**CW IDM panel 6 remarks – Christian Wolff**

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Thank you very much for the invitation – we are also grateful for support and inputs from CS colleagues, including ACT Alliance members, the Global Coalition on Migration, and the Civil Society Action Committee, and the many civil society stakeholders in the various UNNM WGs.

The UN SG’s remarks about COVID-19 being “an opportunity to reimagine human mobility” were very timely and significant.

His policy brief highlighted the need to

• build on the recognition of the vital role played by migrants to redouble our efforts to combat discrimination against them;

• ensure that those in need of protection are able to safely and promptly access it;

• health-proof human mobility systems; and

• strengthen global migration governance and responsibility sharing for refugees, (he spoke about “people on the move” as a broad category)

These steps had already been envisaged by the Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, both of which have their foundations in relevant international human rights and refugee instruments.

Thus, the steps to be taken in response to COVID-19, including and in particular those necessary to protect people on the move, do not require grandiose acts of charity or new sets of concessions by states unduly limiting their sovereignty, they simply require sticking to what we have already agreed to do – but in a way that “reimagines mobility”, not as a threat or a burden, but as an integral part of all our lives, and migrants and refugees not as a drain on, but an enrichment of these lives.

We agree with the overall argument of the UNNM paper that GCM is an important tool for furthering intl cooperation on migration – and it would be good to examine how we have fared here in recent months.

As has been discussed, COVID-19 highlighted a number of crucial issues in the way in which it affected populations on the move – raising health, socio-economic, protection and inclusion issues, among others.

Looking at actual state responses over the last few months, we have noticed:

Several positive examples of (1) release of migrants from detention; (2) regularization of undocumented migrants under certain conditions, (3) facilitation of access to health care, unemployment and other subsistence support, and other services, regardless of status

Nevertheless, in many cases, these measures have had the character of a time-bound emergency response to an extraordinary situation, rather than a due recognition of the role and contribution of migrants in our societies, and the rights that should come with this role, thereby somewhat limiting their transformative potential.

In this sense, and as an example, the pandemic has served to illustrate the extent to which current forms of regular migration programmes have failed migrant workers by setting up separate systems in many destination countries that exclude them from social safety nets, income stimulus, unemployment benefits, healthcare, and other social protections.

Unfortunately, we also continue to see examples of negative COVID-19 responses, with people on the move (1) being denied access to territory, including the right to seek asylum; (2) having their employment prematurely and irregularly terminated; (3) being forced to return to their countries of origin, sometimes into high-risk areas; (4) becoming targets of xenophobic attacks and hate – all in the guise of a “protective” intent in the context of a public health crisis.

We could spend a lot of time dissecting each Objective in the GCM with a view toward what it yields in terms of COVID-related guidance – but allow me to focus on two Objectives in particular here: Objective 7, in relation to its usefulness for guiding responses, and Objective 5, with a view towards its content related to recovery.

Obj 7 is intended to “address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration” – for example, by facilitating status transition to avoid irregularity, enabling individual status assessments, and avoiding arbitrary expulsion (h) and (i); supporting referral and assistance for migrants in situations of vulnerability (k); and developing comprehensive policies at national level that take account of migrants in such situations (l) – imagine how much easier it would have been for states to respond to the needs of migrants during the pandemic if these measures had already been in place, instead of having to scramble for humanitarian responses in the moment.

Obj 5 calls on states to “enhance the availability and flexibility of pathways in a manner that responds to the needs of migrants in a situation of vulnerability” (and then lists several categories) – and this really gets to the heart of what needs to be done to transform migration governance systems in a way that takes the rights of migrants seriously and comprehensively addresses the situation so vividly illustrated by COVID-19, by developing a variety of practices for admission and stay that respond to a broad set of precarious situations, with an honest reimagining of what regular pathways should look like. Obj 5, therefore, in many ways is a keystone of GCM implementation, and solutions in many related areas would cascade quote logically from focusing on this Objective.

Pulling the lens back a bit further, you could then take the next step and invoke Obj 2 to more holistically address the various drivers behind migration in situations of vulnerability – including, and I bring this up because it is particularly relevant also in the context of COVID-19 recovery – the impacts of climate change. Let me again invoke the SG here, who, in a separate statement commented on the need for (1) sustainable COVID-19 recovery plans that tackle climate change; (2) protecting our economies and societies by acting in line with what science tells us; and (3) prioritizing the most vulnerable people and communities. This perspective would then also include recognizing pathways for labour migration for livelihood support as part of adaptation, and building resilience as part of addressing adverse drivers, and averting & minimizing displacement.

Regular pathways have always been crucial to safe, orderly and regular migration. Civil society stakeholders insisted on this throughout the negotiations, but the commitments to expand pathways were not as strong as they might have been. Now the stakes are much, much higher. It’s essential to find ways to operationalize “shared responsibility” between countries of origin and destination for protecting migrants’ labour and human rights, including through concrete work on who is responsible for what aspects of social protection, including access to health care and to earned benefits, and how to hold private actors accountable who are obliged to provide benefits.

As you may know, guidance on how to implement related GCM commitments is currently being drafted by the Network’s thematic WGs (in addition to the work being done in Core WGs, as presented here) – to be followed by pilot testing, which will have to include an honest discussion of promising, as well as worrying practices, guided by the experiences of migrants themselves. It was very illuminating to see in the presentation from Bangladesh yesterday how all the critical issues affecting migrant workers are still with us, and have been brought into even sharper focus by the pandemic, which has perhaps led to renewed urgency – an expanded the cycle of awareness among stakeholders. It also highlights the importance of international collaboration – an aspect that is too often missing from reflections on COVID-19 responses. The upcoming RMRFs may provide a useful space for furthering multilateral – and multi-stakeholder – discussions on this.

The degree to which the GCM can serve as a “blueprint” for a successful and inclusive COVID-19 response depends largely on governments’ willingness to not only reverse overtly discriminatory policies and practices, but also their readiness to transcend “emergency mode” and enter “transformation mode” when it comes to their GCM commitments in this context.