STATEMENT

BY
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AGENDA ITEM 65: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN
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Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the most recent UN General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the need to protect the human rights of migrant children was widely called for.

Either accompanied or unaccompanied, millions of children are migrating across borders or within their own countries every year. Migrant children constitute roughly 35 million of the 232 million international migrants in the world today. 11 million of them are between 15 and 19 years old.

The International Organization for Migration welcomes the various reports associated with this agenda item. In light of these, we will share our views on the promotion and protection of the rights of children in three points.

Mr. Chair,

First, IOM is troubled by the reported increase in child trafficking as noted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography indeed highlights that child migrants are easy prey to traffickers. In addition, child labourers, particularly girls engaged in domestic work, are vulnerable to exploitation.

To reverse this trend, there is an urgent need for States to intensify capacity-building and training of all relevant stakeholders, including immigration officers, border officials, the police, and labour inspectors. It is important to note however, that not only States bear this responsibility. Increased partnerships between all actors are necessary, including international organizations, civil society, and the private sector.

Second, IOM is alarmed by how children continue to be affected and displaced by humanitarian crises and armed conflicts.
As noted by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict, children continue to bear the brunt of today’s conflicts. For example, the cross-border recruitment of children has become a common trait in many conflict situations, which deepens the protection crisis.

IOM encourages special consideration be given to the safe return of children who have fled conflicts. Effective cross-border coordination plays a crucial role in this regard. We support the recommendation of the SRSG for Children in Armed Conflict that measures to reintegrate children must be included systematically in broader recovery and development strategies.

Third, we would like to focus on the situation of unaccompanied migrant children who fall outside traditional trafficking or displacement definitions, and who are among the most vulnerable in the world. Children may have been abandoned or they may have chosen to leave home in search of family or educational and economic opportunities.

Without parental care and often lacking legal status, they are less able to assert their basic rights. Unaccompanied migrant children’s rights need to be protected regardless of their legal status in the country of destination and irrespective of whether a child actively participates in the decision to migrate.

Such efforts need to be child-specific. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a holistic approach, and States now need to make efforts to provide for equally holistic implementation.

Mr. Chair,

In conclusion, let me reiterate that ensuring the protection of migrant children is a complex challenge for all actors. IOM therefore urges an increased effort by all to close both legal and practical gaps in the protection of children. Only when well-established structures exist, both at national and international levels, can we ensure the true protection of children on the move.

Thank you.