



Statement delivered by Elana Wong, selected as the ‘Migrant Voice’ Speaker, at the Opening Plenary of the International Migration Review Forum on the 19th May 2022

Thank you your excellency President, your excellency Secretary General, and to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the UN Network on Migration for this important opportunity to voice some of the concerns and priorities of the diverse migrant community.

The Migration Youth and Children Platform was created in response to the GCM negotiations in 2018. So, 4 years later, having held consultations on GCM progress that represented over 556,000 youth across 36 countries, we are honoured to be here today. However, I don't speak now on behalf of just youth, but to the impossible task of representing the rich, diverse collection of global migrant voices. The migrant community and our needs are not a monolith, so the fact that we're here, with our shared 23 objectives for safe, orderly and regular migration, is an achievement to be celebrated.

“Migrants are the principal stakeholders in migrant discourse.” This core truth was elegantly put earlier this week by my fellow migrant representative, Eni.

And so, it follows that many of us in the migrant community, and the wider migrant-allied stakeholder family, are disappointed this week at the lack of migrant-centricity and facilitated space for us to directly share our on-ground experiences of progress, our needs, and our recommendations with our governments.

The fact that I stand before you today, at the Opening of the IMRF, demonstrates that we understand this simple truth- that migrants are experts on migrant issues. And that no decisions on migrants should be made without our meaningful participation.

However, the fact that I am sitting here as the singular migrant voice, and so that migrant spaces this week have been so limited, is an injustice not just to our community and all those who work tirelessly to ensure all migrants, regardless of status, can lead safe and dignified lives, but to all of us here, working together for the successful achievement of the GCM.

If we don't also have William and Fish, how can we fully obtain justice for all the migrant workers and their families still suffering from wage theft?

If we don't also have Alma and Berenice, how can we ensure that ALL those vulnerable and dying on the US-Mexico border have a chance to safely explore secure and regular pathways?

If we don't have Neha and Apolinar, how can we fight for migrant representation at all? If migrants and migrant workers all over the world still do not have their freedoms of association,



right to organize and collective bargaining, regardless of migration status, and without fear of reprisal, this can never meaningfully happen.

If we don't have Stella and Mirana, how can we fully realise the potential of diaspora, the safety nets of families everywhere, as agents of local and global development?

If we don't have Pefi, how can we properly appreciate the significance, the knowledge, and the agencies of the indigenous peoples that make up such a large part of our migrant community?

I raise the question- not who can be represented, but who **MUST** be here, and everywhere in these discussions and decision-making.

A whole-of-society approach means the creation of an enabling civic space for migrant groups to operate, and for civil society and migrants to engage fully in decision and policy making at all levels of the GCM, from local implementation to the IMRF.

It means ensuring that migrants and everywhere we exist- youth, community groups, trade unions, local government, the private sector, civil society- must be taken as seriously as other states and INGO colleagues.

It means having honest dialogue in these spaces, and making sure these conversations are taken out of the silo of the migration space, and into discussions around climate, disaster response, economic, social and racial justice, public health, and sustainable development.

It means making it a priority **TODAY**, to develop meaningful benchmarks for the GCM objectives, and develop measurable indicators on migrant and stakeholder participation. It means seeing us as partners in design, implementation, and review.

It means seeing accountability as the highest form of respect for our shared mission.

I am just one migrant, one person. I cannot hope to encapsulate the priorities, the challenges, and the needs of migrant women, migrants with disabilities, workers, families, LGBTQI+, the differently abled, entrepreneurs, children, and the multitude of intersectional experiences within our community. I also cannot hope to pass on their expertise to you all today, in just 5 minutes. But you can harness it yourself, by reading collective reports like the 12 Key Ways, through on-ground partnerships, through making space for us.

We **CAN** achieve the Global Compact for Migration, and humanity will be better for it. But we cannot do it without migrants.

Thank you.