Beat: News

Death & disappearance of tens of thousands of people can no longer be ignored

OCHA ReliefWeb Press Release

New York City, 24.05.2022, 04:57 Time

ARAC-International Global Media Partner - Format: News and Press Release Source: ICRC Posted: 23 May 2022 Originally published: 23 May 2022

Statement delivered by Dr Angelo Cotroneo, ICRC's Global Adviser on Migration to the International Migration Review Forum.

"Thank you, Madame Vice President.

Excellencies,

Since the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration in 2018, IOM has recorded 17,000 migrant deaths. Real numbers are likely much higher, as many cases go unrecorded. This also does not include the thousands of migrants who are missing because they cannot communicate with their families.

When 152 States adopted Objective 8 as part of the GCM, our hopes were that efforts to save lives and coordinate internationally on missing migrants would become an integral part of GCM implementation efforts. Sadly, this is not the case. Objective 8 is one commitment in the Global Compact where little progress has been made, as last year's regional reviews showed and as the Secretary-General has repeatedly highlighted.

Migrants go missing due to a variety of circumstances in transit and destination countries, including in places of detention, at borders, at sea, or while traversing areas experiencing armed conflict or other situations of violence.

To address this tragedy, provide for migrants' humanitarian needs and uphold their rights, the ICRC calls on countries of origin, transit and destination to:

1 – Prevent migrants from going missing or dying by taking a close look at the impact of migration laws, policies and practices and ensuring they are in line with international law, including the principle of non-refoulement. States should scale up search and rescue operations, facilitate humanitarian assistance to migrants and refrain from hindering or criminalizing such assistance.

2 – Along migratory routes where migrants go missing, states should set up information exchange mechanisms and coordinate search efforts, in concert with other stakeholders. Regional and sub-regional bodies and processes can play a critical role here.

3 – States should give greater attention and work to meet the needs of affected families who painfully suffer from uncertainty and often face consequences ranging from stigma, to the loss of a breadwinner, to difficulties exercising parental or property rights.

Madame Vice-President, Excellencies,

The death and disappearance of tens of thousands of people can no longer be ignored. And it cannot be resolved through the exclusive prism of security measures.

Next week in Tunis, the ICRC is convening representatives of thirteen west and north-African states and key regional and international organizations to discuss how to respond to missing migrant cases in their region.

Here and elsewhere, the ICRC stands ready to provide advice, support, and convene such multi-stakeholder efforts to ensure that this glaring gap in the global response to vulnerable migrants is addressed. Thank you."

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20843/death-und-disappearance-of-tens-of-thousands-of-people-can-no-longer-be-ignored.html

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