**Opening Remarks by the Director General of IOM**

*Unlocking the potential of youth to respond to the new challenges and opportunities of migration*

**International Dialogue on Migration**

**15 October 2019, Geneva**

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning to open the second International Dialogue on Migration of 2019. This meeting will build upon the excellent discussions that began in February of this year, which explored the role of young migrants in the development of migration policy and governance.

At the first IDM, we heard a strong call for the mainstreaming of the concerns of young people into the migration strategies for countries of origin, transit and destination, including national diaspora strategies and efforts to foster integration and social inclusion.

This is not *yet* a straightforward task. It is important to distinguish the needs of young migrants from the general needs of all migrants, but there is no universal definition of youth, and little reliable evidence on the migration of young people and their specific situations and needs. In February, we heard the call from you all to begin disaggregating data by age, in order to ensure we have the most accurate understanding of what young migrants need.

In addition, in order to include the perspective of migrant youth in our policies, we also need to include them in our conversations. In the words of Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, in February: there is a “need to empower and create the space for young people to participate in civic and political debates”.

Young people possess valuable skills and innovative thinking that can contribute to both their origin and host communities and to help build solutions to problems. They possess digital literacy and the critical knowledge of new technology and, as migrants, have displayed skills essential to the twenty-first century labour market, such as resilience and adaptability.

They can be agents of change, whether working towards the achievement of critical Sustainable Development Goals on education, employment and reducing inequality, or bringing their personal knowledge and experience to bear on narratives that might offer a more positive, forward-looking image of migration and its role in society.

Sadly, at the same time, we must remain cognisant of the tremendous stress — both psychological and physical — that the migration journey can place on young people, particularly those more vulnerable to exploitation and who find themselves in the hands of human traffickers.

This is particularly the case for young women and girls, who find themselves marginalised on the three counts of age, gender and migration status. Strong policies to protect all children, that can take into account the specific challenges faced by those who move across borders, should be high on all of our agendas.

In February, a number of recommendations were made, in addition to those which I have just highlighted. Our task here, over the next several days, is to build on these. Some of the questions that will be asked include:

* How to better use technology for youth development, and reduce its harmful effects?
* How to promote cooperation between countries of origin and countries of destination for on the empowerment of youth? Conversely, how to harness the adaptive resilience of youth migration to promote development?
* How to prepare young migrants for the future labour market, at home and abroad, and invest more deeply in the skills that will be more in demand.

The issues are wide-ranging and complex. I do not envy you this task. But IOM is not the only organisation asking some of these questions.

Indeed, in April 2019, the African Union launched the “1 million by 2021 initiative”, which aims to direct investment towards millions of African youth in the areas of Employment, Entrepreneurship, Education and Engagement, through leveraging partnerships and private sector opportunities. This is a wide-ranging endeavour that looks at the development of start-ups, establishment of internships and apprenticeships, and nurturing leadership skills in young people.

We will have the opportunity to discuss the potential of this initiative for migrant youth alongside the presentation of the first ever African Migration Report, a report that aims to rebalance the conversation about African migration away from the dominant, yet overly narrow, narrative of irregular migration to Europe. African youth are not only a large part of the conversation regarding how migration within the continent will evolve, they will be one of the prime determinants of its success.

The deliberations we undertake here this week will feed into other conversations within IOM and influence our own work in many of these areas. To be effective, IOM needs to be an organisation that can listen as well as act: the IDM is a unique platform that brings governments, NGOs and academic experts together to debate and – ideally -- innovate with respect to policy and practice.

As we have seen at the recent UN General Assembly, we should not ignore the voices of young people, especially when they challenge the norms and assumptions of older generations. And we certainly should not fear them, even when the urgency and clarity of their concerns may bely our own slow-grown cynicism.

As we near the end of 2019, we will begin to explore potential topics for our Dialogues in 2020 and welcome your own ideas on this. In doing so, we will draw upon some of the issues outlined in the forthcoming World Migration Report – to be launched in December at the IOM Council – and identify those that will be of most use to our policy work going forward.

In the meantime, I hope this discussion proves as fruitful and fascinating as our IDM in New York, and I invite you all to actively contribute to our discussions here today, particularly those amongst you who have youth on your side.