

First session of the International Dialogue on Migration 2021

Accelerating integrated action on sustainable development: migration, the environment and climate change

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Opening remarks by the Director General

Thank you so much, and once again, welcome to this 1st session of our 2021 IDM. It is for me a pleasure to welcome you all now when we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the International Dialogue on Migration. The IDM has provided a platform to highlight and debate the key migration governance issues of our times. This year, we have decided to dedicate this event to a topic that is not just a concern for the future but for all of us today: the impacts of climate and environmental change on migration.

In 2001, IDM celebrated the 50th anniversary of the organization, looking back at the evolution of IOM's work since 1951 in the service of governments and migrants. Twenty years later, as we recognise a more mature – but not yet old! -- IOM at 70, the world is recovering from a major shock; a global pandemic that has put a halt to traditional internal and international mobility patterns. But while we are all preoccupied with response and recovery to COVID-19 – a task that I fear will take many years, we must not be distracted from other concerns.

Over the past several decades, climate change and environmental degradation has emerged as what I could say the defining issue of our time. Slowly, the impacts of this change on migration and mobility has moved into the spotlight, due in no small part to the efforts of IOM colleagues who have been constantly promoting awareness, advocacy and action.

Indeed, ten years ago, then years ago, IOM organized the first IDM on Migration, environment and climate change, aiming -- first and foremost -- to encourage parallel, nascent climate negotiations to integrate migration and displacement issues.

A decade later, we are proud to see migration and displacement issues fully integrated in the Paris Agreement and addressed through many other relevant international processes and dialogues. Our awareness and knowledge of the challenge have expanded tremendously, just as the impacts for migrants, displaced populations and broader communities have proliferated.

Yet so much is still to be done. Our objective today is to call on the governments, partners and experts gathered here today to accelerate action on migration, environment and climate change, through strong partnerships and innovative initiatives.

Climate change and its adverse impacts increasingly affect how, when, and where people migrate worldwide. There is no region in the world that has avoided population movements directly, or indirectly, linked to adverse climate impacts.

We are seeing increasing levels of rural to urban migration in African cities; population relocation away from rising sea levels in small island states; and the situation is particularly worrying in the least developed countries, whether landlocked or small islands.

The World Bank has predicted that 143 million people would be forced to move internally by 2050 if no climate and development action is taken to address slow-onset events such as decreasing crop productivity, sea level rise or water shortage.

Similarly, in 2019, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that nearly 1,900 disasters triggered 24.9 million new displacements worldwide, the highest figure recorded since 2012.

As we prepare ourselves for the 26th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change later this year, followed by the International Migration Review Forum in 2022 to assess progress towards GCM implementation, it is critical that we seize the potential opportunities to address this important issue.

I am very pleased to host speakers from a wide array of backgrounds. The nexus between climate change and migration is complex and expertise from many different policy areas is needed to inform the development of concrete responses.

More than ever, multilateralism is needed to address the changing nature of our world. States cannot tackle migration issues and adverse climate change impacts alone. We therefore must redouble our commitment to collective action towards the effective implementation of relevant global frameworks and enhanced policy coherence.

This includes ensuring the robust implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC Recommendations on addressing displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda. More international cooperation is needed to create genuinely transformative changes and support the States most vulnerable to climate impacts.

The Global Compact on Migration provides us with a reference framework to address the migration and climate change nexus and create synergies with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement. Jointly delivering on both these commitments will also leverage our contribution to the 2030 Agenda goals.

For these reasons, the UN Network on Migration on Migration has decided to address this topic as a thematic priority for 2021 and 2022. The migration and climate change workstream, led by

the UNFCCC Secretariat and by IOM, with the support of other Network Members, is currently developing a robust work programme. As Coordinator of the Network, I am committed to supporting the Network's efforts to support UN Member States who request our technical expertise. As the Director General of IOM, I consider the migration and climate change nexus to be a key institutional priority.

We have developed a new institution-wide Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change that has benefitted from broad consultations and engagement with many of you, and which will be presented in the coming months. We have identified key priority areas where we consider action to be urgently needed, and where IOM can add value and provide effective support to Member States, migrants, and to communities. Looking ahead, we have identified specific challenges, such as the interplay between climate change, migration and urban planning or the links between climate, migration, and conflict.

Our vision and commitment are to promote a comprehensive approach to migration, environment and climate change, grounded in human rights-based approaches and for the benefit of migrants and societies. When well managed migration becomes a safe and accessible choice, it can help people adapt to environmental and climate change pressures.

Over the next three days we will take stock of advances and challenges across multiple dimensions of the climate and migration nexus.

My hope is that at the end of this Dialogue, in line with the purpose of the IDM, we will have identified practices, lessons learnt and recommendations that will support the development and implementation of concrete actions for the benefit of both states and migrants. The results of our common work will feed into our contributions to the upcoming COP26, a vitally important milestone.

Colleagues, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to fruitful deliberations and I am convinced that, together, we can rise to the challenge. Thank you.