



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Caribbean Regional Conference on the Protection of Vulnerable Persons in Mixed Migration
Flows
Promoting Cooperation and Identifying Good Practices
Nassau, The Commonwealth of the Bahamas
22-23 May 2013**

**Welcoming Remarks by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Mr. Shelly Pitterman, Regional Representative for the United States and the Caribbean**

Honorable Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, Excellencies, distinguished Delegates, Representatives of International and Regional Organizations, Civil Society, Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

I would like to warmly thank **the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas** for hosting this two-day *Caribbean Regional Conference on the Protection of Vulnerable Persons in Mixed Migration Flows - Promoting Cooperation and Identifying Good Practices*, organized by IOM and UNHCR with the support of the US Department of State. The Bahamas is a particularly appropriate host of this Conference, given its strategic location, its importance as a transit and destination country for mixed migration movements, and the responsible role it is playing in developing its own asylum system. I am also very pleased to welcome our partners and sister organizations IMO, OAS, ICRC, IFRC and our UN partners, as well as delegates from the 20 States participating and representatives of civil society from across the region.

It is also my pleasure sharing this podium with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, with whom we have organized this conference. UNHCR and IOM have developed joint initiatives at the regional and national level since 2003, with the continued support of the US Department of State, as well as independently as part of UNHCR's mandate responsibilities on issues of common concern, and have assisted Governments to address the needs of and to find solutions for vulnerable persons travelling within mixed migration flows.

At the global level, **IOM and UNHCR** have jointly organized a series of regional meetings since 2008 aimed at sensitizing key stakeholders to the protection challenges arising in the context of mixed migratory movements. One of these meetings took place in Costa Rica four years ago, under the umbrella of UNHCR's *10-Point Plan on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration*, and to which some of the Caribbean States present today actively participated.

The States and territories in the Caribbean are not new to the issues surrounding migration and mixed flows. Each State is to some extent a **source, destination and transit country** for tens of thousands of migrants each year. The region is a transit gateway for refugees and asylum-seekers trying to reach North America by land, air and sea. Against this background, the conference will focus **on a range of mixed migratory issues** of common concern, including: data collection and analysis of migration profiles; protection-sensitive entry systems; rescue at sea operations, interception and disembarkation; identification and protection of vulnerable persons within mixed migratory flows; international/regional cooperation mechanisms; and access to refugee solutions and assisting voluntary return and reintegration for other vulnerable persons.

The Conference **is aimed** at identifying and sharing good practices and experiences in managing mixed migration flows in the Caribbean; Secondly, examining the challenges in the region and assisting States in addressing the protection needs of those traveling within mixed migration flows in a comprehensive manner, including refugees, migrants and other vulnerable categories. And thirdly, fostering regional cooperation, inter-State dialogue and partnership and promoting a solution-oriented approach to mixed migration management.

We hope that a set of **recommendations** on selected themes will be agreed upon at the end of the Conference. These recommendations will serve to identify possible follow-up regional and country-specific initiatives to assist Governments in these endeavors with the continued support of UNHCR, IOM, and other international partners and donors who are present today.

UNHCR'S ROLE – MIXED MIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION

With regard to UNHCR' involvement in mixed migratory movements, **UNHCR is not a migration management agency and does not seek to become one.** "Mixed movements" are movements that involve both, refugees and migrants alike. UNHCR has been mandated to provide international protection to refugees and to work with States to seek permanent solutions for their problems. It primarily seeks to ensure that asylum-seekers, refugees and other persons of concern to its Office, including those travelling as part of broader mixed migratory movements, are treated in accordance with internationally recognized legal standards. However, the nature of modern migratory movements requires UNHCR's involvement with migration issues.

Modern migration trends confirm that complex, irregular mixed movements will continue to be a challenge for States and for the international community. Many states are already engaging in good practices on mixed migration management across the region. However, developing collaborative and comprehensive responses which combine a coherent approach to the management of migration with effective protection of persons affected by mixed migration, including refugees, cannot be pursued in isolation. **Promoting inter-State cooperation and partnerships** at national and regional levels is crucial in order to manage mixed migration in a protection-sensitive manner. This is precisely one of the aims of this Conference.

