

2022 International Migration Review Forum: Tracking Progress on the Global Compact for Migration

Have the commitments set out in the Global Compact for Migration catalyzed tangible action towards safe, orderly, and regular migration?

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In May 2022, UN member states and stakeholders convened for the first-ever International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) to assess progress on the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (Global Compact for Migration or GCM) and develop further concrete, actionable recommendations for its implementation. Given the complex nature of international migration, adopting a common approach to international migration governance is no easy feat, and recent crises and ongoing phenomena—in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and ever-worsening climate change—only further complicated the conditions and contexts for migration. While the challenges to facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration might be many, so too are the opportunities. As emphasized throughout the forum’s proceedings, there is both a collective will and intent to improve cooperation on international migration.

Overview of the Global Compact for Migration

The GCM constitutes a milestone agreement, providing an ambitious and cooperative framework on international migration. Adopted in December 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco at the “Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration,” the GCM represents the first intergovernmentally negotiated instrument of its kind, building on previous commitments pledged

by Member States two years earlier in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Although not legally binding, it sets out for Member States a common understanding, shared responsibilities, and unity of purpose vis-à-vis international migration.¹

Given the complex nature of migration, the GCM approaches the phenomenon in a comprehensive, holistic manner. Its underlying principles are rooted, *inter alia*, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 2030 Agenda

¹ *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, A/RES/73/195, 19 December 2018, para. 9,

<https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl416/files/docs/gcm.pdf>.

for Sustainable Development, and international law; as such, they ensure that the GCM's approaches are people-centered, gender-responsive, and child-sensitive; uphold human rights, rule of law, and due process; encourage international cooperation while remaining respectful of national sovereignty; advance sustainable development; and catalyze engagement across all levels and sectors of government and with all relevant stakeholders.

Most importantly, the GCM outlines 23 objectives that aim to improve the well-being of migrants and their host communities and that Member States can implement in their respective national migration policies. Ranging from the root causes of migration to remittances, the objectives are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Overview of the International Migration Review Forum

The International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) is formally enshrined under paragraph 49 of the GCM as the "primary intergovernmental global platform for Member States to discuss and share progress on the implementation of all aspects of the GCM". The first of these quadrennial reviews took place from May 16 – 20, 2022 in New York. Over the course of an informal multistakeholder hearing, four roundtables, a policy debate, and a plenary session, Member States and relevant stakeholders discussed GCM implementation at the local, national, regional, and global levels; assessed challenges faced by countries of origin, transit, and destination; and identified opportunities for cooperation.

The IMRF concluded with the adoption of a Progress Declaration,² reaffirming the GCM as the only comprehensive framework for international migration governance. Most importantly, the Progress Declaration lays out concrete actions to accelerate implementation of the GCM and strengthen international cooperation on migration.

Addressing the Root Causes of Migration

Leaving one's home country is no easy choice. For some migrants, departure represents a positive change; for others, the decision is not made lightly. A host of social, economic, and environmental stressors underpin many a decision to migrate, in some instances uprooting or forcing people from their homes.

The GCM sets out to create conditions that allow individuals and communities to live safely and with dignity in their countries of origin, and under Objective 2, calls for Member States to minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors compelling people to leave.

Member States acknowledged protracted violence, conflict, and inequality as driving forces, particularly for developing countries who may face any combination of these. Many Member States also pointed to the increasing impact and prevalence of climate change, environmental degradation, and natural disasters in spurring human movement.

To implement Objective 2, several developing countries, such as those in the Caribbean and Pacific, have included mobility considerations into their respective climate strategies and have also incorporated migrants into their disaster preparedness and response efforts. Meanwhile, Madagascar, Morocco, Nepal, and Tonga reported having developed migration and development approaches, policies, and mechanisms.³

Despite these efforts, Member States emphasized that considerable gaps remain in anticipating, preparing for, and responding to events that might trigger migration. As regards climate change specifically, Member States acknowledged that not enough has been done to mitigate and adapt to its adverse effects and greater political will is needed to catalyze further action in this area. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated certain structural factors, like poverty and inequality, which often underlie an individual's decision to migrate.⁴

To accelerate action and cooperation on tackling the root causes of migration, the Progress

² *Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum*, A/AC.293/2022/L.1,

³ United Nations Network on Migration, "IMRF Round table one: Background Note," p. 2-3.

