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**Vice President of UCLG for Europe**

**Opening of the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) Summit,**

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(Recorded message)

Your Excellency, Director General of the IOM, your excellency, commissioner of the EU, your excellencies, representatives of national governments and the OECD, ASEAN, and the Organization of American States

Allow me to start by thanking you all, particularly the UAE Chairmanship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, for allowing the voice of local and regional governments to be heard here today. I am pleased to stand before you on behalf of the Mayors Mechanism and of our global organization UCLG and its European Section, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions.

Your excellencies, dear colleagues, as mayors, we know well that migration flows have shaped our territories, and is a phenomenon that continuously shapes our towns, cities and regions.

In fact, the growth, the evolution, and the development of the world is inextricably linked to the people that come and go from and to all parts of the world. This is a fact that is often forgotten in the current narrative around migration, and in particular in the Global North - and of course in European countries- in the discussions whenever the debate on migration takes place.

The simple fact is this: many of us are migrants, our children will also be migrants, and the different mobility patterns along history and across territories have demonstrated to be a sign of innovation, development and resilience.

The global North, and this is something that we are dealing with particularly in Europe, is witnessing challenging demographic dynamics that put our local development at stake.

Our populations are growing old, and this vulnerability has been cruelly visible in many European countries throughout the pandemic. The solution to this situation will need to include a coherent and human-centered approach to migration that imply all levels of governments and all stakeholders.

The current world, almost a year since COVID-19 was declared a worldwide emergency, has seen negative narratives exacerbated, with opportunistic speeches highlighting migrants and

those most vulnerable as the culprits of the pandemic, or as those that will hinder the recovery.

The reality is much different. In Europe, migrant workers are disproportionately employed in precarious work and employment conditions and have been more likely to need to keep working despite the risks of becoming ill, since their right to stay in the country where they live and work depends on their job.

It has been painfully demonstrated how deplorable the conditions often are, and indeed how much they risk their own health but also, may I add, how much of a toll our humanity takes, and how much of our values and ethical responsibility as societies is at risk.

The situation is even worse for undocumented migrant workers, who do not qualify for any social protection, sick pay or unemployment benefits and are forced to keep working, risking their health and that of those around them.

This is the reason why it is so important to help reshape the ongoing debates around South-North migration. Although we, local and regional governments, often lack the powers, we are critical to change minds, to educate, to transform the reactions in our communities and to develop innovative mechanisms that include all.

We understand migration as a status, not as nature. Migrants are neighbors first. They live in our city, they work in our city and need to use the same public services as any other citizen.

At the GFMD regional consultations held throughout 2020, local and regional governments have been vocal in portraying the challenges we are facing, but also the solutions we are promoting with pragmatism and strong efforts, to face and overcome this unprecedented situation of uncertainty.

We are committed to this process of dialogue and we are ready to contribute to the conversation, but we need the international community to stop seeing us as mere implementing partners. In reshaping the future, and as the closest level of government to the people, we need to be at the decision-making table.

A global multi-stakeholder conversation tackling mobility and development is more needed than ever, as the pandemic concerns all levels of government and all actors of society. Migration governance needs to build on the local sphere and take into account our experiences and knowledge.

We need to understand and take to heart the reality that migration is neither a new nor a reversible phenomenon, and that migration flows will increase in the coming years in particular, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated, due to the impact

that climate change and disasters will have in our societies in the future. It is up to us, now, to develop the frameworks and the attitudes to manage migration in a positive manner.

Indeed, local and regional authorities have a crucial role in supporting migrants' inclusion and removing barriers to their contribution to the local fabric. The access to basic services is the starting point, but a strong coordination should be woven between all spheres of administration, in particular the national level, and the stakeholders at local, national and international level.

The local elected representatives gathered around the Mayors Mechanism come from many different territorial realities, but we all bear the responsibility of including new arrivals and promoting cohesion among all our neighbors despite limited resources and mandates. We are willing to contribute with our experiences from the ground to setting a new scenario that is more beneficial for us all.

For this reason, as part of the Mayors Mechanism, at the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments, we are convinced that spaces like the Global Forum for Migration and Development are essential to overcome fearful and bordered-center approaches to migration that have proven inefficient for countries and cities of origin, transit and destination at all levels: local, regional and global. From our European Section, CEMR, we are ready to act as critical partners of national governments and international institutions and we stand ready to contribute.

As 2021 starts with this Summit and with the hope that the vaccine will help us overcome this pandemic, we would like this conversation to be forward looking, honest and proactive in bringing up ideas, agreements, partnerships for a more equal, just and resilient society.

We are together in this. our fate as individuals is tied to our social contract, and never before has it been as clear as now that we cannot allow ourselves to leave no one behind.

We call for a renewed multilateralism, based on ownership, co-creation, and partnerships among all stakeholders. We call for a community-driven approach to migration to truly leave no-one and no place behind in the recovery.

To finalize, let me commend once again the efforts made by the Chairmanship and by all the States that are part of the process to build a truly multi-stakeholder conversation in such a critical moment. Together with States, civil society, the business community and all the international organizations supporting our efforts, we can give us the opportunity to think of a fair, equal and inclusive recovery path that draws from all the lessons we have learned along 2020 about care, inclusiveness and solidarity.

Thank you,