



Statement delivered by Cecilie Kern on behalf of Mercy International Association and the NGO Committee on Migration for Roundtable 3 of the International Migration Review Forum

18 May 2022

Thank you, moderator. Excellencies, dear colleagues,

Faith-based and other civil society organizations fill important gaps in providing essential services across the migration cycle. We are at the frontlines - running hospitals, schools and shelters, providing legal services, skills training, and psychosocial support for victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Most importantly, we accompany people who are on difficult and life-changing journeys to ensure that they feel safe, welcome and included.

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed been a challenge. Exclusion from social protection systems has made it impossible for many migrants and their families to take preventive measures and to receive care and support. Many of our own programs and services were affected by lockdown policies, which severely impacted undocumented migrants reluctant to use public services for fear of being reported to immigration authorities.

Despite the challenges, migrants contribute enormously to development in all of our societies, and are entitled to the fulfillment of their human and labor rights. We must address the withholding of millions of dollars that employers owe to migrant workers for work that they've done. This widespread wage theft violates rights, hurts families, reduces remittances, development and reintegration, and weakens low-income economies.

The pandemic is not an excuse to not implement the Global Compact for Migration. Just the opposite: it makes implementation imperative— and smart too. We strongly urge States to make permanent and replicate positive practices and partnerships that have been implemented during the pandemic, including regularization and effective firewalls, to enable migrants, regardless of status, to access public health services, education, labor rights protections and justice.

Finally, this IMRF is an opportunity to have a conversation –together– about the future of our economies and societies, to find solutions with and for people on the move, especially those most marginalized. In the next four years States, civil society, Mayors, the private sector and others must together tackle systemic and structural social, economic, and political inequalities, and policies that institutionalize or perpetuate racial injustice and xenophobia. To do this effectively, it is of the essence to center the voices of migrants and diaspora in solution-building at all levels of government, including and especially at local and grassroots levels.

We know these are not easy tasks, but we remain committed to working in partnership with governments and stakeholder partners, and most especially with migrants, their families and communities. In the words of one Sister of Mercy, “we are called to respond.” Thank you.