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Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

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Participation, Inclusion, and the Right to Development of Migrants in Countries of Destination

Statement by

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Distinguished Chair, esteemed experts, Excellencies, and colleagues,

I address you today as an international consultant on human rights and social development, and as someone whose own life has been shaped by the question before us. I arrived in Switzerland as a refugee, driven by circumstances beyond my control. What Switzerland offered me was a chance to participate, to contribute, and to belong. That chance changed everything. And it is precisely that chance that the right to development promises to every human being, and that too many migrants in countries of destination are still denied.

The Declaration on the Right to Development is clear: every individual is entitled to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from development. For migrants, these three dimensions are inseparable. When all three are genuinely enabled, the results speak for themselves. When even one is withheld, the promise fails for the migrant, and for the society that loses what they could have built together.

Good practices exist and deserve to be named. The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions free movement and continental integration as pillars of shared development. The European Union's integration frameworks have made a tangible difference where seriously implemented, covering language access, labour market participation, and social cohesion. These are models worth building on.

However, we must be honest about the distance between aspiration and reality. Skills that migrants carry are routinely squandered. Qualifications go unrecognised. People who could contribute fully are kept at the margins, not because of their capacity, but because of structural barriers that serve no one.

I know this because I have lived it. Switzerland is not a perfect example of integration. But it is a country that, with time, made space for me: to learn, to organise, to serve in public life. The fact that a person that arrived in a country as a refugee, might stand before the United Nations is, in part, because of choices the system made to remain open. That openness is worth defending, worth expanding, and worth holding up as a direction of travel.

I urge this Expert Mechanism to consider three directions: first, to embed migrant participation explicitly within regional development frameworks as a core indicator of whether the right to development is being realised; second, to support regional bodies in developing models for the full arc of integration, from arrival through to genuine civic belonging; and third, to insist that migrants themselves have a voice in designing the policies that govern them. The right to development is not something done *to* people, rather something done *with* them.

I came to Switzerland with very little. What I found here was the possibility of a future. That possibility should not depend on fortune. It should be a guarantee.

Thank you, Distinguished Chair.