



# **Multi-stakeholder meeting on the protection of the human rights of migrants in large movements**

1 Juni 2016 | Hotel Royal, Salon Rousseau | Geneva

## **Welcome remarks**

### **Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations Ambassador Alexandre Fasel**

Monsieur le Rapporteur Spécial,  
Excellences,  
Chères et chers collègues,  
Mesdames et messieurs,

C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de vous accueillir à Genève pour cette réunion organisée conjointement par l'HCDH et PICUM représentés ici par leurs directrices respectives, Mesdames Peggy Hicks et Michele Levoy.

Soyez toutes et tous les bienvenus !

Je souhaite bien évidemment remercier tous les experts présents, en particulier le Rapporteur Spécial, Monsieur François Crépeau, qui interviendra aussi lors de cette session. Je salue d'ailleurs tous les autres intervenants.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted that this meeting takes place in Switzerland today since here in Geneva we host the Human Rights Council and many other institutions which guard the universality of human rights. And at this moment in time, for Switzerland as well as for many of our neighbors, there is possibly no human rights issue that is more important than migration.

The world currently faces the largest displacement crisis since World War II. Mixed movements of migrants and refugees have become a reality. Millions of people have left their homes in search of

safety, dignity, respect for their rights, and the prospect of secure livelihoods. For many the journey towards their intended destination is increasingly dangerous and their need for protection changes in the course of their journey. Under the existing frameworks, however, it is difficult to meet the needs of vulnerable migrants in large movements.

In effect, the majority of the people on the move today fall outside the well-established protection categories because they are not recognised as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. As a consequence, the protection of vulnerable migrants outside the refugee protection regime remains one of the most significant gaps in global migration governance.

There is consensus that all migrants have human rights. The question is how these rights can be better implemented. Many migrants in vulnerable situations are in dire need of specific intervention to ensure their human rights are protected. There is a clear need for more guidance, in the form of “guiding principles” or “best practices” which would allow for such protection.

The existing protection gap is the reason why Switzerland and like-minded partners started to engage in various initiatives focusing on the specific vulnerabilities of migrants, including, for example, the Nansen Initiative and its successor, the Platform on Disaster Displacement which was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul last week. Switzerland is also part of the Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative as a member of the Group of Friends.

We believe that, alone, no country has the answers to the ongoing human rights issues arising from international migration and forced displacement. Only through partnerships among all stakeholders – governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector – can challenges be identified, and smart, pragmatic, action-oriented solutions be found. This is why Switzerland has been engaged in the international dialogue on migration since its inception and is continuing its engagement in the context, for example, of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). We welcome the efforts made by the GFMD to address the existing policy gaps and to identify best practices for the protection of vulnerable migrants.

The current discussion on migration as well as the Nansen Initiative, the new Platform on Disaster Displacement, and the MICIC Initiative are critically important to address the protection needs of migrants in vulnerable situations. However, we still need to turn theory into practice to better assist, women, men and children in need. We must implement the policy and legal frameworks on human rights and respond appropriately to the current protection challenges.

I believe we have a common goal for 19 September at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) High-Level Meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants: We need to formulate concrete answers that have a direct impact on the lives of millions of displaced persons. In this regard, the 19 September provides a prime opportunity to promote the human rights of migrants in vulnerable situations. For example, the discussion of “guiding principles” and “best practices” for protection would contribute to the improved implementation of human rights.

Today, we are here to express our determination to make headway on human rights for vulnerable migrants in large movements and to set our milestones for the preparations ahead of the UN High Level-Meeting in September.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The agenda of today's meeting mirrors some of the most pressing issues with regard to protection gaps. Let me briefly mention two of them: the situation of migrant children and the right to health.

First, on the issue of children's rights, there are currently thousands of children arriving daily at Europe's borders. They are amongst the most vulnerable people in large movements. Many are dying as they seek a better future for themselves and their families. The number of unaccompanied children disappearing along the migration routes runs to tens of thousands, a shockingly high number. And when we open the daily newspapers, we see children confined to compounds gazing at us through barbed wire fences. We know that immigration detention has a detrimental impact on children.

The United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe have repeatedly found that the detention of children for reasons of their migration status is contrary to the child's best interests and is a violation of the rights of the child. In 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe took action by launching the Campaign to End Immigration Detention of Children and appointing the Swiss Member of Parliament, Doris Fiala, as General Rapporteur on Ending Immigration Detention of Children. The Swiss parliament is engaged in dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, including NGOs who have been invited for consultations on 15 June in Bern.

Second, on the topic of migrants' right to health and acceptable living conditions: All of us remember the pictures of the deplorable conditions in camps in which thousands of migrants remain stuck at closed border crossings. The right to health extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as access to adequate sanitation, clean water and acceptable housing. Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights we have the duty to address these underlying determinants of health.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is time for us to reaffirm that human rights are inalienable rights which apply to the millions of migrants on the move around the world. At the UN High Level Meeting on 19 September we should aim at common approaches to address and implement the rights of vulnerable migrants in large movements.

I would like to thank you all for your participation in today's meeting and your openness to dialogue. I wish you an inspiring day in Geneva and I look forward to continuing our mutual cooperation.

Thank you.