

VI Annual Meeting MIRPS

and High-Level Solidarity Segment



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Panama City



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- Event Report -

VI MIRPS Annual Meeting and High-Level Solidarity Segment

Opening remarks

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

Ms. Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner

UNHCR congratulated the Government of Panama for its leadership as MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency 2024, and all MIRPS States for their remarkable progress made at national level on protection and solutions of forcibly displaced persons, including advances on strengthening asylum systems, avenues for legal stay, and sustainable integration and development. In the context of unprecedented levels of forced displacement, MIRPS and the MIRPS Support Platform have brought the Global Compact on Refugees to life in Central America and Mexico, seeking to address the humanitarian and development challenges with a holistic and hemispheric approach addressing each stage of the journey of forcibly displaced persons. UNHCR commended MIRPS and its Support Platform for forging new and stronger partnerships between States, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, academia, and displaced persons themselves, and noted that MIRPS also serves as an important space to continue implementing the commitments made under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection and Second Global Refugee Forum.

Organization of American States (OAS)

Ms. Maricarmen Plata, Secretary for Access to Rights and Equity

The OAS acknowledged the leadership of Panama, as MIRPS Pro Tempore Presidency, the United States of America as Chair of the Support Platform, and the commitments of the MIRPS States and Support Platform members. In the six years since its establishment, MIRPS has achieved significant results at the regional and national levels, and the engagement of actors such as local governments, the private sector, and civil society play an increasingly important role in the implementation of commitments made in MIRPS National Action Plans. The OAS General Secretariat is proud to have ensured that the priorities of the MIRPS have also been reflected in strategic political spaces within the inter-American agenda. The OAS highlighted the crucial role of the MIRPS Fund, which it established as a complementary mechanism for raising and channeling financial resources to strengthen the responses of the MIRPS States.

Panama, MIRPS 2023 Pro-tempore Presidency

H.E. Juana López Córdoba, Viceminister of Interior

Panama reiterated its commitment to the MIRPS and expressed appreciation to UNHCR and the OAS for its support as MIRPS Technical Secretariat, the MIRPS countries, and members of the MIRPS Support Platform, particularly the United States of America as outgoing Chair.

Panama highlighted key activities and results during its MIRPS 2023 Pro-tempore Presidency, including: a national meeting with representatives of MIRPS States and the Support Platform, with representatives of diplomatic missions and delegates of financial institutions; a Regional Forum in Commemoration of the 2023 World Refugee Day, “Opportunities for the Integration of Refugees”; the presentation of the “Darién is not a route” documentary in two national universities; three MIRPS Learning Events, organized by the MIRPS Support Platform to facilitate the exchange of good practices between States; the elaboration and approval of the MIRPS Statutory Charter; the usage of a banner to symbolize the transfer of leadership of the MIRPS between Pro-tempore Presidencies, among others. More information can be found in [Chapter 3 of the 2023 MIRPS Annual Report](#).

Interventions by MIRPS countries

The Panama Pro-tempore Presidency invited representatives of MIRPS States to frame their interventions around the question: *How has the MIRPS, as a regional framework, impacted your country’s national actions towards generating protection and solutions for people with protection needs?*

Belize

Ms. Tanya Santos Neal, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Immigration

Belize highlighted that there are over 4,000 forcibly displaced persons in Belize, of whom 240 were recognized as refugees and 791 are asylum-seekers. Of these asylum-seekers, 735 applied for the Amnesty Program than began in 2021, seeking to offer permanent residency as a pathway to citizenship. This program ensures access to employment, health services and protection, which aligns with the objectives and priorities of the MIRPS. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in alliance with other partners, placed birth registration clinics in different parts of Belize to assist persons in acquiring their identity documents, which provides integration opportunities for displaced and

stateless persons. Belize looks forward to leading the MIRPS in 2024, which has generated positive impacts in Belize.

Costa Rica

H.E. Marlen Luna Alfaro, Viceminister of Interior and Police

In 2023, the scale of forced displacement has intensified in the region, and Costa Rica is the country with the third-highest number of asylum applications globally. It is estimated that it will take more than 10 years to resolve the current caseload. As a result of a significant coordination with Panama to protect people crossing the Darien, they have assisted more than 100,000 people. Costa Rica has made significant progress in the protection and integration of displaced persons, guaranteeing access to health services and the education system. In 2024, they are aware of the challenges and are committed to continue providing protection to forcibly displaced persons.

