UNDP Statement at Opening Session of IMO High Level Meeting on Unsafe Mixed Migration by Sea

Thank you, Mr. Sekimizu, for the invitation to my Administrator Helen Clark, and for this initiative. We appreciate the importance of bringing together the different strengths of the United Nations, if unsafe mixed migration is to be responded to in the best way. The “Rescue at Sea Guide” prepared by IMO, UNHCR, and International Chamber of Shipping is an example of practical work together among agencies, that makes a difference to individuals.

As the UNDP Administrator Helen Clark has said, UNDP recognizes that “migration – both across and within national borders – has the potential to greatly improve human welfare, if we get it right.” We devoted the 2009 Human Development Report to the links between Migration and Human Development, with a wide range of suggestions on what can be done to help individual and societies benefit from migration, but also to reduce the terrible and tragic cost it can have when it is not got right.

A key finding was that if legal avenues for migration are overly restrictive, that won’t stop migration, but it makes more likely that there is “irregular” migration. And the informal routes many migrants then use to relocate can become very burdensome and very dangerous.

Those words from 5 years ago do not reflect the gravity of what has happened through 2014, and the human cost for the hundreds of thousands trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe whether refugees or migrants. They do not reflect adequately either the danger and burden shipmasters and seaman face when they do their best to rescue people left alone at sea deliberately or because of the poor quality of the ships and boats they are on. They do not reflect the difficulties individual seaside or island communities as they try to cope in best helping people who are rescued and who need immediate help.

And while the focus is rightly now on the Mediterranean Sea where the issue is currently most serious, we must remember that it is not the only place where this has been an issue of concern in the last years. I served in Sri Lanka as United Nations Resident Coordinator from 2007 to 2011 during the period of heaviest fighting, and with that the heaviest cost on people and the greatest displacement. In the months after the war thousands left the country on small ships – ending up on the other side of the Indian Ocean, in Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia and a few hundred even travelled as far as the west coast of
Canada. Some no doubt fled as they were concerned for their safety; others possibly in hope of a better income, and a better life. But like in the Mediterranean very many were exploited, and misled by unscrupulous middlemen – you could say traffickers, who took advantage of their desperation to mislead them about the safety and benefit of such a passage; and they ended up being rescued by merchant marine or navies – including the Sri Lankan one. I saw the human cost this caused including to the families left behind.

These are all examples of what happens – to quote Helen Clark – “when it’s not got right“.

So how to get it right? No one organization or country can have all the answers. But from UNDP’s perspective let me propose some. Our perspective is as the largest development organization of the UN system with office in about 140 countries and work in more than 180. We have been in most of those countries for more than 40 years as most often a locally based international organization. We also provide support for the Resident Coordinator system, and linked to that with OCHA, to the Humanitarian Coordinator system. In refugee situations we increasingly work with UNHCR on their role as lead international organization on refugees, to help find durable solutions for those displaced by crisis. We work in partnership with governments, whose efforts we assist, and with a range of member states, UN agencies and International Organizations.

Among what we can add to a comprehensive approach is more on how to reduce the outward pressure that often leads to irregular migration, and where people wish to leave, to help put in place an appropriate environment for that to happen based on an informed choice, minimizing risk to them and their families and communities. We do this by working in a number of areas including the following:

In countries of origin:

- **Addressing drivers of conflict/ Peaceful management of emerging and reoccurring conflicts:**
  
  a) Insider mediation;
  
  b) Enhance the coordination of local, regional and national peace groups and initiatives;
c) Provide advice and support for the establishment of government departments and institutions responsible for national peace building, dialogue and mediation, and supporting their work with community peace groups;

d) Design and facilitate the revitalization of existing conflict prevention systems, and assisting with, for example, new technology, and other innovative initiatives.

UNDP helps to foster and strengthen the local and national capacity to build peace, by providing government institutions, civil society, NGOs, communities and individuals with advice, training and support in the analysis of issues, trends and patterns that may lead to violence. UNDP also helps to establish early warning and response systems to detect, anticipate, identify and swiftly act upon potential hostilities.

- **Addressing poverty, inequality and exclusion by:**
  
  a) Supporting access to livelihoods and economic development;
  
  b) Creating equitable access to resources and better protection against economic and environmental shocks;
  
  c) Job creation for groups at risk of becoming displaced;
  
  d) Access to land and means of production as well as access to basic services, including health and education.

In countries of first asylum, among the measures which UNDP takes to address an immediate crisis, is work through resilience-based development approaches and opportunities to progressively build self-reliance.

UNDP works to help ensure that the humanitarian response to the emergency also contributes to longer-term development objectives and more resilient communities, laying the best possible ground work for development work beyond the immediate emergency; and helping people move from humanitarian dependency to self-sufficiency as soon as possible. In the country of transit, at the request of governments we often help to address the immediate through:
• Community sensitization;
• Social cohesion;
• Rule of law;
• Local governance/ local development plans/ safety and security;
• Focus on the role of customs/border control.

UNDP works with communities to discuss and analyse the causes of and possible solutions for the violence and insecurity they face.

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As Helen Clark’ said in 2013 at the High Level Dialogue on Migration, and which she reinforced four months ago at a meeting of the Global Migration Group:

“International migration can bring development opportunities, but for it to do this there are some key pre-conditions which need to be in place, including that international migration needs to operate under the rule of law, in line with international standards, which protect the rights and security of migrants.

These principles, combined with the need to improve human development in those countries that are the source of migration are directly relevant for finding solutions to the situations of unsafe mixed migration by sea. They are necessary if we are to “get it right”.

Thank you.