



Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

Friends of the Forum (FoF) meeting in Geneva, 1st October 2020

Civil Society Statement

In addition to claiming hundreds of thousands of lives, the COVID-19 has been a job-destroyer. Millions of migrant and national workers have been impacted. In the case of migrant workers, many have been forced to return home, indebted, unpaid, and unable to find a new job and support their family. Some are still stranded, often without the slightest help. Even if the world economy finally recovers, the lives, the livelihoods and social fabric that have been recently affected, will be irremediably lost.

Less dramatically, but still significantly, the pandemic has frozen initiatives, interrupted our way of working together and collectively finding solutions, postponed landmark events or drastically reduced them. In such uncertain times, we would like to express our appreciation to the UAE Chair, with the backing of the Steering Group, for adjusting to the new reality, with creativity, with determination to move forward, and a very good sense of choosing what is both possible and safe. The rapid switch to an online formula for the regional consultations, which was a real challenge to be addressed very quickly, is a good example of this capacity to adjust. Under the enormous weight of the circumstances, the regional consultations went well, generated a lot of enthusiasm among civil society, business leaders and mayors, but, in our opinion, saw less engagement from governments. We need to learn from what happened during these regional consultations in order to ensure that the GFMD is a true multi-stakeholder process, with governments in the driving seat, since they are the ones to adopt policies and laws, manage borders, provide visas and work permits for migrant workers. The other mechanisms have an important role to play, but our responsibilities are different.

As we stand now and if the world health situation permits, we will have a hybrid Summit, something which is supported by civil society. Some of our potential delegates have already indicated that they would like to participate in-person, and others will choose to join online. Altogether, we are envisaging the participation of around 200 civil society representatives, from all regions and backgrounds, making sure that the selection process guarantees diversity, gender-equality, the significant presence of migrants and diasporas, and a balance between advocacy NGOs and grassroot organizations. We have also focused this year on a process of participation which prioritizes civil society representatives who have participated in the regional consultations and can build from there, as well as those who have demonstrated a commitment to carry forward the potential outcomes from the Summit in the partnership models we have been discussing through the year and beyond.

In the meantime, civil society is actively engaged and represented in the various thematic working groups, the migration partnerships and each of the six practitioners groups. We fully appreciate being involved during the drafting process of the thematic papers, and not at the very end when the draft is submitted for final comments.

Now coming back to the Summit, the hybrid formula - or a purely virtual one if the health situation does not allow for any in-person participation – will have challenges to organize. Huge differences in time zones, the likely participation of senior representatives and key leaders online instead of in-person, the many challenges of online infrastructures, the lack of or limitations in personal interaction, all create a complex dynamic, a very different one from a more traditional Summit. Corridor side discussions providing invaluable opportunities for advocacy, reinforcing partnerships and bi-lateral exchanges are almost impossible for online participants. As already mentioned for the regional consultations, government officials somehow seem to be less engaged online, a platform which is perhaps considered as more unpredictable, less manageable, more open to unknown outsiders, and where it is more difficult to build trust with people we don't know.

We still believe that these concerns can and must be addressed. The COVID-19 crisis--which has taken and hurt so many lives and livelihoods--, is a reminder that *we need to seize the opportunities we do have to respond together* by implementing rights-based, principled policies as well as best practices we know that work. The GFMD, now more than ever is a golden opportunity that

we need to seize. It is a key process, a key space for dialogue and exchange on partnerships and best practices, a space which has a history of creative thinking, genuine dialogue, and step-by-step, incremental achievements. But it is also a defining moment; we, both individually and collectively must have faith in the GFMD *and* proactively invest in it.

The online dimension of the Summit does not force us to completely change the agenda, but to rethink and adjust it to be fit-for-purpose. We must focus on the strengths of what this dimension offers. Very senior government officials, business leaders and CEOs, mayors of big cities and secretaries general of NGOs should be able to participate in a two-hour long online meeting, while they would probably not have the time to travel for a four-day Summit. This is only one example. We will come up with concrete proposals to the UAE Chair after consulting the other mechanisms.

As it is now the tradition, civil society will also have its own Civil Society Days during the GFMD Summit, capitalizing on our being together for the Summit, whether virtually or in-person. During these last years, the GFMD Civil Society Day has been the largest and the most productive annual global civil society gathering around migration and development. This really shows the relevance and importance of the GFMD for civil society, a relevance and importance which, as already said, can only be enhanced by the need to find urgent solutions to the current COVID-19 migration and development crisis, with all the losses provoked by the pandemic and related lockdowns. Our Civil Society Days help us being better prepared for our dialogue with governments, the business and mayors mechanisms, and observers. We will have a prepared programme which will be designed fully for hybrid participation, with advocacy priorities, benchmarks and concrete, implementable proposals as outcomes to carry with us into the full Summit. The Civil Society Days will also be preceded with online preparatory sessions so that all our civil society delegates are fully prepared to not only engage substantively in the thematic areas, but also completely familiar to utilize all the tools at our disposal. We want, once again, to reiterate our strong commitment to partnerships, shared responsibilities and transparency.

In addition to the Civil Society Days, organized by the Civil Society Coordinating Office with the support of our International Steering Committee, regional focal points, thematic leads and many civil society colleagues, we will also coordinate with a parallel, but inter-related civil society process. The People's

Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights (PGA), a self-organized civil society forum in parallel to the GFMD, has been around since the advent of the GFMD in 2007, and was an initial catalyst to show how civil society could self-organize its engagement through the Civil Society Days. Since the Civil Society Coordinating Office assumed our role in 2011, the PGA has continued to bring a collective and substantive input to the annual GFMD summit through its grassroots collective civil society preparatory process. This year, it is doing the same, engaging and preparing civil society participants from grassroots organizations around the Gulf region and from around the world.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to the governments, which have generously ensured meaningful, fair and diverse civil society participation in the GFMD, i.e. the governments of Germany (through GiZ), the United Arab Emirates, Switzerland (through the SDC) and Canada. Thanks to their concrete support, we are able to better engage and influence migration policies.

Thank you!