El Salvador

H.E. Diana Marcela Vanegas, Ambassador of El Salvador to Panama

El Salvador has been working to create better living conditions for Salvadorans to reduce forced displacement, and the MIRPS has been instrumental in strengthening the government's responses for displaced persons and those at risk of displacement. Actions in security have marked a turning point in the country and have led to a change in the dynamics of displacement. El Salvador highlighted initiatives such as the support spaces *A tu Lado*, *Mi Primer Trabajo*, and training for health personnel on migration and health, among others. El Salvador launched the National Employment System through an accessible platform for employers and candidates to promote access to job opportunities. El Salvador was pleased to host a MIRPS Learning Event on access to mental health services and psychosocial support in 2023 and offered to host a Learning Event in 2024.

Guatemala

H.E. Juan José Barrios, Ambassador of Guatemala to Panama

Through the implementation of its National Action Plan, Guatemala has significantly advanced on matters related to refugees and others in need of protection. Guatemala's achievements include the formation of a National Technical Team with coordination between the involved institutions. Regarding access to jobs and livelihoods, Guatemala implements the Electronic Platform for Work Permits for Foreigners (PEX), a tool that facilitates the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers into the Guatemalan labor market. Concerning the Support Platform, Guatemala has optimized the participation of the international community, demonstrating that comprehensive results are only achieved through a spirit of shared responsibility. Guatemala expressed appreciation for the leadership of the United States of America as Chair of the Support Platform and its financial and technical contributions to MIRPS countries through dialogue spaces and learning events.

Honduras

H.E. Antonio García, Undersecretary for Consular and Migratory Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Honduras

While welcoming Belize in their new role as MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency 2024, Honduras offered its support in coordinating with CELAC and SICA, as Honduras will hold the Presidencies of these forums in 2024. The MIRPS has facilitated the implementation of practical measures in

Honduras to support displaced populations. In December 2022, Honduras achieved a historic milestone by approving a law for the prevention, attention, and protection of internally displaced persons, considered a modern and innovative law implemented on the 25th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Regarding the protection of land, the Institute of Property is moving forward with the identification of land and goods to be protected by their mechanism. the National Institute of Migration (INM), supported by UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM, inaugurated the “Francisco Paz” Irregular Migrant Assistance Center, aiming to provide comprehensive assistance to people in mixed migration flows and those requiring international protection. Honduras plans to open new centers to provide attention to displaced persons. The INM also implemented measures to identify the immediate needs of returnees with needs for protection. Honduras recognized that its most significant challenge is to reduce the causes of displacement and to facilitate voluntary returns and integration of displaced persons, and asked the international community to support its related initiatives.

Mexico

H. E. Alejandro Bichir Batres, Ambassador of Mexico to Panama

Mexico recognized the MIRPS as an example to be referenced around the globe for coordination and experience exchange, emphasizing the consistent collaboration with Member States, civil society organizations, and international bodies to promote actions allowing people in need of international protection to access fair and efficient asylum procedures and supporting local integration in regional and national contexts. With more than 140,000 asylum claims reported in 2023, Mexico continues to be among the top five countries with the most asylum-seekers globally. In this context, Mexico confirmed its commitment to promote a joint vision centered on the different stages of displacement: origin, transit and destination. To facilitate the local integration process, Mexico organizes national and local interinstitutional roundtables on refuge and complementary protection, including thematic roundtables on health, education, labor and documentation. Mexico reiterated its commitment to regional collaboration and the protection of displaced persons.

Panama

H. M. Lorenzo Hincapié, Director of the National Office for the Attention of Refugees of Panama

In 2023, Panama strengthened its MIRPS National Technical Team by organizing thematic groups, which allowed them to achieve significant progress in the implementation of their plan, including: reduction of processing times of asylum claims, introduction of biometrics in asylum processes, eight CONARE meetings with 131 persons recognized as refugees, the elaboration of data reports, the promotion of community prevention and protection programs, the creation of alliances to increase the engagement of local governments, the establishment of job opportunities with a focus on women, and partnerships with the private sector, among other initiatives.

