 in 2015 -- covering almost every region of the world with some 160 countries participating in one or more RCPs.

At its very core, a regional consultative process is a platform that brings together countries to do three main things:

* To understand the nature, causes and consequences of migration;
* To track migration trends and patterns; and
* To identify appropriate policy responses and build partnerships for collaborative action.

Given the political sensitivity of migration, the very fact that governments in all regions of the world have committed themselves to consultation is perhaps an achievement in itself.

This RCM has gone far beyond, you have established bonds of trust among your countries; increasing your peoples’ appreciation of migration issues and challenges; encouraging communication among migration practitioners of your countries; and improving capacity building and developing public policy.

Last but not least, through this RCM, you have contributed to strengthening the nexus between migration and development and cross-fertilized important regional and global processes like the CELAC[[1]](#footnote-1) Special Migration Group, the UN High level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

**Conclusion**

IOM applauds all these achievements and stands ready, as has been the case during the 20 years of existence of the RCM, to cooperate with you to develop and implement the actions and strategies you might define in the pursuit of the RCM goals, fully respecting the state-driven character of your achievements. IOM stands ready to work closely with all of you and to support your efforts in making migration beneficial to countries of origin, transit, and destination, while protecting migrants’ rights in an orderly and dignified manner.

1. Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)