



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU President's Statement

High Level Meeting of the General Assembly to address large movements of refugees and migrants

Mr. Saber Chowdhury

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President,

Millions of people are on the move within their own countries and across borders. More than ever before, a greater number of these people are not just seeking a better life: they are literally *running* for their lives, fearing persecution, starvation, devastation, destitution, torture and all sorts of other evils.

We have an emergency in our hands that will only grow worse if we don't take decisive action. We are past the time for small, reluctant steps. A long-range, coordinated and multidimensional solution grounded in human rights is needed.

Migrants and refugees are among the most vulnerable people in the world. By virtue of their transient status, they also lack a political voice as they don't get to vote or participate in politics. This places a special responsibility on members of parliament, as representatives of the people, to listen carefully not only to the concerns of host communities, but to migrants themselves. Beyond this, parliamentarians must ensure that international law is upheld, particularly when it comes to the *obligation* of states to receive and assist refugees and asylum-seekers.

Your Declaration today goes in the right direction. I am pleased to see strong convergence, in terms of overall approach and specific policy prescriptions, between this Declaration and the one that the IPU issued around this time last year, on the occasion of its 133rd Assembly, following a four-day debate on *the moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*.

We have much in common that we can build upon.

Like you, members of parliament for the most part want to see a shift in the way migrants and refugees are often seen:

- no longer as a burden, but as a *responsibility* to be shared;
- not just as a cost, but as an economic *opportunity* for the host countries and local communities where migrants end up settling, as well as for their countries of origin;
- not only as an issue of border controls, but of orderly *settlement* and social *integration*;

- no longer as a threat to national identity, but as a chance to embrace *diversity* – cultural, ethnic, and religious – as a principle of human interaction in a globalized world.

We must work together - governments, parliaments and civil society – to change the negative narrative about migration that pervades public culture and the media. We must stand firm against all expressions of xenophobia, racism and discrimination, and for the realization of the human rights of migrants.

And we must pay special attention to intersecting forms of discrimination that some migrants or refugees face, in particular as they are discriminated against based on their nationality, ethnicity or sex, both in national laws and in practice. Migrant women and children are at particular risk of exploitation and abuse. Disregard for their specific needs, and for those of disabled migrants, may lead to other forms of discrimination in addition to the frequent prejudice against migrants and refugees.

Above all, we have a common understanding of what it will take to manage migration more effectively, including in terms of *combating its root causes* such as conflict, poverty, natural disasters, and climate change, to mention the most obvious ones.

Undoing the drivers of migration in countries of origin is not easy; nor is it easy for receiving countries with high unemployment, stagnant incomes, and strained budgets to be more receptive to migrant workers and refugees. The good news is that the SDGs that came into effect this year provide us with all the guidance we need to connect the dots at the policy level and to build common ground among all concerned.

If we take decisive action to implement the comprehensive framework of the SDGs to fight poverty, restore political stability and shore up the environment, more people will be able to live in their own countries in full security and freedom and with the hope of a better life for themselves and their children. Implementing the SDGs will also enable host countries to effectively integrate migrants in their societies.

IPU is determined to make a strong contribution on this front by helping parliaments institutionalize the SDGs through capacity building and policy advice. Going forward, the SDGs will loom large in our strategic planning as well as in our close partnership with the United Nations.

As part of this work, we will be building on a recent Handbook for Parliamentarians on *Migration, human rights and governance* that was produced together with ILO and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human rights.

As usual when it comes to agreements such as the one signed today, not much will happen without *political will* to implement what is agreed. This is where parliamentarians once again will be critical. It is perhaps the main reason why this year's GA resolution on *interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU* (70/298), invites the IPU and the UN to work together “in supporting Governments in facilitating the orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”

We look forward to working with all of you to advance this critical issue based on our shared vision of the road ahead.

Thank you.