⁴ IMRF Policy debate on 18 May 2022, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1e/k1ee1vybfs>.

Declaration recommends increased efforts to eliminate the adverse drivers and structural factors preventing individuals from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods.⁵

Upholding the Human Rights of Migrants

A lack of human rights-based migration governance leaves migrants, especially those with an irregular status, in particularly vulnerable situations. All too often, they are reluctant to jeopardize their journey and speak out against human rights violations, fearing arrest, detention, or expulsion.

Human beings are at the heart of the GCM, which maintains that human rights and fundamental freedoms apply to all migrants, regardless of their status and whether their migration is forced or voluntary.⁶ In keeping with this principle, the GCM outlines several objectives aimed at protecting, respecting, and fulfilling migrants' human rights throughout the migration cycle. These include providing migrants with timely and accurate information at all stages of migration (Objective 3); ensuring that migrants are not subjected to unethical and illegal recruitment practices and have decent work conditions (Objective 6); limiting and finding alternatives to migration detention (Objective 13); providing migrants with access to basic services, such as healthcare, justice, and education (Objective 15); eliminating all forms of discrimination towards migrants (Objective 17); and facilitating the safe and dignified return, readmission, and sustainable reintegration of migrants (Objective 21).

Ensuring that migrants have accurate, up-to-date, and transparent information regarding their rights and obligations, such as entry and exit requirements and access to services and justice, is key to protecting them against the risks of exploitation and abuse. As regards Objective 3, Member States noted that discriminatory laws and policies, language barriers, and fear of immigration enforcement are among the key

obstacles keeping migrants from accessing the information needed. In spite of these ongoing challenges, Member States and stakeholders have made progress on this objective. For example, Portugal has created a welcome guide for migrants, providing an overview of all the services available to them. To help migrants overcome language barriers, Mexico's consular assistance centers offer interpretation and translation services for their nationals abroad. Lastly, several countries in South-East Asia have launched Migrant Worker Resource Centres, which serve as safe spaces and allow migrants to access reliable information.⁷

With regard to Objective 6 concerning recruitment and work conditions, Member States reported several ongoing challenges facing migrants, such as the prevalence of the informal or domestic market, restrictions on labor market mobility, and a lack of freedom of association and collective bargaining. However, Member States did report progress towards Objective 6, citing efforts to strengthen labor inspection capacities and reduce or ban recruitment fees. Several Member States also ratified migrant-worker related international labor standards. Meanwhile, the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor convened governments, employers, workers, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and strengthen regional migrant worker protections.⁸

While international law limits immigration detention to a few circumstances, Member States reported its continued use, along with child immigration detention in contravention to international standards. With respect to Objective 13, some Member States have taken steps to adopt community-based, non-custodial alternatives to immigration detention and to end child immigration detention altogether. Other initiatives in this regard have included the collection and sharing of data on alternatives to immigration detention, as well as global, regional, and national peer learning exchanges to foster implementation of Objective 13.⁹

Although migrants play an essential role in providing basic services, they often encounter

⁵ *Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum (Progress Declaration)*, para. 58.

⁶ *Global Compact for Migration*, para. 15.

⁷ "IMRF Round table two: Background Note," p. 3; IMRF Policy debate on 18 May 2022.

⁸ "IMRF Round table two: Background Note," p. 4-5; *Progress Declaration*, para. 25.