High-Level Solidarity Segment - Led by the United States of America as Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform

Opening Statement by the United States of America

Ms. Cheryl Fernandes, Director, Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)

As Chair of the Support Platform from September 2022 to present, the U.S. has focused efforts on strengthening tools and frameworks addressing forced displacement and raising awareness of the value that forcibly displaced people bring to host communities. Key activities have included the documentation of good practices of MIRPS States and Support Platform members on successful integration, which has supported learning and direct exchanges on the application of these practices in the region with three MIRPS Learning Events in 2023 (in El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Colombia). In December 2023, the U.S., in coordination with Panama and Belize, led a High-Level Parallel Event at the Second Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, where panelists from MIRPS States and Support Platform members discussed priorities and solutions for the region, and new pledges directly linked to the MIRPS framework.

PRM provided more than USD 195M in 2023 in humanitarian aid through international organizations and NGO partners in Central America and Mexico, which have directly supported the four MIRPS objectives. With this funding, partners provide direct support to forcibly displaced persons, work with governments on asylum and capacity building, protection, and other regularization initiatives, and support to host communities.

Beyond its Chair term, the U.S. will continue to be a close ally for addressing forced displacement in the region, and contribute to key initiatives, in particular generating new partnerships with the private sector. The U.S. will support targeted projects in each MIRPS State in 2024 through UNHCR, to support implementation of good practices on integration.

Statements of Solidarity by MIRPS Support Platform Members and Other Partners

Canada

Mr. Jason Hollmann, Director General, Asylum Policy Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

As Canada transitions out of its role in the Troika as Past Chair, it remains deeply committed as an active member of the MIRPS Support Platform. In addition to Canada's ongoing work to welcome 4,000 resettled refugees from the Americas between 2022 and 2028, Canada has committed to welcoming 15,000 individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean through safe and regular migration pathways, including a new initiative to give residency to up to 11,000 people (Colombian, Haitian and Venezuelan nationals) who have family connections in Canada, and who are living in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Canada is also actively working on complementary pathways, including its Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot.

Canada is leading the Investing in Asylum Action Package Committee under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, through which it recently completed a mapping exercise on asylum capacity development and will work to promote alignment of international cooperation to the documented needs. At the Second Global Refugee Forum, Canada announced CAD 1.4M in initiatives with UNHCR for the second phase of a project to support Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras in processing asylum claims, and announced CAD 900,000 to an IOM project to support migrants' integration in communities, including labor migration in Costa Rica. These initiatives form part of Canada's commitment to provide CAD 75M over 6 years to increase asylum capacity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Canada is interested to build on the success of various asylum capacity initiatives and seek linkages between other regional initiatives, including MIRPS, the Quito Process and the Regional Conference on Migration, and reiterated its support for the Regional Asylum Capacity Building Initiative (RACBI).

Spain

H.E. Guzmán Palacios, Ambassador of Spain to Panama

Spain referenced the rise of movements across the Darien and impact on indigenous communities and in Panama more generally, noting that Spain and Europe more broadly are familiar with these challenges based on experiences with movements in the Mediterranean. Spain, which served as the first Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform, emphasized the importance of addressing root causes, and reiterated its commitment to support, having made financial contributions over the last three years that reached more than EUR 6.2 million through UNHCR and to OAS for the MIRPS Fund. This support has also been complemented by humanitarian support by Spanish Cooperation, which has reached EUR 3.2 million, centered on health care, water and sanitation, and governance programs.

Spain encouraged specific attention for supporting afro-descendants and indigenous communities that are affected by migration, citing the example of Panama's project supported by the MIRPS Fund with Spain's contribution, which is improving attention to refugees and indigenous communities in the Darien. Spain remains a committed member of the MIRPS Support Platform and encourages continued collaboration in this framework.

Brazil

H.E. Carlos Henrique Moojen de Abreu e Silva, Ambassador of Brazil to Panama

As a Support Platform Member, Brazil continues engaging with the MIRPS as a forum for supporting countries of origin, transit, asylum, and return. Brazil launched its first resettlement program in 2019, benefiting more than 28 people with international protection needs in the north of Central America in partnership with civil society and UNHCR, including Portuguese classes, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), training and labor insertion. As announced in the Second Global Refugee Forum, Brazil will implement a larger resettlement program and will continue seeking opportunities to expand support to MIRPS in the areas of durable solutions, particularly with civil society and the private sector. Brazil offers its own lessons learned and best practices, particularly in the context of "Operation Welcome," and technical support in areas of governance, protection, documentation, RSD, humanitarian assistance, MHPSS, capacity development, labor insertion, and local integration.

