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## **Remarks of Catherine Wiesner**

### **International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) 2012 “Managing Migration in Crisis Situations” Special Session: Reflections on Migration Crises April 25, 2012, 10:00 am to 12:30 pm**

#### **U.S. Humanitarian Assistance and Migration Response**

##### *Reflections and Experiences*

The United States has long played a significant role in addressing migration challenges associated with complex emergencies and natural disasters around the world. My Bureau in the U.S. Department of State, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, or PRM, as many of you know us, is the lead for policy discussions on the subject of international migration. Whether responding to refugees, IDPs or other vulnerable migrant populations, we attempt to carefully identify and respond to humanitarian needs and protection concerns for the world's most vulnerable populations on the move.

Today, I want to share some insights from the recent U.S. Chairmanship of the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees, or the IGC, when we brought countries together, to discuss responses to migration challenges in complex humanitarian emergencies. I would also like to share some examples of the U.S. responses to migration consequences of natural disasters and civil conflict during the Haiti and Libya crises.

As the IGC chair, we selected the theme of “Humanitarian Responses to Crises with Migration Consequences.” We wanted to look at the impact of and responses to crises – for example,

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armed conflict, political instability, natural disasters, or pandemics - that spurred significant movements of people who cannot be considered refugees under international law, but who, nevertheless, are often highly vulnerable and in need of protection. Our initial motivation for choosing this theme was our experience with the complex inter-agency U.S. Government response to the Haiti earthquake in January 2010. After the outbreak of political unrest associated with “the Arab Spring”, our theme seemed almost prescient. We partnered with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to sponsor a workshop in March 2011 that examined the balance between the need for agile and compassionate responses by immigration systems and the need to preserve the integrity of those systems.

Among the key themes raised at the workshop were the importance: of preparedness and pre-established immigration policies that can be quickly implemented as soon as an emergency occurs; the establishment of mechanisms for quickly identifying individuals in need of international protection; and the critical value of coordination for both the immediate and longer term migration response, each of which I will discuss briefly.

- **First, preparedness** – there is a lot governments can and should do ahead of time to analyze migration trends and patterns to anticipate potential impacts of crises on migrant populations, in particular their own citizens living and working abroad. Countries can start by knowing where their citizens are and under what immigration status they reside in their host countries. Countries can establish dialogues internally and with the host countries to plan for large scale evacuations of citizens in case of an emergency. We know IOM has done much to encourage this type of contingency planning. The U.S. strongly supported the establishment of IOM’s Migration Emergency Response

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Mechanism and this year made a 2.5 million dollar contribution to that Fund, in great part, due to our experiences with Libya. We urge all IOM member states to support this preparedness mechanism, which will ensure improved IOM capacity for early response to future migration crises. Since countries are responsible for their own citizens both internally and abroad, we also encourage the creation of national contingency funds to bring migrants home, if necessary. This could be a public/private initiative. For example, employment agencies brokering overseas jobs could provide funds to return their citizens, or each country could make a contribution to IOM's Response Fund. We also urge countries to look at ways to develop surge capacity for emergency consular services for its citizens who may end up stranded overseas.

- **Second, establishing immigration policies and operational tool kits** can prevent unexpected migration flows as a consequence of crises. From our experiences, we know that clear policies and reliable assistance can help to minimize dangerous movements of people. I'll discuss the U.S. experience with Haiti in a bit to illustrate this.
- **Third, a strong foundation in protection principles** is also essential for effective and humane response to crisis-induced movements, which often include asylum seekers, trafficking victims, unaccompanied minors, and other individuals with unique protection needs. This was certainly the case with the mass outflow from Libya last year. Any policy and operational response to similar movements in the future should include procedures to identify and address protection needs.
- **Finally, coordination on many fronts** is critical for an effective migration response.

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- **Coordination within governments** is necessary to develop effective plans and rapid interventions for evacuations and to ensure capacity to receive and reintegrate returning migrant populations.
- **Effective international coordination** is also necessary to ensure both rapid responses to prevent secondary humanitarian crises caused by increased migration and to encourage long-term regional coordination to establish improved response capacity and contingency planning.

The U.S. has been highly involved with many crises where we employed these principles in our response. I will talk about two examples to illustrate my points— the Haiti earthquake and the Libya conflict.

## **Haiti**

In Haiti, the U.S. learned a number of lessons from mass migrations by sea from Haiti in the 1990s. Two different events led to nearly 40,000 Haitians being picked up at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard and brought to Guantanamo Bay Naval Station. Most were returned to Haiti after being screened for protection concerns. Since then, we have developed a number of mechanisms and policy tools to respond humanely and quickly to similar crises, including establishing intra-government contingency planning and coordination groups; conducting annual interagency military and civilian exercises for mass migration response; and employing an improved framework for providing emergency immigration benefits such as temporary protected status and humanitarian parole.

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After the Haiti earthquake, in 2010, our immediate concern was to help save lives and address critical humanitarian needs. But we were also concerned that the earthquake could trigger large-scale irregular migration, and that large numbers of people might take to the sea or cross into the Dominican Republic under hazardous conditions, with the potential for great loss of life. The United States Government implemented a number of programmatic and policy responses that addressed these challenges. Initially, the large scale humanitarian response to the Port Au Prince area prevented nearly two million IDPs from moving out in large numbers as they quickly began receiving food, water and sanitation services. We supported UN and IOM activities to stabilize the Haiti/Dominican Republic border where thousands of Haitians sought medical care. The U.S. also bolstered efforts to discourage large scale maritime migration by strengthening the Government of Haiti's capacity to receive migrants who were picked up and returned by the Haitian and U.S. Coast Guards in dangerous boats. PRM alone provided 14.2 million dollars in funding to address migration challenges associated with the earthquake.

In addition to the humanitarian assistance, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services provided immigration relief to Haitians. Some 51,000 Haitians received temporary protected status allowing them to stay and work in the U.S.; many Haitians in need of emergency medical care were allowed into the U.S. under humanitarian parole, and visa issuance was expedited for immediate family members of U.S. Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents from Haiti.

## **Libya**

As the Libya crisis unfolded, it became apparent to the international community, very early, that large numbers of third country nationals working and living there were in great peril as they fled

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the civil conflict into Tunisia and Egypt. Thanks in great part to IOM, UNHCR, and neighboring governments, excellent coordination and quick actions resulted in the repatriation of more than 1,000,000 people fleeing Libya. Most believe this mass effort helped to avert a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the borders areas. To support these efforts, the U.S. Government provided 92 million dollars in humanitarian assistance in Fiscal Year 2011. Of this, PRM funding accounted for 60 million dollars, primarily for protection and humanitarian response activities conducted by IOM, UNHCR, and ICRC.

Many other countries responded to the Libya crisis admirably. The international coordination and cooperation was outstanding. The international community rallied to provide significant funding and logistical support for evacuations and a number of countries enhanced consular services to provide emergency assistance for replacing necessary paperwork to help their citizens return home.

## **In Conclusion**

All of the themes that I mentioned, are challenging when addressing a fast-moving humanitarian crisis— especially given the need to also be aware of potential security threats and political consequences of these movements.

I will end here by saying that we should not view the migration response independent of the humanitarian response. Natural disasters and political crises are often triggers for significant displacement and migration and we need to be prepared to use all diplomatic, programmatic, and immigration tools at our hands to relieve suffering of those vulnerable populations forced to move. The International Community has a major role to play in migration crisis response and in

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order to respond effectively, we need active cooperation and participation before, during, and after a crisis.