Similar regional conferences held earlier have demonstrated that **more innovative approaches** to migration policies and strategies are needed to maintain the integrity of asylum, to identify

those deserving international protection, as well as to address the needs of undocumented migrants, and others with specific needs such as trafficked victims and unaccompanied children.

One of UNHCR's principal concerns is indeed that the right to seek asylum by persons travelling as part of mixed movements is not undermined or jeopardized as a result of measures to curb irregular migration and to prevent the abuse of asylum systems. That also includes full respect for the principle of *non-refoulement*, which prohibits the forced return of persons in need of international protection to territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened.

It is also important to ensure that **appropriate solutions** are found for all the different categories of persons affected by mixed migration and to ensure that those **who do not need international protection** are assisted to return to their home countries, promptly and humanely. These issues will be further examined throughout the conference.

In order to address these challenges, UNHCR developed in 2006 the ***10-Point Plan on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration***, which provides a number of practical tools and suggestions to assist States in developing and implementing protection-sensitive migration strategies. We hope that this Conference will allow us to examine how best, States and partners alike, can use the *10-Point Plan* as a practical management tool customized to the Caribbean realities in a spirit of collaboration and partnership.

To address the needs of those involved in irregular maritime flows, UNHCR developed a *Model Framework for Co-operation following Rescue at Sea Operations involving Refugees and Asylum-seekers (Model Framework)*. It is based on and further develops UNHCR's *10-Point Plan*, which is aimed at establishing procedures for burden and responsibility sharing to support States providing for disembarkation, processing and/or solutions for the different categories of persons arriving by sea. During the conference the *Model Framework* will be examined to facilitate discussions and identify possible cooperative responses to address mixed maritime movements in the region.

CHALLENGES IN THE REGION

To the credit of many of the participants in this conference, in recent years, the states and territories of the Caribbean have **increased dialogue and information-sharing** on the issue of mixed migration in the Caribbean.

Some of the **key challenges** ahead of us today include: establishing efficient national legal frameworks for the protection of refugees; incorporating protection safeguards and differentiated procedures in migratory policies for vulnerable persons and those seeking to migrate, including persons travelling or arriving by sea; the return of stranded migrants and rejected asylum seekers who *can* safely return to their countries of origin; and limited reception or assistance mechanisms and integration options available for mixed arrivals.

Progress has been made in a number of countries in the region on mixed migration management. Some States have reactivated or enhanced their existing asylum procedures and their adjudicating bodies; others established initial screening and referral mechanisms for

mixed arrivals; or set up multi-stakeholder taskforces for the identification and assistance of trafficked victims; or developed protocols for the identification of vulnerable children and established Best Interest Determination (BID) systems.

Assisted voluntary repatriation to countries of origin has proven to be a best solution for a number of persons who do not qualify for refugee status; and some host countries are even considering the possibility of facilitating the integration of recognized refugees and provide access to documentation for those who do not wish to or are unable to return. In addition, inter-agency cooperation has also been strengthened in some countries on children and trafficked victims protection, contingency planning, and cross-border cooperation and monitoring.

CONCLUSIONS

Inter-State cooperation, partnerships and solidarity at the national and regional level is crucial in order to manage mixed migration in a protection-sensitive manner, as today's gathering will hopefully demonstrate. Although encouraging developments have occurred in a number of countries in the region, **further concerted support and targeted interventions** are nevertheless still needed to address the protection needs of those affected by mixed migration and for achieving a regional and solution-oriented approach.

I sincerely hope that this Conference paves the way for concrete follow-up actions and serves as a regional platform for further discussion and cooperation on selected themes in the region. We also hope that the possible recommendations endorsed at the end of the conference will assist in developing national action plans and strategies on mixed migration. At the regional level, we suggest that a mixed migration co-ordination task force (Working Group) be established at the technical level that meets annually and reviews progress and achievements, with the support of the international community. As part of this regional initiative, we would like States and partners to consider convening a follow-up regional meeting to consolidate possible outcomes and recommendations.

UNHCR will continue to support States, within the parameters of its mandate, in these endeavors, together with other stakeholders and partners. It is very much hoped that these welcoming remarks will inform the discussions and outcomes to be agreed upon during the next two days, to be further complemented by the invited speakers and panelists.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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