Brazil suggested to explore opportunities for two-way learning across MIRPS and the Quito Process, and in the context of Cartagena+40. It was also noted that Brazil is prepared to make a donation to Panama for dehydrated food to provide support in the situation of mixed movements.

Colombia

H.E. Mauricio Baquero, Ambassador of Colombia to Panama

Colombia expressed its commitment to regional responsibility sharing for strengthening protection and solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, and returnees with international protection needs, noting that as an active member of the MIRPS Support Platform, Colombia has shared its experiences and good practices on diverse topics, including by hosting a MIRPS Learning Event in October in 2023 on internal displacement.

Colombia highlighted its experiences in issues of internal displacement and advancements in its strategy on durable solutions, for socio-economic stabilization of victims, aligned with the national development plan 2022-2026, noting the importance of inter-institutional coordination and international cooperation, and highlighted its interest to continue sharing experiences with MIRPS Countries on durable solutions. Colombia's experiences with massive mixed movements and its efforts to respond to the irregular flows moving north through the Darien were also highlighted, as Colombia is interested in sharing experiences on humanitarian assistance, regularization, and socio-economic integration.

European Union

H.E. Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, ECHO (video intervention)

ECHO noted that in the context of unprecedented forced displacement, and recognizing the deepening climate crisis and El Niño, national resources in the region are under immense pressure. The EU remains committed to shared goals of protecting and supporting displaced persons in the region and advocating for their support and mitigation of pressures on national systems.

The EU announced a new humanitarian aid budget for Central America of over EUR 19M, as part of the ongoing commitment to support people in need across Latin America and the Caribbean.

France

Mr. Thibault Cornut-Gentile, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of France in Panama

France has been a member of the Support Platform since its establishment in 2019 and contributed EUR 200,000 in 2023 to UNHCR to support regional activities. France also supports assistance and protection programs for refugees in highly vulnerable situations and migrant children through UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF. More broadly, France noted its commitment to supporting UNHCR on issues of forced displacement, with contributions of EUR 120M in 2023, as well as EUR 26M to IOM in 2023. France co-sponsored the Second GRF in Dec 2023, in which it announced the launch of the *Avec Elles* initiative that aims to strengthen protection and integration of refugee women and girls throughout their displacement. France will continue to act in favor of greater international cooperation on migration issues.

Japan

H.E. Hideo Fukushima, Ambassador of Japan to Panama

Japan referenced its ongoing support in the region and interest to explore further cooperation and partnership with the MIRPS. Japan highlighted the importance of addressing poverty, security, and disasters that are the root causes of migration, its continued collaboration to support these issues, and the importance of longer-term approaches. Japan emphasized its interest in women, peace and security, and its provision of USD 2M in assistance through UN Women in 2024 to protect migrant women who are particularly vulnerable in Central American countries, such as Costa Rica, Panama, and Honduras.

Japan has provided support in the region in for disaster response, including emergency relief goods to Honduras and Guatemala after hurricanes in 2022; contributed to strengthening social infrastructure systems in Haiti and will provide USD 14M in additional assistance, recognizing

Haiti's security as one of most critical challenges facing the western hemisphere; and noted the important role of the private sector in medium to long-term job creation in the region and correcting disparities. In the last decade, the number of Japanese companies operating in Latin America has increased by more than 1,000, generating social as well as economic benefits. In 2023, in response to the U.S. *Call to Action*, Yazaki corporation opened Japan's first auto parts company in Guatemala, contributing to the country's economy and job growth.

World Bank

Mr. Michel Kerf, Country Director for Central America and the Dominican Republic

The World Bank, also in collaboration with IADB, UNHCR, and IOM is redoubling efforts to support its member states in Central America and Mexico, working through its knowledge agenda and its investment and financing portfolio. In Central America, the World Bank has invested more than USD 1M for generating new studies and direct technical assistance on issues of human mobility and displacement. At regional level, the World Bank published three studies that seek to guide efforts on push and pull factors, labor mobility, and vulnerabilities specific to some categories of refugees and migrants, with particular attention to the risks of violence faced by women. With IOM, the World Bank has supported the creation of the first regional database on violence against women in transit in all of Central America.

