

## Canada:

### Day 1: Tuesday, Sept 8

**Panel 1:** Impact of natural disasters, conflicts and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on trends in organized criminal groups and on routes for the smuggling of migrants, as well as good practices to support effective law enforcement cooperation during such crises to detect, investigate and prosecute such cases.

- Thank you Mr. Chair and thanks to the panelists for their timely presentations as well as to the Secretariat for the helpful discussion paper.
- Like other countries, Canada is concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on transnational organized crime, including migrant smuggling.
- While recognizing that due to our geography, Canada does not face the same challenges of migrant smuggling on the same scale as other State Parties, we nevertheless continually analyze the impact of the pandemic and adjust our efforts to combat this crime.
- Canada remains committed to learning from, and working with our partners to prevent and combat the international criminal organizations that seek to profit from the desperation and vulnerability of others.
- The UNODC assessed that COVID-19 travel and movement restrictions are not stopping people from fleeing conflict, violence, and dangerous and inhumane conditions.
- At the same time, prolonged border restrictions may increase the demand for migrant smuggling, introducing new clandestine smuggling routes in ever-more dangerous conditions.
- There has also been an increase in smuggled migrants becoming stranded in transit countries during the pandemic.
- They face increased risks as they exhaust their personal resources, particularly if they are unable to access work or health care services. They may become more vulnerable to exploitation, including forced labour or trafficking in persons.
- During pandemic situations, it is therefore crucial that vulnerable populations, as well as women and girls, have access to appropriate support services more than ever.
- In order to address these vulnerabilities, and in response to an increase in referrals during the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada works with trusted partners, such as the International Organization for Migration, to fund activities and support for stranded

irregular migrants who are believed to be destined for Canada and who are outside their countries of origin. This includes

- Assisting in the reintegration of returned individuals;
  - Supporting capacity building activities for governments of transit states and;
  - Delivering information and awareness activities in country of origin, with the aim of discouraging participation in illegal migration.
- All migrants who are not able to return to their country of origin are further referred to the appropriate national organization or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to conduct refugee status determination.
  - On that basis, we noted with appreciation the Secretariat's related recommendations contained in its discussion paper, specifically, to
    - "Enhance national and international coordinated responses to reduce the vulnerabilities of smuggled migrants, especially in time of crisis." And
    - "Provide for targeted responses and protection measures to address the concerns about smuggled migrants becoming victims of crime, including trafficking in persons and other abuses."
  - My delegation believes that implementation of these recommendations would go a long way toward preserving and protecting human rights and dignity of vulnerable migrants.
  - Thank you Mr Chair.