

**Remarks by Suzanne Sheldon, Director, Office of International Migration,
United States Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and
Migration
Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative**

**2016 International Dialogue on Migration – “Migration in the SDGs”
March 1, 2016, New York, NY**

INTRODUCTION

- Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Suzanne Sheldon, and I am the Director, Office of International Migration, United States Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.
- The past two years have seen unprecedented numbers of people in all parts of the world fleeing protracted conflict, brutal human rights abuses, severe natural disasters, and extreme poverty.
- In Europe alone, more than a million refugees and migrants arrived in the past year, and thousands continue to come.
- In transit they can face human trafficking, physical and sexual abuse, labor exploitation, acts of torture, arbitrary detention, kidnapping, extortion, and drowning at sea.
- All this has triggered enormous international attention and stirred a new sense of shared responsibility among states. It has also led to the recognition that many of those risking their lives on perilous journeys are not refugees as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. They are migrants.
- On a positive note, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 recognized migration as an important enabler of development, a groundbreaking affirmation of the connection emphasized for many years in the Global Forum on Migration and Development.
- The SDGs are part of a growing appreciation of the need to recognize the links between migration and development, to link humanitarian assistance

with development aid, and to work harder to address the root causes of migration so that people are not forced to leave their homes in the first place.

- Yesterday’s panel on SDG Target 10.7 focused on technical indicators that might measure well-managed migration. Today, we’ll be talking more about concrete tools to assist vulnerable migrants.
- One such tool, an initiative that will fill a big gap in protecting some of the most vulnerable populations, is the Migrants in Countries in Crisis initiative, or “MICIC”, as we call it.
- This initiative addresses one critically important part of any well-managed migration system – the ability to quickly and flexibly assist migrants trapped in crisis situations.

WHAT IS MICIC?

- First, what is MICIC? The initiative will generate voluntary guidelines that states, employers, NGOs, and international organizations can follow in situations where migrants are stranded as a result of armed conflict or a serious natural disaster.
 - Let me say at the outset that we launched this initiative well before the current global refugee and migration crisis hit the news, and it does not directly address things like the thousands of migrants showing up in Europe. (I’ll say more about that shortly.)
 - But it’s still an excellent starting point for thinking about assistance in crisis situations.
- The United States co-leads the MICIC Initiative with the Philippines, with the support of a working group composed of the governments of Costa Rica, Bangladesh, Australia, Ethiopia, and the European Commission, as well as the UN Refugee Agency, the Special Representative to the UN Secretary General for International Migration, Georgetown University, and IOM serving as an excellent Secretariat.
- The eventual guidelines will be applicable to all three phases of a crisis: (1) preparedness; (2) the crisis period itself; and (3) post-crisis needs.

- MICIC will not result in a treaty, new international law, or anything binding. Rather, we aim to create a set of practical, voluntary tools that apply to real on-the-ground situations.

WHY MIGRANTS?

- Second, how did this initiative come about and why is there a need for it?
- Over the past ten years the world has witnessed a huge and growing number of life-threatening conflicts and natural disasters where thousands of non-nationals are stranded in life-threatening situations. They include:
 - The 2011 crisis in Libya.
 - The current civil war in Yemen.
 - The Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004.
 - Hurricane Sandy in the United States.
- Crises like these fortunately don't happen every day. But when they do, there's large scale loss of life. In Libya, some 800,000 migrants from over 100 countries were trapped. Many had no access to a telephone, money, or their passports. Worse, some were actually targeted, forbidden from leaving the country, or jailed.
- It's often the most marginalized who can't get to safety. Migrants are at greater risk of exploitation by smugglers, or unscrupulous employers who keep their passports. They're targeted by human traffickers. Their home country might not have an Embassy in the country where they live, or they might be afraid to turn to their own home country's authorities.
- In other words, they can be “caught between the cracks” because no frameworks exist delineating the responsibilities of State and other actors.

SCOPE OF MICIC AND RELATIONSHIP TO GLOBAL MIGRATION-REFUGEE CRISIS

- MICIC has a fairly narrow focus. Many migrants can be caught in dire circumstances, like being victimized by criminal groups while in transit. But these are not the same kind of situations as when migrants are *in a country* when a crisis breaks out.
- The former are situations of crisis for particular migrants; the latter are situations of crisis in a country where migrants are physically present. They call for different types of planning and responses, and it is the latter type of situation that the MICIC Initiative aims to address.
- So, how does the MICIC Initiative relate to the broader crises we are seeing today?
- MICIC does not address situations like the huge numbers of migrants and refugees, many from war-torn Syria, showing up on Europe's borders over the last few months.
- The crisis in Syria is only the most visible aspect of a much broader global crisis. The UN and IOM estimate the number of international migrants (including refugees) to be over **230 million**. Of these, about 4 ½ million are Syrian refugees - by any measure a large number, but a small fraction of all migrants.
- A great many are likely people who don't meet the refugee definition but are forced to move across borders due to conflict, extreme human rights abuses, severe natural disasters, food insecurity, or other extreme circumstances.
- The burden of caring for these people falls disproportionately on a small number of countries, but there's growing consensus that it should be a collective, global responsibility.
- So, while MICIC addresses only specific situations, it's a critical part of such global responsibility-sharing. The MICIC guidelines for situation-specific change can help generate broader systemic change that could apply to a greater range of crises. We hope they do. This initiative is one piece of a much larger set of efforts.

- I should briefly mention here two of those larger efforts coming up at UNGA this September, which I'm sure many of you are aware of.
- President Obama plans to host a high-level summit at the U.N. General Assembly this September focused on the global refugee crisis. He will seek to secure new commitments including increased and sustained support for UN humanitarian appeals, greater opportunities for resettlement, and expanded opportunities for refugee self-reliance through access to education, legal employment, and other measures.
- And, the U.N. President of the General Assembly will host a broader event in September on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.
- We also plan to formally roll out the MICIC guidelines at the General Assembly.

RELATED EFFORTS

- Just a word to recognize some of the other important efforts related to the MICIC Initiative.
 - SRSR Peter Sutherland has been a driving force behind MICIC. It was in large part his good efforts that resulted in the Secretary General's announcement at the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development that the United States and Philippines would lead this initiative.
 - A few years ago IOM developed its Migration Crisis Operational Framework, a practical, operational tool to improve the way in which IOM supports its Member States and partners to better prepare for and respond to migration crises, and a Migration Emergency Funding Mechanism that IOM can quickly draw from when a crisis hits.
 - The Nansen Initiative, led by Switzerland and Norway, looked at the related issues of cross-border displacement due to climate change and

natural disasters, resulting in adoption of a "Protection Agenda" last fall.

- The MICIC Initiative has undertaken a series of regional consultations around the world (with generous support from the EC) to develop the MICIC guidelines, as well as thematic consultations with civil society, international organizations, and the private sector that the United States has funded. We're more than halfway through and expect to conclude in April, and launch the final guidelines at UNGA 71 in September.

Conclusion

- Our hope is that the MICIC initiative will be a positive contribution to well-managed migration policies that contribute to development in all countries.
- In the meantime, I encourage you to visit the MICIC website (<http://micicinitiative.iom.int/>) and submit your own good practices so that other States and our partners can benefit from your experiences.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.