

**Informal interactive multi-stakeholder Hearing in support of the
GA High-level plenary Meeting to address large movements of refugees and migrants
United Nations Headquarters, New York, 18 July 2016, CR 4**

**Comments from Catherine Tactaquin, Executive Director,
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (USA)**

Panel 4: Achieving a Global Compact for safe, regular and orderly migration

- 1) *How can understanding the root causes of forced migration and displacement inform responses to refugees and migration, including by developing comprehensive and coordinated efforts?*

Understanding root causes should certainly not only inform policy and practical responses, but moreover, should be targets for political and economic change so **that migration is a choice and not a necessity**, and perhaps, can contribute to challenging xenophobic reactions. I don't think we, including international actors and national policy makers, are necessarily unaware of the root causes of forced migration and displacement. But we do have a problem with these root causes being acknowledged, and addressed. Are "we" addressing the factors that affect migration and displacement: global economic policy towards increasing equality among states, addressing violent conflicts, poverty and inequality, gender-based violence, climate change, disaster risk reduction, peacebuilding, environmental degradation?

Obviously we have a long list of factors affecting forced migration and displacement and some of these factors are clearly understood. However, at national levels, state migration policies typically ignore root causes and instead, **rely on deterrent and securitized frameworks**. We have responded to forced migration with greater barriers that have forced migrants to cross dangerous land and sea borders; we have limited access to permanent, regular immigration, and arrested and imprisoned undocumented migrants, including children. Despite awareness of root causes, we have countries such as my own, where there is an official policy of "zero tolerance" of undocumented migrants, we have made borders more unsafe and created a situation where **we essentially have migrant deaths by policy**. In going forward for a global compact, we would urge states to throw off these deterrent immigration policies.

- 2) *How can we strengthen international cooperation related to issues of migration and displacement so that all migrants are afforded adequate support under a coherent global strategy?*

The first consideration should be, on what basis are we seeking international cooperation? I would like to reaffirm the importance of adherence to a **human rights framework**, including active support for the various rights instruments that together provide the foundation for

greater international cooperation. Here I would continue to turn to the states to strengthen their commitments as part of a global strategy. This includes, for example, ratification of the Migrant Workers Convention, adoption of relevant ILO resolutions, protections for domestic workers, or embracing the “Recommended Principles and Guidelines for Human Rights at International Borders,” as well as for migrants in transit, both of which have been drafted under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We need a global commitment not only towards regular migration channels, including permanent residency and access to citizenship, and for regularization programs for migrants who are undocumented, who have migrated in the ones and twos as well as in large movements -- who are often criminalized and deemed ineligible even for the most basic rights and supports. The draft outcome document mentions cooperation between countries regarding the return of migrants in accordance with international human rights standards, but it does not speak to **regularization initiatives** that create an opportunity to remain with rights and dignity. ***Perhaps the document acquiesces to the notion that these people do not, cannot belong.*** Let's change this narrative. If we want a more solid compact in two years, we have much to do change the narrative. But much can be done now. We believe we should end the punitive policies of detention, certainly we should not be detaining children; we can ensure labor protection for migrant workers and provide the ability to work; we can end deportations that separate families; and we can open regular channels for migration that ensure access rights and justice.

3) *How can civil society, the private sector and academia contribute to the preparatory process for the “global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration”?*

Civil society has been more than willing to engage in the preparatory process and I would refer to the remarks of Michele Levoy, in our opening panel. To facilitate participation of civil society partners from all the global regions, from viable but under-resourced grassroots groups, from diverse migrant and refugee communities, from the trade union and women's sectors – these are vital voices that must be included, and we ask the UN to go an extra mile to strengthen avenues, provide greater resources and to do so in a timely and transparent way. I am concerned that as we face a two-year process towards developing this compact, and we will lose momentum, passion and commitment towards creating what should be a historic compact. Let's also look to more vigorous and transparent national and regional processes to share information, analysis, proposals, that bring together multi-stakeholders.

I would also like to raise a concern here about the involvement of certain elements of the private sector; for example, the members of the defense industries and private prison corporations who are vested in continuing punitive and deterrent migration policies.

I know our civil society partners in networks such as the Global Coalition on Migration, the Women in Migration Network and many others are eager to move forward and I also believe this commitment is consistent with a pledge we made a few years ago. Some of you here may recall that civil society had proposed a 5 year, 8 point plan of action at the 2013 UN High Level

Dialogue on International Migration and Development, towards advancing migrant rights, labor mobility, migrant women's rights, development, partnerships, and more. This process is an opportunity that had not been defined at that time, and we certainly hope that civil society can push forward the process in many ways. In addition to academia, our own grassroots groups can also provide evidence to impacts and to the need. For example, I just returned from a visit to Tucson, Arizona, near the US-Mexico border. The local group there, the Coalicion de Derechos Humanos, or the Human Rights Coalition, told me that they are receiving more than 300 calls each month on their Missing Migrants Hotline, from families seeking news of missing loved ones. I told them I would find a way to bring that message here because that tragedy is so central to our commitment and deliberations. We don't need to wait for two years to begin to make some of the changes that are going to ensure human rights for all migrants, in transit, at borders and in new countries of residence, and to save lives.

Closing comment:

I am hopeful for a positive outcome from this process; but, I want to note that building walls and imprisoning migrants does nothing to address root causes nor makes us a more humane global society; knowing that thousands of migrants and refugees will die each year simply because they needed to move is death by policy and is inhumane; and while we can respect freedom of speech, we need to stand up against the rhetoric and practice of racism and xenophobia wherever and whenever this is encountered.