

Remarks by Mr. José Samaniego, Regional Director for the Americas Bureau, UNHCR at the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment 2022, Session 4: Regional Repositioning: Role of regional leadership in supporting countries

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Latin American and Caribbean region continues to experience unprecedented human mobility marked by record numbers of forcibly displaced persons and other on the move including those in mixed and onward movements from South America and through Central America to the US Southern Border.

Increasing and more complex movements in the region are triggered by multiple interrelated factors including violence, deteriorating human rights situations, socio economic factors; deep rooted inequality and exclusion, and the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters. These factors and the disproportionate and devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the already fragile refugee, migrants and host communities (the loss of livelihoods, evictions, negative coping mechanisms, discrimination, and xenophobia) act as a strong factor forcing people to search for better opportunities elsewhere.

In 2021 alone, more than 133,000 people engaged in unprecedented irregular crossings from South America into Central America through the Darien Gap, while more than two million persons reached the US Southern border. Heightened protection risks along such treacherous routes include exposure to gender-based violence and other threats to physical security, as well as other risks inherent to the involvement of trafficking and smuggling networks.

Increasing numbers of people on the move present significant challenges to efforts to enhance human mobility management, the establishment of protection-sensitive entry systems, the strengthening of reception arrangements and measures to meet the immediate needs of new arrivals, access to protection and essential documentation and the search for solutions.

At a moment when the Latin American and Caribbean region continues to experience unprecedented human mobility and displacement situations, efforts to ensure a more consistent, predictable, and coordinated response represent both a priority and a necessity for States and all relevant stakeholders, including the UN System, its agencies, and programmes.

In the Americas, human mobility and displacement has presented the UN System with multiple and complex challenges but also opportunities. This has necessitated our collective engagement in the development of a regional approach that leverages our comparative advantage and individual mandates to support States scale-up an increasingly integrated and comprehensive response.

Equally, these circumstances have provided impetus to address the needs of persons on the move and support host communities.

In the absence of a continental platform or coordination mechanism to address broad issues of human mobility, the Issue-based Coalition on Human Mobility (IBC-HM) established in the framework of RCP-LAC and co-lead by ECLAC, IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF has proven effective to agree and advance key initiatives to support UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators to address cross-border challenges emerging from human mobility, including:

- the formulation of common advocacy strategies and key messages;
- the development of common information management tools;
- the implementation of preparedness and response plans;
- the mobilization of resources to support stabilization efforts;
- the provision of targeted technical assistance and support.

A concrete and relevant example on the kind of support provided to UNCTs-RCs by the IBC is the development of common messages and advocacy actions to strengthen the messages and efforts towards the inclusion of people on the move in health care and social protection mechanisms, as well as socio-economic recovery plans. In 2020, the IBC joined the efforts of UNCTs in the region to position the inclusion of refugees, migrants and IDPs in COVID-19 responses and protect them from the pandemic's worst impact.

To support UNCTs and RCS in addressing increasing flow of persons on the move engaged in mixed movements across the region, the agencies involved in the IBC on Human Mobility have also displayed collaborative actions in key areas, including the support to early warning mechanisms, the development of concrete information management tools that are regularly update to ensure access to information on the scale, trends and profile, travel routes, displacement triggers and protection risks, and the support to develop area-based intervention to strengthen monitoring and programmatic interventions in key transit(hosting areas).

Collaboration within the IBC on Human Mobility has also played a key role to ensure common advocacy and messaging to reinforce the coherence of the UN position on mixed movements in the context of regional State-led mechanisms and conferences convened to advance a regional/hemispheric approach towards the challenges of human mobility and protection, such as

the recent participation and common messages displayed by the IBC co-chairs in the framework of Ministerial Conference on Migration and Protection organized in Panama last April.

There is strong precedent at the regional level for this kind of collaborative creative and forward-thinking approach with the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), where coordination arrangements have played for the last 4 years a fundamental role in harmonizing and promoting coherent and collaborative approaches between the agencies of the UN System, with international organizations and civil society in support of the commitment of States to protect, assist, and further the local integration of almost 5 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Equally, harmonizing the UN's regional collaborative response on human mobility, and ensuring effective alignment with existing regional coordination mechanisms established and led by States including the Comprehensive Regional Protection & Solutions Framework (MIRPS); the Quito Process, the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), amongst others, remains a priority and warrants our further collective attention.

This denotes ensuring a more clearly defined and articulated alignment between the investment made by the UN System in national humanitarian (HRPs) and development strategies and response plans (UNSDCFs), under the leadership of the RCs and in coordination with the RCP-LAC and the IBC, to support and facilitate a state-led regional comprehensive regional response.

Thank you.