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## **Migrants must be treated with dignity and respect for human rights, UN expert says**



South African soldier apprehends illegal migrants from Zimbabwe

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Stressing that migration is in the DNA of humankind and dignity has no nationality, a United Nations expert today called for a balanced approach based on equal rights, non-discrimination and dignity, as well as reality, in light of increasingly xenophobic statements.

“Sealing the borders is a fantasy; migration happens and we have to live together,” UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants François Crépeau told the General Assembly’s third committee, emphasizing that so-called illegal immigration is not a crime since in itself it does not cause victims.

“Migration is in the DNA of mankind, is how we cope with environmental threats, with political oppression, but also with our desire to create a meaningful future for ourselves and our children.”

Warning that xenophobic discourse on migration is increasingly gaining ground in many countries, he pointed to a lack of push-back and of a “credible political counter-discourse.” The difficulty of migrants, especially those in irregular situations, to organize themselves and be able to convince relevant constituencies of their cause partly explains why anti-immigrant rhetoric continues to thrive, he said.

“We are all migrants and as such are contributing to the global economy and to global cultural diversity,” he noted. “How many of us live today in the city of birth of our grandparents? Not many. We are all children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren of migrants. Rare are those who have settled in one and the same place for numerous generations.”

Mr. Crépeau, a Canadian law professor who acts in an independent capacity and reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, said irregular migration is not a crime.

“Crossing borders may be in violation of the law, but it is an abstract violation of it, since moving from one country to the other does not per se hurt or endanger anyone else,” he added.

“Migration concerns us all and no State can escape from its obligations under international human rights law to protect and ensure respect for the human rights of migrants, irrespective of their migration status. We often apply to foreigners, legal standards that we would abhor if they were applied to our sons and daughters,” he stressed, voicing concern at administrative detention of migrants resulting in long periods without access to legal representation or review.

Recalling that “dignity has no nationality,” he reiterated the shared responsibility of all for ensuring respect for the human rights of migrants. The principle of equal rights for all means that migrants must never be discriminated against because of their “foreignness,” he said.

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