⁹ "IMRF Round table two: Background Note," p. 6.

difficulties in accessing them due to legal and practical barriers. During the pandemic, for example, migrants found they were unable to access COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccinations and unable to benefit from pandemic-related relief and recovery measures.¹⁰ On Objective 15, Member States reported efforts to enhance migrants' access to services during the pandemic. Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe regularly kept their migrant populations informed of COVID-19 measures via brochures and radio programs. Ireland implemented measures that enabled undocumented migrants to access services without fear of immigration enforcement.¹¹

Discrimination, intolerance, racism, and xenophobia remain continuing challenges for migrants. During the COVID-19 pandemic, perceptions that migrants were responsible for the spread of the virus also heightened hate speech, racial slurs, stigma, and violence against migrant populations. Although not many countries reported implementation of Objective 17, a few took proactive efforts to change the narrative surrounding migration. For example, Canada and Ecuador—working with the Global Forum on Migration and Development Mayor's Mechanism—have developed "It Takes A Community," a social media campaign promoting positive stories of migrants' contributions to their communities.¹²

Under Objective 21, Member States commit to the human rights-compliant return and readmission of migrants, as well as their sustainable reintegration. However, as Member States observed, there remain gaps in international cooperation on readmission and a lack of agreed minimum standards on how to measure sustainable reintegration, the support for which varies widely from country to country. COVID-19-related travel restrictions, including border closures and lockdowns, also created obstacles for migrants' return and readmission. Nonetheless, Member States reported progress toward Objective 21, including the temporary suspension of forced returns, visa and work permit extensions, and the granting of temporary

residence to migrants. Some countries, like Bangladesh, introduced up-skilling programs for returning migrant workers to assist with their reintegration.¹³

To accelerate action and cooperation on protecting the human rights of migrants, the Progress Declaration makes the following recommendations:¹⁴

- Eliminate all forms of discrimination generating negative perceptions of migration and promote evidence-based discourse;
- Ensure that migration policies and practices are non-discriminatory and compliant with international human rights obligations;
- Respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of migrant children, including by ending child migrant detention;
- Address and eliminate violence and harassment against women migrant workers.

Mitigating Vulnerabilities for Migrants

For many migrants, the journey from their countries of origin to countries of destination is fraught with peril. The Missing Migrants Project, under the International Organization for Migration, has recorded the deaths of almost 50,000 migrants since 2014.¹⁵ Migrants—in particular, women and children—also find themselves especially vulnerable to trafficking, smuggling, and other forms of exploitation.

Taking into account these dangers, the GCM has set out several objectives that protect vulnerable migrants at all phases of their journey (Objective 7) and in specific contexts, including the risk of death at land and sea (Objective 8), trafficking (Objective 9), and smuggling (Objective 10).

Under Objective 8, Member States commit to saving migrants' lives and coordinating international efforts to find missing migrants across countries of origin, transit, and

¹⁰ *Progress Declaration*, para. 41.

¹¹ "IMRF Round table three: Background Note," p. 2-3.

¹² "IMRF Round table four: Background Note," p. 4-5.

¹³ "IMRF Round table two: Background Note," p. 7.

¹⁴ *Progress Declaration*, paras. 54, 55, 57, and 63.

¹⁵ "Missing Migrants Project," International Organization for Migration, <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data>.

destination. However, progress towards this objective remains very limited, with only 17% of Member States reporting efforts in their voluntary GCM reviews. However, initiatives highlighted include the Inter-Agency Group on the Protection of Refugees and Migrants Moving by Sea, which coordinates search and rescue efforts between states and stakeholders, and the European Contact Group on Search and Rescue, which promotes cross-border operational coordination and information-sharing.¹⁶

With regards to Objective 9 and preventing the smuggling of migrants, Member States observed an increased reliance on smugglers owing to pandemic-related border closures and job losses.¹⁷ Countries also acknowledged that a general lack of data on the financial flows for smuggling networks and their modus operandi continues to impede progress in this area. However, some Member States improved their capacities to identify smuggling routes and networks. Sierra Leone, for example, signed bilateral agreements with Guinea and Liberia to share intelligence and information on the routes and financial transactions of smuggling networks. Through its new action plan against migrant smuggling, the European Union (EU) will also strengthen its capacity to track and sanction smugglers and establish operational partnerships with non-EU countries to better protect migrants' rights.¹⁸

