

Remarks by John Sandage, Director of Treaty Affairs, UNODC

High-Level Meeting on Migration and Human Rights

Panel on: Roundtable 2 of the High-Level Dialogue: protecting the human rights of migrants

Geneva, 4 September 2013

Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. As the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has noted [in his video message], the underlying realities of the subject matter we discuss here today are all too familiar to the day-to-day work of my office.

As most of you will know, UNODC operates global assistance programmes to help prevent and combat smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons – practical work that is ultimately rooted in the very real dangers, abuse and exploitation experienced by thousands, if not millions, of individual migrants across the globe daily. Thousands of daily incidences where migrants experience severe challenges to their human rights.

The key international instruments on these issues, the UN Protocols on trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, require comprehensive action on 4 fronts, on what is commonly termed as the 4 Ps – prevention... prosecution [of offenders]...partnership [at both the national and international levels]...and, of greatest significance for today's discussion, protection of the rights of both trafficked persons and smuggled migrants.

Turning to the forthcoming second High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development this year, the long title for the roundtable¹ we discuss here today, maybe unwittingly, lists the human rights of migrants, and smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, as if they are separate issues. They are not.

It is crucial to emphasize that an effective response to these specific transnational crimes requires a nuanced understanding of the legal, social and economic pressures that make it easier for migrant smugglers and traffickers to exploit the vulnerabilities that can result from that most human characteristic – the desire to seek better opportunities.

¹ 2013 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development : Roundtable 2 - "Measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of all migrants, with particular reference to women and children, as well as to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, and to ensure regular, orderly, and safe migration".

It is not possible to respond to these crimes without taking concrete action regarding protection.

It is not possible to meaningfully address these issues without a comprehensive rights-based approach to migration.

For many years, UNODC has, in consultation with the international community, including many partners represented here today, worked to develop and promote a better understanding of the measures necessary to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, which, without fail, include a core protection component.

Through our work with our sister agencies in the Global Migration Group, we're very proud to now be able to add to that, in the launch today of a Global Migration Group thematic paper², seeking to raise awareness and further discussion of the exploitation and abuse of international migrants, and the associated human rights considerations.

Noting that our work as individual actors is closely tied, both for better and worse, to the different frameworks we use to categorise migrants, the paper seeks to focus greater attention on rights-based approaches to exploitation of migrants, irrespective of the category attributed to a person at any given stage of the migration process.

The great value of consultative discourse, of which today's meeting is an important example, and the GMG an illustrative mechanism, is that we can, one, broaden a discussion to ensure we address all related issues and perspectives and, two, agree on the fundamental, underlying focus we must not lose sight of.

Tellingly, the sub-title of this new paper of the GMG, on exploitation of migrants, and compiling the perspectives of multiple agencies, is, "A human rights approach".

With great thanks to the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, we welcome the discussion today involving all those present, and its continuation through to and beyond the High Level Dialogue. Thank you.

² GMG Thematic Paper, "Exploitation and abuse of international migrants, particularly those in an irregular situation: a human rights approach"