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United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants

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Round Table 3: International Action and Cooperation on Refugees and Migrants and Issues Related to Displacement: The Way Ahead

United Nations Headquarters, New York – 19 September 2016

Co-chairs, Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen.

We congratulate member states for adopting the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. It focuses minds on the specifics of large movements, and the imperative for urgent action, cooperation and responsibility sharing amongst states.

Having worked with states and partners during the negotiations, I now commend to you the civil society response document entitled 'Act Now', as published. We acknowledge that progress has been made, yet we note that it is nowhere near enough. We observe that what could have been expected to be firm commitments are presented as considerations to be applied where appropriate. Alas, we noticed undue *"hesitancy, half-heartedness.....and language [that] attempts to back-slide on or undercut existing fundamental human rights standards"*.

The New York Declaration reaffirmed that *"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"*. For refugees and migrants, civil society reminds us that: *"They may lose many things when they move but never their human rights and fundamental dignity"*. It is in this spirit of shared purpose, urgency and goodwill that the 'Act Now' civil society document recommends that seven immediate actions be taken, starting with the production of an implementation plan before 31 December 2016.

Your Excellencies,

I have searched but I could not find anything in the Declaration which singularly furthers our knowledge and understanding of what we should do to address the known problems. Extraordinarily, we seem to know what should be done to protect rights of refugees and migrants, and facilitate and optimise their contribution to the development of countries of origin, transit and destination. The challenge we face is that not all states are keen to implement the known best practices. A few member states are in fact inclined to adopt counterproductive actions. Indeed, the principle of equitable responsibility sharing may be inviolable. Yet we face a moral hazard: Do we set the standards of protection and facilitation using the lowest common denominator, subject to being dragged down by the unwilling and the obstructionists? Do we spend much of our inadequate resources and time declaring and reaffirming the basic things we already agree on? Do we indulge in negotiations and gamesmanship whilst existing conventions, agreements and best practices remain inert for want of implementation?

As a community of nations, we witness failure – in too many places and for too many incidents – regarding large movements of refugees and migrants. Are we reckless, incompetent or indifferent? I ask, because in the Twenty-First century, humanity is at the zenith of her innovative capacity, her technological capability, and her operational prowess. As member states and non-state actors, and here in the United Nations as a new Secretary General takes office, I propose that we make a major practical, emotional and principled shift, such that operational implementation and tactical means of implementation are given the highest priority. This is the practical game-changer we need in order to enhance and optimise the achievement of our cherished aspirations, strategic goals and global commitments.

So, let this summit be the kick-off point for implementation, operationalisation and action. One year into Agenda 2030, we are in the era of implementation and action. As we work on the global compacts for refugees and migrants, and for campaigns against xenophobia, let these not focus on strategic goals and aspirations – for we are already over-aspirational. Let these be about actions and tasks – for we are indeed under-performing.

As we make a shift of emphasis towards implementation and operations, we shall embrace and normalise the techniques and processes of effectiveness and efficiency, and liberate states and non-state actors to innovate and activate options and opportunities that create best results for refugees, migrants and the communities and countries that host them.

Ours is a world of acreage of land and heads of people. It appears that we sanctify the acreage of land, and the privileges thereof, to the pernicious expense of heads of people and the humanity therein. We should remember that the plight of the refugee may be one of desperation and destitution, but the person of the refugee is neither hopeless nor helpless.

Thank You.

Gibril Faal – New York, 19 September 2016.