

IMRF Civil Society Representative Intervention

19 May 2022

Your Excellency Mr. President, Your Excellency Mr. Secretary-General, Director-General Vitorino, Elana, Excellencies, and my fellow stakeholder colleagues,

I was trying to explain to a friend of mine the other day what I'm doing in New York this week, and I said that this was like our Olympics – its every 4 years, we train and work hard for it through that 4 years, and then we get just one shot at it to do it right! I get just this one shot to offer you *ALL* stakeholders' views on the GCM. That's a big task, so please pardon me if I try to make the best use of the next 5 minutes allotted to me, to be as provocative and propositional as I can be.

First I want to explain that my fellow moderators from Monday's stakeholder hearing – Laurel Townhead, Claudia Interiano, and myself – are busy finalizing a summary report which pulls together all of the hearing's inputs. It was 6 hours of intense discussion with dozens of inputs, from an extremely wide range of stakeholders. Now Excellencies, if you truly believe in the whole-of-society approach, I implore you to please read the summary report, because it contains a wealth of information which we believe to be invaluable for this review forum. Nothing I can say next will give you that level of detail and policy nuance needed for a proper review – one single representative for all stakeholders cannot do that. So please allow me instead to take a bit of license and offer a more big picture view from stakeholders.

As we've reached this first ever IMRF, we should go back in time to the final round of GCM negotiations almost 4 years ago in these very hallways. Closing the final day of negotiations early that Friday afternoon (13 July 2018), the co-facilitators asked me to inform each stakeholder group, to each choose a representative to deliver a statement – so in essence then each stakeholder group got to have the last words in the GCM negotiations. Those statements were full of hope, full of anticipation, and maybe even a little excitement about this new era in global migration governance we were ushering in. We thought then, we'd be coming into this first IMRF with a lot to say about the progress we had made by now. And some of us migrants, we even dared to believe that our communities would be improving.

And yes, as our summary report shows, there have been pockets of incremental progress – some good practices on some issues. And the fact that you are here today, Member States, is a promising sign. But the good practices were few and far between, sporadic and ad-hoc, mostly relating to specific circumstances or a country's needs, rather than universally applied.

So we've lost a lot of that hope, that anticipation, and there's not much excitement left among us. Overall, the conditions for us migrants have actually gotten worse in this period. And yes, we could blame the pandemic for causing a lot of that. But the pandemic should have been a

litmus test of the GCM – we should have shown how this multilateral framework in a time of global crisis, could ensure the protection of the lives, the wellbeing, and the rights of migrants.

And yet the opposite has happened. Instead of moving towards safe, orderly and regular migration, migration become more turbulent, more irregular, and more dangerous and deadly. More of us got sick and more of us lost our lives, more of us lost our jobs and experienced wage theft, more of us were detained and deported, more of us have gone missing at borders, and many of us were even blamed for the spread of the pandemic. We were applauded for being “frontline responders” and “essential workers”, and yet many migrant workers had their labor rights routinely violated, instead of human rights and international labor standards being applied as in the GCM. Systemic racism continues to play a much bigger role in migration policies, than humanitarianism. And we are still looking for the regular pathways which were to be the keystone objective of the GCM – that’s something that both migrant workers and employers wanted.

So we’ve dutifully come here in the hopes of raising our collective voices and concerns, and proposing better ways forward. And yet even that process of coming here became a monumental task for many of us. Many of our leaders from the Global South could not even get visas, and others found even the accreditation process to be impossible given their precarious status. Local and regional governments, which many, including the Secretary-General in his report, acknowledge as key allies in GCM implementation, do not even have the modalities to be in this room today. Indeed, civic space within these UN walls is shrinking.

But still we recommit to the aspirations and ideals of the GCM, because they are valuable. But in order to move forward, first and foremost – as I borrow the mantra from our sisters in the domestic workers movement – there can be “nothing about us, without us”. Migrants, and diasporas, and refugees, must be a fundamental part in the design, implementation and review of the GCM. And further, let’s expand that to all stakeholders, and let us self-organize our own engagement. Only then can the real whole-of-society aspect of the GCM be realized. As one delegate said, “stakeholders are a bridge from the world we have now, to the world we want to see, and migrants are the keystone”.

Excellencies, to us stakeholders, it would seem that 4 years into it, we might be failing the ambitions of the GCM. But it’s not too late. Let’s work together to overcome that – let’s put aside the politics, let’s put aside the bureaucracies, let’s put aside the unnecessary and not-fit-for-purpose rules and procedures, and let’s really get down to work... together. And let us not come back 4 years from now, and have to repeat all these over again. For the sake of our migrant communities everywhere, we can do better, we must do better.