Across the board, human trafficking remains underreported, which poses a major obstacle to the implementation of Objective 10. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated conditions of poverty and inequality, some of the key factors making individuals vulnerable to trafficking. In spite of these challenges, some Member States took steps to strengthen the capacity of border officials to detect human trafficking cases and modernize their border-crossing points with simplified procedures and upgraded infrastructure and equipment. Ethiopia, Namibia, and Serbia have adopted Standard Operational Procedures to identify, refer, and support

migrant trafficking victims. In addition, the Philippines and United Arab Emirates in 2019 signed a Memorandum of Understanding to foster cross-border collaboration for the effective investigation and prosecution of traffickers.¹⁹

To accelerate action and cooperation on protecting migrants in vulnerable situations, the Progress Declaration makes the following recommendations:²⁰

- Develop and implement safe, transparent, and predictable arrival procedures on land and at sea for all migrants, as well as search and rescue procedures and agreements;
- Intensify bilateral, regional, and international cooperation to investigate, prosecute, and penalize trafficking in persons;
- Ensure effective identification of, protection of, and assistance to migrants who have become trafficking victims;
- Intensify counter-smuggling efforts between countries of origin, transit, and destination; and
- Ensure safe and effective justice for migrant victims and ensure they are not liable to criminal prosecution.

Enhancing Regular Pathways to Reduce Irregular Migration

Regular migration helps to reduce situations of vulnerability for migrants, protect their human rights, and contribute to sustainable development, among other advantages.²¹ To this end, GCM Objective 5 calls on Member States to enhance the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration. Other complementary objectives, which also help to reduce the incidence and negative impact of irregular migration, include ensuring proof of legal identity and adequate documentation for migrants (Objective 4); managing border (Objective 11); and strengthening the certainty and predictability in migration procedures for

¹⁶ "IMRF Round table two: Background Note," p. 2-3.

¹⁷ IMRF Policy debate on 18 May 2022.

¹⁸ "IMRF Round table two: Background Note," p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4-5; *Progress Declaration*, para. 31.

²⁰ *Progress Declaration*, paras. 60, 61, and 65.

²¹ United Nations Network on Migration, *Regular Pathways for Admission and Stay for Migrants in Situations of Vulnerability*, p. 2, https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1416/files/docs/guidance_note-_regular_pathways_for_admission_and_stay_for_migran_ts_in_situations_of_vulnerabilty_final.pdf.

appropriate screening, assessment, and referral (Objective 12).

Since the GCM's adoption, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed the greatest challenge to implementing Objective 5 by disrupting regular pathways for migration. Member States also flagged as key hurdles a lack of coherence in migration-related policymaking, particularly with regards to climate-related mobility, and a lack of rights-based and child sensitive pathways for migrants in vulnerable situations. To make regular pathways more accessible and diversified, Member States have concluded several bilateral and regional labor migration agreements, such as the African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. Other Member States have simplified administrative procedures related to migration, for example, by combining residence and work permit approval.

Appropriate documentation to prove one's legal identity is an essential part of the migration cycle, ensuring efficient and effective migration procedures and helping to improve public safety. However, as Member States noted, many countries lack the robust civil registration systems or capacity to issue the appropriate identity and travel documents; further, migrants abroad are unable to access records via well-managed and rights-compliant management systems. To implement Objective 4, some Member States, like the United Kingdom and Albania, have issued migrants with the appropriate documentation to ensure they have proof of legal identity. Others have bolstered consular services abroad and issued birth certifications to nationals living overseas.²²

To facilitate safe and regular migration, GCM Objective 11 calls on Member States to manage their borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner with human rights-compliant, gender responsive, child sensitive, and non-discriminatory procedures. Member States have acknowledged the vital role of inter-agency and intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms in managing borders. For example, Armenia has updated its border crossing, upgrading its infrastructure, building capacities of personnel,

and streamlining its procedures. To facilitate information-sharing and better respond to the needs of migrants in situations of vulnerability, Mexico has implemented coordination mechanisms with other Central American countries.²³

