

Meeting of the Council of the Socialist International
United Nations, Geneva, 26-27 June 2018

DECLARATION ON GLOBAL MIGRATION AND THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEES

The SI Council considers that migration has played a central and positive role throughout human history, as our ancestors have moved to different regions of the planet in pursuit of opportunity, freedom and a better quality of life. These are people who have contributed to the development and advancement of their places of arrival through their talents and endeavours, shaping the countries of the world as we know them today.

The Council rejects attempts to portray migration in the 21st century as a negative phenomenon, and the associated demonization of those who move across national borders. Social democratic parties oppose the anti-immigration rhetoric of the populist right, which merely creates scapegoats rather than offering solutions to the realities of the day.

The commitments made by the SI Council on migration are grounded in the SI Charter for the Rights of Migrants, adopted by the Council at the United Nations in New York in 2015. This document, which all SI member parties are committed to uphold, underlines the fundamental human rights of all migrants, based on respect for human life and basic liberties.

The Council considered current trends in global migration:

The death of thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea in recent years as they attempt to cross into Europe is a human catastrophe on a devastating scale, and a source of great shame for humanity. At a time when solidarity, compassion and assistance to fellow inhabitants of this planet are required, anti-migrant rhetoric from populist parties have created a situation in which more concern has been shown for keeping migrants out than human life. In this regard, the Council is extremely concerned by the position recently adopted by the governments of Italy and Malta in turning away ships requiring assistance having rescued people from the waters of the Mediterranean. The Council is also concerned about the lack of coordinated-policy response at the European level, where the populist and nationalistic forces are imposing their migration policies characterized by border closings and xenophobia. These movements of people require a human response, rather than an attempt to make the outer borders of Europe impenetrable, and the Council applauds actions of the Spanish socialist government of Pedro Sánchez, SI Vice-President, which has given these people a safe haven.

The emergence last year of clear evidence of the selling of humans as slaves in Libya was a shocking and abhorrent demonstration of complete disregard for the human rights of migrants who had in many cases been taken unwittingly into the country by human traffickers under false pretences. Special attention to women and children who are often victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Migrants are among the most vulnerable in society and are particularly prone to exploitation and mistreatment. In this context it is a positive step for the defence of human rights that the UN has recently imposed sanctions for people on six Libyans responsible for a transnational smuggling network and brutal treatment of migrants.

Populist parties have successfully exploited the issue of migration in order to win electoral success, and it is vital for social democratic parties to respond. All political parties must listen to legitimate concerns of the electorate, but social democrats have a moral and political obligation to defend the

human rights of migrants and the contribution they make to their country of arrival. Those who seek to blame migration for economic difficulties, a lack of social cohesion, unemployment and other problems in society do so because they do not want to look for solutions but only to stop migrations. In contrast, seeking appropriate, just and sustainable solutions to the consequences of global migration flows are at the core of social democracy.

It is equally vital to counter misinformation, in particular the narrative that the developed world is under siege from mass migration. Approximately 85% of global refugees are hosted by developing countries, which themselves are in many cases facing severe economic and societal challenges. Nowhere is this more true than in Africa, which hosts more refugees than any other region of the world yet is often portrayed as the source of the global refugee crisis.

The Council condemns the policy of separating predominantly Latin American migrant children from their parents and their placement in detention facilities instituted by the current US administration. Such treatment is fundamentally cruel and a clear violation of the human rights of these vulnerable children, many of them extremely young and at risk of severe trauma as a result.

The Council recalls its previous declarations on the Rohingya people and urges continued attention to the plight of those forced to flee Myanmar and seek refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. It reiterates its calls for an end to persecution and human rights violations against the Rohingya, underlines the right of all Rohingya to be able to return to their homes with guarantees of security and urges the international community to maintain pressure on the leadership and government of Myanmar.

The number of forcibly displaced people in the world today is greater than at any stage since the Second World War. This includes both cross-border refugees and internally displaced persons, and is an indication of the wider impact of conflict, terrorism and climate change on vulnerable populations. The Council underlines that no action to resolve the global refugee crisis can succeed without also addressing the underlying causes of the flows of people across international borders. This will require concerted action on conflict resolution, peace-building, sustainable development, democratisation and tackling climate change. These are the defining challenges of this era, and cannot be resolved by any one country alone. At the heart of responses to global migration and the plight of refugees is therefore the principle of multilateralism.

Migration is a question that we must address with humanity and with the courage of our convictions as socialists, in the name of solidarity, respect and social justice. We cannot accept simplistic categories of legal (asylum seekers, refugees, etc.) versus illegal migrants (all the others, economic, environmental), allowing the populists to define who is in and who is out. We must restore legal channels of legal migration also for non-forcibly displaced people. We must establish stable relations with the countries of origin and transit for a joint management of the migration flows, helping them in their development processes and building democratic institutions that are respectful of human rights.
