



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

**Regional Conference on the Protection of Vulnerable Persons in Mixed Migration Flows
Promoting Cooperation and Identification of Good Practices
Nassau, The Commonwealth of The Bahamas
22-23 May 2013**

**Opening Remarks from Robert G. Paiva
IOM Regional Director for Central and North America
and the Caribbean**

On behalf of the International Organization for Migration, it is my honor to be with you today and welcome you to the Regional Conference on the Protection of Vulnerable Persons in Mixed Migration Flows. I would like to take this opportunity to extend special thanks to the Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas – particularly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – for hosting this regional event. IOM’s thanks also go to the US State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) for making this conference possible.

While mixed migration flows as such are not new, today they are a global phenomenon affecting every nation on earth, and are more complex and diverse than ever before. It is our hope that this conference will provide a timely opportunity to promote understanding, cooperation and coordination, as well as to share good practices on mixed flows as they affect the Caribbean.

But let me start at the beginning: what do we mean by “mixed migration flows”? For IOM, these are “complex population movements which include refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other migrants” who move using the same modes and routes but for different reasons and individual circumstances. Their movement is often irregular and frequently in-transit.

Some migrants caught up in mixed flows face dangerous and harsh conditions while in transit, whether at sea or in border areas. They are likely to be subjected to hardship, human rights violations and discrimination, and thus require special and individualized assistance.

Mixed flows may also include diverse groups of particularly vulnerable migrants, such as victims of trafficking, stranded migrants, unaccompanied minors, victims of violence (including gender-based violence), and those subjected to other forms of psychological distress and trauma during the migration process. Not surprisingly, among the most vulnerable individuals caught up in these flows are

pregnant women, children and the elderly, whose protection needs are particularly acute.

Yet determining who is vulnerable, and why that person is vulnerable, in any mixed migration context is the first step towards a protection response and one of the largest challenges with which States and other actors grapple. Unfortunately, only a small fraction of the vulnerable migrants present in mixed flows are identified, receive assistance, and, if appropriate, eventually return home. Many more continue to go undetected or unassisted, presenting other challenges to States in every region of the world. This is as true in the Caribbean as elsewhere, where migrants are increasingly moving from, through and within the region, via sea, air and land, in search of safety, economic opportunities, or simply a better life.

As Governments in the region seek to meet the challenges of mixed flows, they are recognizing the need for improved procedures, policies and approaches. These, in turn, require more reliable data and more predictable response mechanisms. Governments are limited in their ability to respond to and assist vulnerable migrants without the availability of comprehensive migration information, statistics, and analysis. Such detailed data is often best captured through enhanced screening to determine who fits in which category – a victim of trafficking, a child, an asylum-seeker or, ever more frequently, some combination of categories.

IOM is actively supporting Caribbean governments and other stakeholders in addressing the complex issues in a mixed migration context in two primary ways. First, IOM works with local stakeholders to directly assist vulnerable migrants by providing shelter, counseling, medical care, facilitating health referrals, and coordinating voluntary and safe return and reintegration.

Second, IOM provides support and services to governments and other stakeholders in developing their response mechanisms to the challenges posed by such movements. This support includes helping to develop policy and legislation, providing training to stakeholders, and disseminating information to migrants and host communities. By supporting governments and partners, IOM works to ensure that the services provided are in conformity with a comprehensive approach to migration management and – most importantly - reflect respect for national sovereignty, States' international obligations as party to various Conventions, and individual human rights.

In the face of the complexities presented by mixed migration flows, it is clear that a collective effort – on the part of governments, NGOs and the international community at large – is needed. This partnership is represented in the room and is the key to success in the Caribbean. For if one thing is clear, it is that all of us here have a common goal: to improve the protection of vulnerable persons caught



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up in mixed migration flows in the region. I firmly believe the exchange that will occur over the next two days will help us to do just that.

In concluding these opening remarks, let me highlight IOM's close partnership with UNHCR not only in organizing this conference, but indeed in day-to-day cooperation to assist governments in building their capacity to manage migration. For IOM's part, we are pleased to join hands once again with UHCR here today and we look forward to a fruitful and active discussion on the way forward in dealing with this important topic in the Caribbean.