

Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)

UAE Summit January 2021

The Future of the Forum: Statement by Civil Society¹

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear GFMD friends,

Let me first congratulate the United Arab Emirates Chair for such a strong leadership under very difficult – or shall I say completely extraordinary – circumstances, and for organizing a very successful and substantive Summit. This is truly an outstanding achievement, making the GFMD, by far, the most relevant and constructive migration and development platform since the outbreak of the pandemic. This is remarkable given the absence of in-person meetings and the constraints of a purely online get-together. Our particular gratitude to Alex Zalami and his coordination team for a truly impressive work on both substance and organization.

If such a reminder were necessary, and unfortunately it has come at the cost of millions of lives, jobs and livelihoods destroyed, the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that the GFMD is more meaningful and purposeful than ever. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing problems and turned deficiencies or serious shortcomings into irreparable tragedies. At a time of collective and individual mourning, we have entered moments of great doubts and uncertainties. Moments during which governments and societies are torn between seeking help and healing from others, on one hand, and inward-looking thoughts and actions, on the other, often driven by domestic priorities and the noise made by anti-migration constituencies, thus resulting in increased xenophobia.

At such moments, we all need a place where we can discuss without undue pressure, without being judged; where a real dialogue can take place; and where all who should have a voice are invited to sit at the table, speak their mind and make a contribution to find solutions. As civil society, we are convinced that the GFMD provides not only such a place but also the conducive environment for a constructive dialogue geared towards best practices, true partnerships, shared responsibilities and, not least, the recognition of each stakeholder's strength.

There are indeed other avenues and fora where migration is being discussed. But they are organized in a different way, with often a top-down approach, with statements and resolutions prepared well in advance, often in capital cities, or in New York or Geneva, and where the space left for business, local authorities or civil society is limited, and self-organizing is not always recognized. A space where genuine spontaneity and thinking out of the box is not necessarily encouraged. This is not a criticism, but just to highlight the respective strengths and limitations of other platforms, compared to the GFMD, which really brings something essential and different, in particular, for us, how much the successive Chairs and members of the Steering Group have encouraged, since 2011, Civil Society self-organizing. Building on the increasingly inclusive approach from previous Chairs, the UAE has also set a very good precedent where all the mechanisms can now participate in the

¹ Delivered by Stéphane Jaquemet, Head of the GFMD Civil Society Coordinating Office, on 22 January 2021

entire summit, which, we hope, will become a permanent format for future GFMDs. This should certainly be recognized as a best practice.

Looking at all the challenges ahead of us, not least to rebuild a devastated economy, restore the dignity of people, and build back better migration governance, while reinforcing its link to development, we are convinced that what we need - more than ever - is precisely the hard work, dedication and sense of ownership and responsibility that each mechanism brings.

Governments have the ultimate responsibility for almost everything. They adopt policies, implement laws, adhere to human rights standards, are in charge of internal security, manage borders and issue visas and work permits. Business leaders are the ones to create jobs, and without job creation we will never recover. Migrants live in cities or small communities, as fully engaged members of the society, as enablers, implementers, and as part of the solutions to building back better. The local authorities interact with them on a daily basis, and many municipalities have important social budgets that can benefit migrants. Grassroot civil society organizations provide vital services, including health, education and humanitarian help, like food and hygiene, to often vulnerable or marginalized communities, contributing to their empowerment and inclusion.

The GFMD is precisely the crossroad where all these initiatives converge, are shared, and replicated. It is also the meeting point, where we learn from each other, and always try to do better. I am not sure this has often been stated, but one of the strengths of the GFMD is this rare combination of remaining modest, while being ambitious. Migration and Development require hard work; knowing what happens at the grassroots level - and here the voices of migrants, without filter, are essential -; and respect for others, people or institutions. But the GFMD is also built on a future where xenophobia and discrimination are countered with the utmost determination, a clear strategy and the absolute refusal to compromise with those promoting hatred.

It is essential that the GFMD evolves without losing its identity and unique character. We are indeed at a very difficult time for the Global Forum, in spite of its successes, not least because of a worrying financial situation, which threatens the continued operation of the Support Unit. Civil society can attest to the competence, professionalism and incredible hard work of the Support Unit, under Estrella Lajom's leadership. Throughout the years, it has always provided much-needed support, essential help and encouragement to civil society and done the heavy lifting in terms of coordination and organizing. We hope that Member States will find the means to address the financial challenges to ensure the continuity of the Support Unit, which would be vital work for the incoming Chair, given the mutual trust built over the years and the need to have an institutional memory.

Whatever arrangements are being made - and we know that the Steering Group has not only been busy but also very much engaged and creative to ensure the viability of the GFMD - it will be essential, in our view, to prioritize the following:

1. Even if 2021, starting in February, may be considered as a kind of a transition year to fix a number of things, we will still need to have clear thematic priorities, regular meetings with focused agenda, thematic or regional workshops, and the preparatory work for a Summit, which could indeed be postponed to later in 2022. The work of both Working Groups, respectively on "Public Narratives on Migration" and on "the

- Impacts of COVID-19 on Migrants, Migration and Development” must not only continue but also been given a new impetus, in light of the centrality of both issues.
2. Given both the very substantive discussions initiated and led by the UAE Chair, and the destruction brought by the pandemic, it is of the utmost importance that the new Chair, supported by the Steering Group, build on what was achieved in the UAE-led GFMD, and does not start anew. Building bridges from one chair to the other, while still enabling the new Chair to come up with fresh contributions, should become a trademark of the GFMD. One of the areas that we would recommend continuing is the inclusive nature of this year’s GFMD, which enabled all of the mechanisms – governments, civil society, business and city representatives - to speak to each other in a very constructive and useful debate.
 3. At the closing of the Summit in a few days, Civil Society will be elaborating on the priorities we have identified, based on the gaps in protection discussed during this Summit. These priorities are:
 - a) Regular pathways, including regularization
 - b) Xenophobia and discrimination against migrants
 - c) Due process and access to justice
 - d) Social protection for all migrants, irrespective of their migratory status, ensuring that there will be no immigration enforcement consequences for them, while accessing vital and often lifesaving services.

We hope that the incoming Chair and the Steering Group will prioritize these four areas, which the COVID-19 crisis has only rendered more pressing than ever.

4. The fundamentals of the GFMD must be preserved. These are governments in the driving seat; business, mayors and civil society as full and self-organized partners and stakeholders; international organizations in a vital and indispensable expert support; as well as transparency and focus on replicable best practices – must be preserved. We also believe that the UAE’s very strong support for youth engagement must continue and we would like to thank our longtime partner, the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, for its extraordinary engagement and leadership, and we support its proposed vision of future youth engagement in the GFMD. Finally, our frequent exchanges and consultations with the Business and Mayors Mechanisms have helped us being more pertinent and focused.

Civil society is conscious that the long-term viability of the GFMD depends on the renewed commitment of all stakeholders. Civil Society has always been enthusiastically engaged, but we are willing to do even more and work harder in a true spirit of partnership. You can count on us more than ever!

Thank you!