

Opening remarks by the Director General, International Organization for
Migration and

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Second Regional Review Conference of the implementation of Global
Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues and friends,

It is an honour and a pleasure to join you here in Cairo for this important and timely review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region – the second such review since the Compact was adopted six years ago.

A special thank you to His Excellency Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for his hospitality in hosting this conference, and to Ms. Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, for co-organizing this conference. Thanks also to Ms. Khadija Amahal for joining us this morning as stakeholder rapporteur – and to all of you present here.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I think we can't begin discussing the issues before us today without first acknowledging the crisis dominating this region more than any other right now – and that is of course the ongoing war and catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza.

I wholeheartedly echo the UN Secretary General when he described the war in Gaza as an open wound that threatens to infect the entire region. Every day the death toll mounts still further. Around 75 per cent of the whole population has been displaced since October, many of them multiple times, and most of them with nowhere safe to go. Famine stalks the entire territory, while the healthcare system has effectively collapsed. Water, sanitation and fuel are all desperately lacking. And the instability is

increasingly impacting other countries in the region, with the situation in southern Lebanon giving particular cause for alarm.

We've run out of words to describe the civilian suffering. And we've run out of patience asking for it to end.

But we'll keep repeating the message. As set out in the recent UN Security Council resolution 2735, a ceasefire must be put in place immediately. All hostages must be released unconditionally. And this must be part of a longer-term reconstruction and recovery plan.

There is of course no substitute for a genuine political will to end the crisis in Gaza. But in the meantime, we need safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to save lives and alleviate the appalling suffering. International humanitarian law spells out this obligation of warring parties very clearly. But more than a legal obligation, it's a moral imperative and a question of fundamental humanity.

Beyond Gaza, sadly, there is no shortage of other crises in the region that are causing massive displacement and immeasurable suffering.

Sudan is just one. With more than 10.5 million displaced inside the country and around 2 million refugees in neighbouring countries, Sudan is now the world's largest displacement crisis. The conflict that erupted in April last year has had a devastating impact on the civilian population, who live with the constant threat of violence, famine and disease.

More broadly in the Arab region, for example between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, migration dynamics are among the most complex anywhere in the world – driven by armed conflict or violence, food scarcity, economic hardship, the effects of climate change – or, increasingly, a combination of all of these.

And they are often among the deadliest. We estimate that in 2023 nearly *5,300 migrants* died in transit in the Arab region alone, which represents more than 61 per cent of the global total of 8,600.

We know that when there are no safe, regular pathways to move, *people will move anyway* – regardless of the dangers, and despite being particularly vulnerable to exploitation, violence, abuse and discrimination.

That's why it's so vital to make sure that we have a global migration system that works – for everyone. To give people the possibility to migrate in ways that are humane, safe and orderly.

To this end, we certainly have positive examples of migration governance in the Arab region that point us in the right direction. For example, various States have embraced the potential offered by regular pathways, promoting migration as a force for sustainable development, while addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. Skills-based labour mobility schemes have upskilled and empowered migrants. And thanks to concerted action through regional protection programmes - in the framework of both the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees – we have been able to better protect migrants' rights and reduce protection risks, enable stakeholders to plan and manage movements of people, and promote opportunities in countries of destination, transit and origin.

As we reflect on our progress, and our challenges, in implementing the Global Compact, we will be focusing on the **six priority areas identified in the first regional review.**

- 1) Expanding regular migration pathways and reducing irregular migration
- 2) Ensuring that migrants have the right to access basic services
- 3) Protecting and empowering migrant workers and operationalizing their role in the sustainable development process in countries of origin and destination
- 4) Respecting the human rights of all migrants, especially the most vulnerable
- 5) Strengthening national, bilateral, regional and international cooperation
- 6) Providing detailed, timely and available data

I strongly encourage all of you to **put forward best practices, lessons learned and ways forward in these priority areas** – noting that they are not mutually exclusive, and several of them overlap.

The outcomes and recommendations of the regional stakeholder consultation, which were shared yesterday, will certainly help inform your discussions over the next two days.

For example, **building safe and regular pathways** for migration is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of exploitation. It ensures protection of migrants' human rights – including labour rights – and access to essential services.

It also brings significant benefits in the form of skills, strengthening the work force, investment and cultural diversity. It helps facilitate integration into communities. It boosts the local economy and contributes to improving the lives of communities in their countries of origin through the transfer of skills and financial resources.

And it helps empower migrant workers and operationalize their role in the sustainable development process in both countries of origin and destination – which is priority number three.

These are well-documented facts. It is our shared responsibility to do more – and do it better – to harness the vast potential of safe, orderly and humane migration.

At the same time, there is no doubt that much more needs to be done to **ensure respect of migrants' human rights**, especially the most vulnerable. We need to better identify and assist migrants in need of protection - including children, victims of trafficking, survivors of gender-based violence, persons with disabilities and other migrants in vulnerable situations.

Given the terrible death toll of migrants along migration routes – not just in this region but around the world – I'm encouraged by the General

Assembly's call to the Secretary General, which many of you here backed, asking him to propose concrete actions to help tackle this tragedy.

With the support of the UN Network on Migration, he will report his findings later this year – and we will certainly all have a role to play in implementing them.

Another cross-cutting priority is the need to **increase the availability of detailed, timely and reliable data**. This is essential to design effective evidence-based policies that will strengthen migration governance.

And at the heart of *all* these priorities – and the search for solutions – is the **need for cooperation**, on all levels.

The Global Compact's capacity-building mechanism and the Migration Multi-Partner Trust fund are important tools that help the UN system to support and work with national partners to operationalize their commitments.

I'm really encouraged by some of the positive examples of collaboration in the framework of the Global Compact in this region. In Morocco, for example, national partners have joined with UN agencies in an initiative to improve social cohesion and access to services for migrants. And in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon, UN agencies are supporting efforts to strengthen inclusive climate change adaptation and risk reduction responses.

These initiatives have been made possible by the Trust Fund, which to date has mobilized nearly \$60 million.

But more resources are needed so that we can do more – and better – across the region. To this end, I would ask all of you to support the Trust Fund as much as you possibly can.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, our discussions here today matter very much. I will brief the General Assembly on the outcomes of this and other regional reviews later this year – which, in turn, will inform the International Migration Review Forum in 2026.

In short, what we say and do over these two days will help us chart the way forward to a better future for this region, one in which migrants are acknowledged as agents of positive change and migration as an opportunity to boost economic growth and development.

I wish you all constructive and productive discussions. Thank you very much.