

Opening Remarks

Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

High Level Round Table

“Call to Action: Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America”

San Jose, Costa Rica, 6 July 2016

Honorable Vice President of Costa Rica,

Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica,

Honorable Secretary General of the OAS,

Honorable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,

Allow me to begin by expressing my great pleasure at being in Costa Rica today to participate in this important and very timely Round Table. Addressing displacement in the Northern Triangle of Central America is one of my Office's priorities. Such a large number and high level of participants in this Round Table demonstrates your interest and commitment, and fills us with optimism for achieving joint protection responses and effective, practical and innovative solutions.

I would like to thank Secretary General Almagro and the Organization of American States for their commitment and cooperation as co-organizers of this event, in addition to the Central American Integration System for its co-sponsorship and, of course, the Government of Costa Rica for welcoming us with the hospitality and affection that characterizes the people and the nation of Costa Rica.

This region is known for its leadership and commitment to humanitarian causes and has set specific examples of protection responses and innovative and creative solutions, which my Office and my predecessors have valued and continue to do so, since they demonstrate that when we work together, under cooperation frameworks, and with regional solidarity and shared responsibility, the international community is effectively able to find solutions for displaced persons, asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and stateless persons.

What I most admire and value about the region is its capacity for dialogue, commitment and action. In this region, much more so than in any other, governments, international agencies, civil society and academic organizations have, all together and for years, been conducting regular consultations on the challenges of forced displacement. I am certain that this spirit of dialogue, conciliation, solidarity and cooperation will allow us, once more, to have open talks on challenges and opportunities and to find practical solutions for improving the protection response for displaced persons and refugees from the Northern Triangle of Central America.

As you know, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide is greater than that of the Second World War. It is hard to be optimistic as we witness the suffering of people who every day are forced to leave their homes due to wars, conflicts, violations of human rights and persecution in many parts of the world. However, I just came from Colombia, and we are all hopeful that the Peace Agreements (which we trust will be signed soon) will transform a country that has suffered internal conflict for decades into a society of peace, progress and opportunities for all. This will allow us to find solutions for refugees and displaced persons.

I sincerely hope that the example set by this region will inspire others, and I urge you to ensure that the results of this Round Table will also contribute valuable input to the discussions that will take place within the context of the United Nations General Assembly at the Summit on the response to large movements of refugees and migrants this coming 19 September, and at the Summit of World Leaders on refugees to be held on 20 September.

Central and North America have, for decades, been the scene of large population movements. The flow of people from Central America towards the more prosperous countries of North America is a phenomenon that has been extensively researched by migration specialists and its multiple causes and impact on the host countries and countries of origin continue to be the subject of study.

Recognizing the multi-causality of these flows and the specificities and differences that are characteristic of each of the three countries: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, my Office, along with many analysts, considers that, at present, migration due to poverty and social exclusion co-exist alongside a growing phenomenon of forced displacement generated primarily by the violence perpetrated by organized crime (maras, gangs and drug cartels). This

forced displacement manifests in population movements both within countries, as well as across borders. These constitute relatively new forms of displacement that require innovative responses.

The forced recruitment of girls and boys, sexual abuse and gender-based violence, extortion, extrajudicial executions and disappearances, as well as intimidation and threats, are forms of persecution by non-state actors such as organized crime groups. Similarly, domestic violence, harassment, intimidation, and the discrimination of persons on the grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity may constitute reasons for individuals to feel compelled to leave their homes and seek protection within their country or abroad.

The number of asylum seekers and refugees from the Northern Triangle of Central America has increased very significantly in the last two or three years in Mexico, the USA and Canada, but also in Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

The challenge, in our view, is to identify the persons with protection needs and what kind of differentiated responses they require from the countries of origin, transit and asylum or destination, including both actors for strengthening governance, and financial and development agencies for addressing the root causes. Forced displacement is an increasingly determining factor in the regional migration from and within the Northern Triangle of Central America. It is a regional situation requiring a regional response.

This problem occurs not only in Central America but throughout the world. Consequently, the discussions we will have in this Round Table will be extremely useful for the international community, and your protection responses and solutions will be able to benefit other regions of the world.

Protection responses require a collaborative and strategic approach in which all humanitarian and development actors are willing to lend our wholehearted support to the efforts and actions being undertaken by the governments of the countries of origin, transit, and asylum or destination, including those carried out through the implementation of joint programs based on the complementarity of our mandates and with the support of the international community.

An initial approach to the phenomenon of internal displacement involves conducting analytical studies that allow us to measure their causes, scope,

trends and the populations at risk. In this regard, we believe that the Human Rights Observatory set up within the framework of SICA and UNHCR cooperation, as recommended by all the countries in the region in the Brazil Plan of Action, will allow us to progress towards a better understanding of the phenomenon and contribute to the design and implementation of public policies regarding forced displacement, with the support of civil society and academic organizations.

As part of the support provided to the countries of origin, we hope to jointly identify responses for preventing and mitigating forced displacement, for the provision of humanitarian aid, and for strengthening national protection mechanisms. The involvement of development agencies seeks to promote effective access to health services, education, housing and livelihoods in order to facilitate settling, promote effective reintegration and avoid repeating the cycle of displacement.

In the case of transit and asylum countries we seek to ensure full respect for the principle of *non-refoulement* and access to territory and to refugee status determination procedures, for which effective reception mechanisms are vital, as is the implementation of comprehensive solutions strategies that include local integration, the strategic use of resettlement and other humanitarian mechanisms of admission to the territory. In all these areas, very good practices are in place in the Americas.

The Americas is a region known for providing protection and solidarity to their own refugees and to many thousands of refugees from around the world. Resettlement programs in the USA and Canada and, more recently, in South American countries, as well as comprehensive durable solutions strategies, such as those developed in Costa Rica with the involvement of public institutions and the private sector through social responsibility business programs, are important examples of innovation in the search for durable solutions for refugees.

In the search for responses and solutions for internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees, and returnees in need of protection, all the actors represented here can provide our support and we have a role to play. The universal protection system must be complemented and strengthened by the actions of the OAS's regional system and its entities for the protection of human rights: the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. All of us, the SICA and the Regional Conference

on Migration (RCM), the different United Nations agencies, IOM, ICRC, development agencies such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, national organizations that promote and protect human rights, as well as civil society and academic institutions, and the international community as a whole, can and must unite in support of the governments of the affected countries and ensure that increasingly fewer children and adolescents, women and other persons at risk are forcibly displaced because their most basic rights to life, physical integrity, freedom and dignity are violated by non-state actors, and also in order that the governments of the countries of origin strengthen their own national protection mechanisms.

One of the major contributions that this Round Table can make at the global and regional level is to discuss the scope and content of a regional mechanism of shared responsibility, with clearly identified responses and solutions to be implemented in the countries of origin, countries of transit and countries of asylum or destination.

In order to accomplish this and to achieve the mobilization of the international community with its fundamental support, with technical and financial resources, I confirm the availability of my Office to ensure, in collaboration with the international organizations here present and others, clear results in the short term for persons in need of assistance and protection, including those provided through a monitoring mechanism to facilitate the development of programs, projects and smooth coordination between all actors. In short, to ensure that responses in the region are more predictable and fair.

I wish you every success in your deliberations, I confirm my high hopes for the outcome of this Round Table and I thank you once again for your support and your regional and global leadership in the search for creative responses to the growing challenges of international protection. I urge you once more to prove, with the results of this meeting, that your region, the Americas, remains at the forefront of international protection for refugees.

Thank you very much.