***REMARKS***

***For a region free of trafficking in persons***

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1. Introduction

It is an honor to be at the “Regional Conference on Migration”.

I would like to thank the Nicaraguan Chair for organizing the event as well as the Government of Nicaragua for the kind welcome to the homeland of the legendary poet Rubén Darío.

1. Scene setter

We live in an era of unprecedented human mobility. Numerically, there are more people on the move than ever before in recorded history. Today, international and domestic migrants comprise some 1 billion of the 7 billion people in the world. International migrants (232 million) represent a population group larger than Brazil. Many billions more are directly affected by migration –whether migrants’ family members or the people who receive indispensable services and other support from migrants.

Migration is inevitable in view of demographic trends, North-South disparities, and disasters including climate change. It is necessary for socio-economic development and growth; it is desirable if well-governed. Good migration governance seeks to create conditions under which migration benefits all -- migrants, host and origin countries -- by: (a) reducing forced, irregular and desperation-driven migration; (b) facilitating regular migration by reducing the human and financial costs; (c) ensuring the practical protection of all migrants and their rights; and (d) all this to create the most benefits for migrants and host and home countries.

In the current migration global context, full of opportunities and threats, I would like to raise three main challenges for this region:

1. **Migration and migrants must be fully incorporated into development strategies and the post-2015 UN Development Agenda**

The world and this region have been shaped by migration. Unfortunately, migration continues to be seen as a threat even though it contributes significantly to development. Every day, migrants suffer abuses, discrimination, exclusion and gross human rights violations.

Migration is one of the ways in which the exchange of talent, services, skills and a diversity of experience is achieved. Yet migration remains politically sensitive and governments face the difficult task of dispelling the misunderstandings surrounding it. Indeed, misinformation and misperception can trigger a vicious cycle that influences government policy, and in turn, perpetuates negative attitudes in mass media and the community at large. Policies and political discourse can therefore play a major role in shaping the image of migrants in home and host societies. It is time to emphasize the past, present and future contributions of migration to regional development. Being part of what is arguably the principal region of origin, transit, destination and return of migrants in the world; RCM countries have a particular obligation towards their migrants. We cannot allow migration to be left out of the Post-2015 agenda in the same way that it was left out of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The region has before it the enormous opportunity to define specific goals and objectives for the international community to adopt in order to ensure orderly and humane migration in the 21st century.

Simply put, the migration mega-trend is too important for development policy makers to ignore it. The global nature of migration clearly requires a global response. Since the MDGs were agreed, human mobility has become an essential element in development affairs. Therefore, if post-2015 can set clear targets and thus mobilize global action, there will be concrete improvements for migrants and their dependents, and improved development in countries of origin and destination. This can be done IOM believes, by concentrating on:

* Fostering partnerships on mobility for development
* Promoting and protecting migrant’s rights and well-being
* Reducing the risks and terrible consequences of forced and desperation-induced migration
* capturing the maximum benefits for sending and receiving countries and migrants alike

1. **Migration and migrants must be part of humanitarian, disaster risk reduction and mitigation strategies.**

This region is one of the most vulnerable to disasters. It faces high risks of desertification, soil degradation, rising sea levels and an increasing number of major natural disasters. Given this level of exposure, combined with the intensity of mobility in the region, it is extremely important to advance adequate management of disaster-induced migration.

Human mobility has long shown its ability to save lives, enhance resilience and reduce risk in emergency contexts. But when mobility is not planned or well-governed, it can make people more vulnerable, as this region has witnessed only too frequently: Hurricane Mitch and the Haiti earthquake are two examples that come readily to mind.

Better understanding and management of forced displacement in global, regional, national and local policies is essential to prevent the creation of new risks and to support investments in resilience.

IOM’s approach - the Migration Crisis Operational Framework, endorsed by IOM Member States in 2012 - brings together disaster risk reduction and mobility management practices to improve people’s livelihoods and well-being. The result is a set of strategies and actions to build the resilience of communities through improved attention to mobile populations which could be particularly useful in this region.

These and many other issues will be squarely on the international community’s agenda in 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit. I would like to encourage RCM countries to actively participate and advocate for recognizing the importance of migrants and diasporas in crises.

1. **Migrants’ vulnerability and human trafficking must remain high on the region’s agenda despite the impressive advances.**

Despite great progress in working individually and jointly to face migration management challenges and in particular human trafficking, especially through the work of counter trafficking taskforces, this crime continues to be a major issue in this region. I applaud Nicaragua’s choice of the trafficking theme because we need to continue to work together in the fight against this terrible crime: the data show that, in most countries, the victims most vulnerable to human trafficking are migrants, and an estimated 800,000 trafficking victims cross borders each year

In recent years, IOM’s strategy has focused on protecting victims of trafficking by protecting migrants in vulnerable situation. In order to protect victims of trafficking, they must be identified. This is the principle challenge for governments and others: out of the many migrants who come through a territory, how many are irregular? How many suffer abuse? How many are being trafficked?

The process of identifying victims is not an exact science. There is often a fine line separating a trafficked person from an exploited or abused migrant. And yet to positively identify a person as a victim of trafficking means that he or she may be eligible for temporary or permanent residence, safe accommodation, medical and psychosocial support, skills training, and a range of other forms of assistance by service providers.

Therefore, IOM has engaged in strengthening capacities of governments and civil society organizations to identify the differentiated protection needs of vulnerable groups of migrants, which include not only victims of trafficking, but also unaccompanied children, victims of sexual abuse or other types of violence, and migrants in need to health assistance. The “Regional Guidelines for the Preliminary Identification and Referral Mechanisms for Migrant Populations in Vulnerable Situations” is an excellent framework to insure the protection of vulnerable migrants. IOM applauds the RCM for its approval of these Guidelines and its commitment to implementing them. We remain ready to provide support for such implementation in the field.

One of the migrant groups in greatest need of protection is migrant children, especially those unaccompanied. Children are migrating in greater numbers to join their families, for economic opportunities or to escape violence and poverty in their home communities. According to recent statistics, it is estimated that the number of children entering the U.S. in 2014 will be more than double the number from last year, with thousands arriving unaccompanied every month. Some 80% of children detected crossing the border are said to be from Central America.

IOM is deeply concerned about the protection of these migrant children who are exposed to unimaginable risks as they seek opportunities or escape conditions at home. Many parents are unaware of the real risks of sending their children on these perilous journeys or are misinformed about what will happen once they arrive in the U.S. Information campaigns in their home communities and assistance to help those children who return, including psychosocial counseling, food, transportation, and locating family members, are urgently needed.

This dramatic increase in children migrating north should not only demand from all of us immediate actions. It should also be seen as an opportunity to address disparities and vulnerabilities in their home communities which are its structural causes, and an opportunity to provide a coordinated regional response. In the long term, the solution lies in addressing the economic and security challenges in the region; however, even in the short term, a collaborative approach is needed if the migrant children of Central America and Mexico are to be better protected.

In concluding, let me say that there is no quick or easy solution to strengthen our ability to identify and protect victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children. However, a greater commitment to protecting all migrants – regardless of status and wherever they may be - may well be a good place to start. And in my view, the RCM provides an ideal platform for addressing this issue given its commitment to safeguarding migrants, and especially children.