

**Address by National Assembly Speaker Ms Baleka Mbete to the Inter Parliamentary Union 138<sup>th</sup> Assembly General Debate on “Strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees: the need for evidence-based policy solutions”  
Tuesday, 27 March 2018**

**Madam President  
Honourable Members  
Ladies and gentlemen**

The Indian poet, Faida Basheer, in a poem, Migrant Bird, says:

The globe's my world. The cloud's my kin  
I care not where the skies begin;  
I spread my wings through all the din;  
Through fears and fright I fly my flight.  
No walls for me, no vigil gates,  
No flags, no machine guns that blast  
Citizens of those border states-  
Brothers of her brother' s sons.  
No maps, no boundaries to block

Migrants are our children, our kinsmen and women. They are human like us.

At the heart of this debate is the extent to which our world, our individual countries, ourselves, individually and collectively, can surmount the physical boundaries and borders created by our ignorance and imagined sense of identity, to be the heart that welcomes, that provides a home to strangers and visitors to our respective countries.

Our freedom in a number of Southern African countries would not have been possible if our neighbours and the world had given us their back instead of their hearts when we were in need.

It is up to us as leaders, because we are well placed to shape this world in the image of the dream that has brought us here together today, to build bridges that turn boundaries into open hearts reaching out to welcome those who are forced by circumstances to come our way for shelter or a second home.

Our youth do not have to turn to extremism, with the horrors of its violence, because they have lost hope in this world and in us, their leaders.

We believe in the importance and urgency of strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees, and strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation on migration and migration governance.

Without migration, most societies worldwide would never have achieved their current level of development. When supported by appropriate policies, migration can contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, as well as development in both original and host countries.

However, people's decisions to migrate are influenced by various factors. Structural factors such as economic inequalities, discrimination, persecution, crime, armed conflicts, instabilities and the impact of climate - all continue to influence and intensify migration.

Some 50 000 persons, including elders, women children, have died in the past two decades while crossing international borders. The majority of these fatalities occurred in the Mediterranean.

Excellencies

South Africa is both the sender and recipient of various categories of migrants and, indeed, faces a host of migration-related challenges, including the integration of migrants into our communities.

There have been cases of communal violence, some widely reported in the media, due to competition for scarce resources, small business opportunities and government services, in some parts of our country.

Government and Parliament acted swiftly against this violence.

A much bigger challenge is in addressing the root causes.

South Africa has not been successful in attracting and retaining highly skilled and business persons. Instead, the majority of international migrants are either low-skilled, asylum seekers or those granted residence on the basis of a relationship with a South African.

Excellencies

It is our considered view, Honourable Members, that Parliaments, through their oversight function, should ensure, that their respective countries, where appropriate, put in place mechanisms, including legislation and budgets to implement the commitments enshrined in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the UN Summit on 19 September 2016.

As one of the largest host-country and destination for refugees and migrants, in particular mixed migration flows, migration issues are a priority for South Africa, hence we participate actively and constructively in these two processes that elaborate the Global Compacts for Refugees and Migrants.

The two Compacts must recognise that the country's ability to determine who may enter and exit its territory, and on what terms, should be a right that all States should retain, at all times.

The two Compacts should not bring additional responsibilities, burden or obligations to developing countries which host refugees and migrants.

An adequate, regular and predictable funding mechanism is critical to the success of the implementation of the two Global Compacts and should not be provided through the loan

facilities, that can over-burden the already indebted developing countries, in particular in the African Continent.

On resource mobilisation, we must include other global development actors, like the New Development Bank and African Development Bank.

Addressing the root causes of migration should be at the core of the two compacts. Issues relating to underdevelopment characterised by poverty, unemployment, inequality, competition for scarce resources should also be explored.

We look forward to presenting our Country Report at the IPU in 2021 on our implementation of IPU resolutions and the impact made in South Africa.

I thank you