While most international migration is motivated by economic reasons: conflicts, violence, persecution, political repression and other serious human rights violations still lead to forced migration today.

There were 80 million forcibly displaced people worldwide by the mid of 2020 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. According to some estimates, at least 50,000 people, including thousands of children, have died in the last twenty years while trying to cross international borders. Developing countries hosted 85 percent of the world’s refugees and people displaced abroad. The Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 27 per cent of the total.

As a human rights defender in the Middle East, ACHRS wishes to address the threats to the full enjoyment of fundamental rights posed by forced migration.

Indeed, the Middle East region is particularly affected by this issue since it is crossed by conflicts - such as the war in Syria, armed conflicts in Iraq, or the Palestinian exodus - but is also exposed to terrorist attacks, persecution of religious minorities and human rights violations that push part of the population to flee. It is also the region that bears the greatest burden of these migrations, with Turkey, followed by Jordan and Lebanon, being the countries hosting the most refugees in the world.

Beyond the threats to human rights posed by conflicts or persecutions leading to population displacements, the very conditions of reception of refugees who have fled their native land make them vulnerable and allow all kinds of violations of their rights.

In the course of their journey, many migrants and refugees suffer various traumas, such as imprisonment or physical or psychological violence, they are also often victims of human trafficking or smuggling. Children, whether alone or with their families, as well as pregnant women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. The risk of sexual and gender-based violence is high upon arrival at borders; asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants face additional challenges, including access to fair and effective refugee status determination procedures. In some countries they were held in detention, sometimes for prolonged periods, in substandard conditions and without any means to assert their rights. States also sometimes established deportation procedures. Living conditions in the camps were rudimentary, and full access to health care, food, and running water was often
compromised. Refugees were often severely restricted in their enjoyment of civil rights and freedom of movement.

If there is one lesson to be learned from the experience of recent years, it is that individual countries cannot solve these problems individually. There is a need for greater international cooperation and action to respond to the massive movements of refugees and migrants.

To combat forced migration and the niches of rights violations it creates for refugees, the best solution remains to address the root causes, the reasons why people leave their place of residence. But there must also be measures taken in the short and medium term to protect these populations that are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations.

First, the international community must strive to ensure the protection and safety of populations as they move across borders, and address the needs, both immediate and long-term, of those who cross borders to reach other countries. Persons in transit, whether refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, are entitled to protection. International law requires assistance to "anyone found in peril at sea". Care must be taken to ensure that border procedures protect human rights, respect international refugee law, and take into account the special needs of women, children, and other particularly vulnerable persons. The immediate needs of all those who have encountered physical or psychological danger during their journey, whether by land or sea, must be met and those with special needs must be referred to appropriate services.

We are concerned about the growing trend to criminalize irregular travel. International refugee law expressly provides that the use of irregular means of entry by asylum seekers cannot be held against them. Regardless of their status, all refugees and migrants are entitled to a fair procedure to determine their legal status, conditions of entry, and right to remain in a territory. We call on States not to follow the growing trend of secure and closed borders but to provide more means to ensure safe, regular and orderly migration.

Therefore, discrimination is a problem that refugees frequently face, and the international community has a duty to fight against it, in the name of international law that prohibits it. Many refugees and migrants remain on the margins of the societies in which they live. This situation denies their contribution and is a source of economic hardship and social tension. To promote refugee self-reliance, there must be recognition of their right to residency and a commitment to expand access to legal work where possible. States have a duty to implement integration policies for refugees and migrants in all areas of social, cultural and economic life, enabling them to express their potential and make a positive contribution to the economy and society of host countries and also promoting social cohesion.

In addition, there is an urgent need to ensure a better sharing of responsibilities so that their rights are protected and the consequences of their flight are not disproportionately borne by certain States and regions located near their countries of origin, which are often countries already severely weakened by neighboring conflicts and suffering shortages of essential natural resources. The preamble of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees considers that "the granting of asylum may involve exceptionally heavy burdens on certain countries and that a satisfactory solution of the problems whose scope and international character have been recognized by the United Nations cannot, in that event, be achieved
without international solidarity”. This principle of shared responsibility remains essential, since refugee problems are transnational in nature and cannot be solved by a single State.

We therefore call on all States and humanitarian agencies to address the causes of displacement and irregular migration, develop mechanisms to respond more effectively and predictably to future mass displacement, and recognize and strengthen the contributions of refugees and migrants to host communities.

The consequences of inaction would be far-reaching. If opportunities to strengthen respect for international law, develop new approaches and enhance joint responses are not seized, we can expect to see even more people lose their lives and tensions increase between states and within host communities. More refugees and migrants will perish in transit. Transnational criminal networks for migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons will continue to flourish, promoting the exploitation of vulnerable people. Millions of human beings will see their rights and dignity further violated if they continue to languish in camps or on the outskirts of cities without access to basic goods and services, livelihoods and income-generating activities. With millions of children out of school and millions of adults deprived of the opportunity to earn an income, the future of many communities and states would be particularly dire.

Given the many violations of human rights and international law made possible by forced population displacement in the current context, all states should be concerned, even those that are far from conflict zones and are not the first countries to receive refugees; and act to combat displacement itself but also to annihilate the violations it causes.