

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

International Dialogue on Migration 2018

**Inclusive and innovative partnerships
for effective global governance of migration**

26–27 March 2018

Conference Room 2, United Nations Headquarters, New York

ILO Director-General’s Opening Remarks – AS DELIVERED

Excellencies,

Fellow panellists,

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by thanking Director-General Swing for inviting me to join you at this opening session.

The topic you have chosen today could not be more appropriate or more timely. Partnerships matter, because migration raises multiple and complex policy issues and there are many actors addressing them locally, nationally and internationally. So it is essential that they come together in ways which are indeed inclusive and innovative.

In recent years, migration has played a central, though regrettably not always positive role in the public debate. That debate demands from us better responses.

This Dialogue gives us opportunity for this, because it comes at a pivotal moment in the formulation of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The negotiations will not be easy, but they must set the tone and foundation for moving towards more constructive dialogue, responsibility and cooperation, and that will take real leadership from all concerned.

This is especially pertinent in the context of the Reform of the UN. The Secretary-General’s report, “Making Migration Work for All”, has recognized the need to strengthen centralized capacity in the UN, and to dedicate our organizations to these same values of cooperation and coordination. This is important to the proper functioning of both the Global Compact and more broadly the 2030 Agenda, and ultimately to delivering on our promise to the many millions of migrants – including migrant workers and their families – and to help them realize their full development and personal potential.

This is both challenging and urgent. Because in too many countries, migrant workers face discrimination. They work often in precarious forms of employment which can entail high risks and costs, especially for the low-skilled. Exploitation in the recruitment process is widespread, and can indeed result in the trafficking in persons and debt bondage.

What at first sight might look like a passport to prosperity may end in loss of your passport and forced labour. When policies are not grounded in international labour standards, migrant workers can suffer denial of their fundamental principles and rights at work, wage penalties, poor working conditions and an absence of social protection.

During the recent negotiations here in New York, we have taken good note of the calls by Member States for the Compact to give due attention to the importance of labour migration, and for the ILO to play our part. And we are, I would like to underline, absolutely committed to doing so because nearly always, from the beginning or at the end, migration is about work.

It is the ILO’s constitutional and social justice mandate to protect “those working in countries other than their own” which drives and guides us. And we have expertise, rich experience, and strong capacity-

building ability, delivered through Decent Work Country Programmes operating or about to start in over 100 countries.

We take pride that this work has been valued by Member States for nearly 100 years. The ILO's centenary next year is a moment to reflect, with our 187 member States – Governments, Workers and Employers - on how we want to see the future of work for present and future generations. Labour migration is and will be a central reality of our working future and therefore fair and effective labour migration frameworks will be essential to support a future of work that we would want to see.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda, which supports a fair migration agenda for the Compact, provides a clear path forward. It calls for policy that is evidence-based, gender-sensitive, and grounded in international labour standards, and we think these are important aspects to be considered in designing a system to support the implementation of the Global Compact.

The ILO's constituents reinforced this message at last year's International Labour Conference, and our Governing Body has given us clear direction to work in ever closer partnership with the IOM, OHCHR and other UN agencies.

We know that with the right governance setting, labour migration can yield many positive benefits. Policies linked to employment can help meet labour market needs and ensure migrant workers' rights are protected as well. The ILO already has an arsenal of standards, tools and guidance to support the Compact; strengthening partnerships will help us to be more effective in deploying them.

The ILO's Constitution holds that labour is not a commodity. Migrant labour is no more a commodity than any other, and any policy setting that neglects that imperative is deficient by definition.

This is one reason the ILO is pleased that the Compact's current draft refers to commitments on governing labour migration in areas where the ILO is taking leadership in providing technical support and capacity-building on the ground. Those areas include promoting fair recruitment, skills development and recognition through global skills partnerships, social protection, and on enhancing data and knowledge management.

As a tripartite organization, we also understand the benefits that social dialogue can bring to policy debate and implementation. We are working closely in national contexts and with Regional Economic Communities to support good practices in this regard. The Global Compact can strengthen its approach by encouraging the use of such social dialogue mechanisms.

Partnerships among governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and with other stakeholders are indeed going to be central if we envision a Global Compact that delivers real and shared benefits for all — and perhaps serves as a new social contract on migration.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the UN Development System Reform and the Global Compact give us an opportunity to examine how best to ensure the UN system truly is fit for purpose: how to leverage each agency's special expertise, including those with a normative mandate, to mobilize coordinated actions in support of the Global Compact's implementation.

Bill, I want to conclude by assuring you of the ILO's commitment to the UN reform, and to deepening our valued partnerships with the IOM and other UN agencies.

Thank you.