**STATEMENT**

**Ms. Louise Arbour, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration**

**Human Rights Council**

**Intersessional panel discussion on human rights, climate change, migrants and persons displaced across international borders**

**6 October 2017, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.**

**Palais des Nations, Room XX Geneva**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Let me thank the President of the Human Rights Council for inviting me to speak at this panel discussion.**

**In the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, adopted by the General Assembly on 19 September last year, Member States recognized the complexity of the motivations that compel people to move, including the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters or other environmental factors.**

**As you know, the New York Declaration launched a preparatory process leading to the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018. Your meeting today is an important contribution towards that outcome.**

**I would like to focus on the link between the more direct effects of climate change, including both extreme events and slow onset events, and different forms of human mobility, as well as its impact on other socio-economic, political and demographic drivers of migration.**

**One often hears the appealing mantra: “Migration by choice, not necessity”. However, the motivations for undertaking cross-border journeys are ever more complex.**

**In many cases, one would be hard pressed to assume whether people moved by choice or by necessity. Migration, however, happens on a spectrum of voluntariness and free choice, and is usually triggered by a variety of factors.**

**As we try to design the global compact, we need to determine whether this question of voluntariness or free choice should be the main, or even a relevant consideration.**

**A real challenge for the international community - and a key issue for the global compact - is to address fully the protection needs encountered by those compelled to move to escape these complex factors, and to design long-term solutions, particularly when return is not a sustainable option.**

**When we think about the question of voluntariness or free choice, we make many invidious assumptions. For instance, the prevailing assumption is that we are referring to migration of men, while women and children are either left behind, or follow passively. In fact, the expression "migrants and their families" is commonly misused to mean "male migrants and their wives and children", as if the latter were just accompanying a man.**

**This is an aspect of the narrative around migration that we must change. The reality is that 48% of international migrants are women, and many of them migrate by themselves.**

**Let us look at women in migration as rights-holders, agents of development and, most importantly, leaders. When women lead, change happens.**

**As we work towards the global compact, it is imperative that we strengthen international cooperation in responding to the drivers that compel people to migrate, and that we focus on the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights of all migrants, particular by those most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.**

**Let us all work together towards that aim in a human rights-based and gender-responsive manner.**

**Thank you for your kind attention.**