With regards to Objective 12, digital technologies have helped to increase the effectiveness and transparency of migration procedures and how countries screen, assess, and refer migrants. For example, Kenya, Pakistan, and the Republic of Korea have all upgraded their migration procedures through online visa systems, e-passports, and digitized border procedures. However, the increased use of digital tools has prompted some Member States to raise concerns over migrants' rights to privacy and data protection. Among other challenges, Member States noted that the growing number and scale of mixed migration flows has made the identification and referral of migrants more difficult. It was also acknowledged that migration officials are often permitted high levels of discretion, thus undermining rule of law and due process.²⁴

To better safeguard the rights and interests of all migrants throughout the migration cycle, Member States commit in Objective 14 to strengthening consular protection, assistance, and cooperation. As Member States noted, though, migrants face difficulties in accessing consular assistance, especially during emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic also tested the capacities of consulates abroad to help migrants. Many Member States adopted the use of digital technologies to facilitate migrants' access to consular services, as Argentina did with its one-stop virtual consular mechanism. However, as consular assistance become increasingly digitalized, the question remains how the digital divide might further restrict migrants' access to essential services.²⁵

To accelerate action and cooperation on expanding and diversifying regular pathways to migration, the Progress Declaration makes the following recommendations:²⁶

²² "IMRF Round table one: Background Note," p. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁵ "IMRF Round table three: Background Note," p. 2.

²⁶ *Progress Declaration*, paras. 59 and 64.

- Provide migrants with access to information regarding their rights and obligations during all stages of migration; and
- Provide migrants with proof of identity and adequate documentation, including strengthening identification procedures and documentation systems and improving consular capacities.

Facilitating Migrant Integration and Social Cohesion

Integral to the GCM's vision is enabling migrants to enrich communities and creating conducive conditions for them to do so. Under Objective 16, Member States commit to empowering migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion. Member States voiced concerns about growing discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and inequalities, as well as language barriers, that hinder migrant inclusion in host communities. However, several countries have made considerable efforts to promote inclusion and social cohesion. For example, Germany has promoted language learning, professional training, employment, education, and social inclusion measures for all migrants. In Central and South America, El Salvador and Peru launched community awareness campaigns to enhance social cohesion within diverse communities.²⁷

A lack of recognition of migrant workers' skills and qualifications limits their potential, as well as their contributions as development actors. With regards to the implementation of Objective 18, Member States flagged a lack of attention being paid to the development of migrant workers' skills and skills recognition frameworks. Another key challenge cited was the need to adapt skills recognition to the changing nature of the labor market. In spite of these, Member States in Africa, Europe, and the Pacific have reported progress in developing regional and international qualification frameworks and practices to ensure the recognition and transferability of migrants' skills. Meanwhile, the European Union has supported the training of migrants in their

countries of origin to ensure they are equipped with recognized skills.²⁸

Recognizing the human, cultural, social, and economic capital that diasporas offer, Objective 19 calls on Member States to empower migrants to contribute to the sustainable development of countries of origin, transit, and destination. A major obstacle to the implementation of this objective remains a lack of engagement with diaspora communities in countries of destination. That said, some Member States have teamed up with diaspora organizations to collaborate more effectively, as with the European Union Global Diaspora Facility and its Capacity Development Lab.²⁹

To facilitate and encourage the financial contributions of diaspora communities to their societies of origin and destination, Objective 20 calls for Member States to promote faster, safer, and cheaper remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants. As a key challenge to progress, Member States identified the digital and financial exclusion of migrants, particularly women, who lack access to financial services and mobile-enabled data.³⁰ Highlighted efforts on Objective 20 included those of the Gambia and Kenya, who have incorporated remittances in their national financial inclusion strategies. Several Member States and stakeholders have also taken action to ensure the uninterrupted flow of remittances, for example, by promoting the use of digital tools to send them.³¹

As regards Objective 22, Member States commit to establishing mechanisms that would allow migrants to preserve, maintain, and transfer their social security entitlements and earned benefits. For many migrant workers, the coverage and portability of these entitlements and benefits remains limited, owing to eligibility barriers and limited cross-border cooperation. However, progress has been reported on Objective 22. For example, Portugal and the Philippines have signed bilateral and multilateral agreements to foster portability of social security entitlements.³²

To accelerate action and cooperation on migrant integration and social cohesion, the Progress

²⁷ "IMRF Round table three: Background Note," p. 3.

²⁸ "IMRF Round table four: Background Note,"

²⁹ "IMRF Round table three: Background Note," p. 3-4; IMRF Policy debate on 18 May 2022.

³⁰ *Progress Declaration*, para. 43, p. 8.

³¹ "IMRF Round table three: Background Note," p. 4.

³² *Progress Declaration*, para. 44, p. 8; "IMRF Round table three: Background Note," p. 4-5.

Declaration makes the following recommendations:³³

- Eliminate all forms of discrimination that generate negative perceptions of migration and promote evidence-based discourse on migration;
- Provide migrants with the necessary information, support, and services to facilitate their integration;
- Facilitate the mutual recognition of formally and informally acquired skills and competencies acquired by migrants, for example, by issuing the appropriate documentation of supporting skilling/reskilling of migrants; and
- Cut the average transaction costs of migrant remittances in half by 2030.

Strengthening Understanding of and Cooperation on Migration

A better understanding of migration, its complexities, and its benefits, together with increased international cooperation, will contribute to improved and informed migration governance. To that end, the calls on Member States to collect and utilize data as the basis for evidence-based policies (Objective 1) and commit to enhanced international cooperation and global partnership (Objective 23).

Member States highlighted gaps in data collection and analysis as a key challenge to the implementation of Objective 1. Many Member States still rely on outdated, incompatible, or inadequate sources and systems for data collection and disaggregation. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic created further difficulties to data collection, delaying the availability of 2020 population censuses which serve as a key source of migration data.³⁴

Towards Objective 23, many Member States and stakeholders have jointly developed and strengthened bilateral, regional, and global dialogues and initiatives relating to the GCM. For example, Azerbaijan has developed a migration training and knowledge management hub to assist partner countries in the region.³⁵ However, funding for some cooperative and partnership efforts—in particular, the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund—has been insufficient.³⁶

To accelerate action and cooperation on Objectives 1 and 23, the Progress Declaration makes the following recommendations:³⁷

- Strengthen national capacities for data collection;
- Engage with subregional, regional, and cross-regional processes, platforms, dialogues, forums, and organizations when reviewing GCM implementation to consider ways to enhance cooperation; and
- Expand international cooperation and partnerships to implement the GCM's vision, including through financial and technical assistance to countries in need.

Looking Ahead to IMRF 2026

In this increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the fact remains that migration will only increase, especially given demographic trends and labor market needs. In 2020 alone, 281 million people—3.5% of the world's population—were reported to be international migrants.³⁸ In the absence of sufficient national solutions, increased and improved cooperation on international migration is needed now more than ever.³⁹

In this regard, the GCM truly represents a landmark achievement, providing the international community with both a common

³³ *Progress Declaration*, paras. 54, 59, 66, and 67.

³⁴ "IMRF Round table four: Background Note," p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ *Progress Declaration*, para. 50.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 71 and 68.

³⁸ *Progress Declaration*, para. 9.

³⁹ IMRF 2022 Roundtable 1, 17 May 2022, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k18/k180kr6dzd>.

terminology for discussing migration issues and a blueprint for developing migration policies. However, while considerable progress towards the GCM was highlighted throughout the IMRF's proceeding, the overwhelming consensus was that more needs to be done. Amid ongoing crises and conflicts, it has become increasingly difficult

to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration. As such, the 2022 IMRF represents not just a platform for reflection on and reaffirmation of the GCM's objectives, but a warning and rallying call for accelerated action in advance of the next quadrennial review.

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