The World Bank supported the creation of the first international master's program on migration policy and development in Latin America, which began with its first cohort on 15 January, benefiting 35 officials from the public sector and civil society from Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Cuba. In Mexico, the World Bank is collaborating with IOM to develop a methodology that allows for better understanding the link between climate change and environmental degradation and internal displacement in the country. In Latin America, over USD 1B in operations in investments have focused on migration management and strengthening migrants' access to education, health, social protection, decent employment, and basic infrastructure. Global evidence demonstrates that the economic benefits of integrating refugees exceed the short-term financial costs, and the World Bank supports medium-and long-term integration efforts.

Inter-American Development Bank

Mr. Felipe Muñoz, Migration Unit Chief (video intervention)

IADB reiterated its commitment as a Member of the MIRPS Support Platform, highlighting its robust portfolio of reimbursable and non-reimbursable resources, as well as technical capacity that the Bank puts at the disposition of MIRPS States for management of forced displacement and migration. Since the IADB Migration Fund was established four years ago, three countries in the region (at national level) and Mexico (at subnational level) have received non-reimbursable resources, and six credit operations (in Panama, Costa Rica and Belize) have benefitted nationals as well as supported the inclusion of migrants with non-reimbursable resources.

With the decision of the IADB Board of Directors in 2022 to include the three countries of north of Central America in accessing support with challenges related to returnees, all MIRPS States have access to IADB's support. IADB is advancing with the design of four new operations in MIRPS States totaling 187M in investments and 17M in non-reimbursable resources: two in Belize (on reinforcing health systems and inclusion of migrants, and in urban development in certain cities;

one in Costa Rica (for strengthening the education system and the possibility of including migrants); and a first operation with returnees in Honduras (to strengthen job creation for youth, including returnees). IADB also highlighted its technical cooperation, working to strengthen institutional capacities of the migration units of Panama, Belize and Costa Rica, and referenced resources from Spain for technical cooperation with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to support possibilities for seasonal and circular migration to Spain.

MIRPS Fund Update

OAS

Ms. Betilde Muñoz, Director of the Department of Social Inclusion, Secretariat for Access to Rights and Equity

OAS presented the main advances on the implementation of the MIRPS Fund, created by the OAS as a mechanism for collecting and channeling financial resources for MIRPS States to support their responses to forced displacement. After the first Solidarity Event, Spain contributed the pioneering contribution of EUR 1M, and the OAS created the operational framework in collaboration with MIRPS States, working to assure equality, transparency, and accountability. With the first call for proposals, six proposals were submitted by Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama. The High-Level Selections Committee completed a thorough selection process that resulted in the first portfolio of MIRPS Fund Projects for 2023-2024 that plan to benefit a total of more than 100,000 people. Four of the six agreements have been completed and the implementing entities received their first disbursement. More detailed overviews on the projects are available [here](#).

The MIRPS Fund stands ready to receive contributions for a second portfolio of projects, representing an opportunity to provide instrumental support for projects led by MIRPS States to support a comprehensive response for protection and solutions.

Ratification of the Statutory Charter and Adoption of the Panama City Declaration

MIRPS States ratified the [MIRPS Statutory Charter](#), which establishes a clear structure and roles to strengthen MIRPS as a regional mechanism.

MIRPS States adopted the [Panama City Declaration](#), the content of which was previously agreed upon through a consultative process led by Panama as MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency 2023, through the Missions of the MIRPS States to the OAS.

Formal Handover of the MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency

Panama, MIRPS 2023 Pro-tempore Presidency 2023

H.E. Roger Tejada Bryden, Minister of Interior

Minister Tejada, on behalf of the Government of Panama, thanked all participants, the Governments of the United States and Canada as the Support Platform Troika, OAS and UNHCR, and welcomed Belize as the new Pro-tempore Presidency. He indicated that he instructed the Vice Minister to visit Belize and other MIRPS countries to strengthen the institutional framework to address the migration and forced displacement crisis, and requested the creation of a technological platform for sharing information among MIRPS countries.

Belize, MIRPS 2024 Pro-tempore Presidency

H.E. Anthony Sylvestre, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Belize recognized that 2024 presents an opportunity for the MIRPS to advance in its regional work, building on the four MIRPS pledges presented at the Second Global Refugee Forum, and the commitments made in the Panama City Declaration and the Statutory Charter. Belize has developed a draft Regional Action Plan with three focus areas: i) Strengthen the regional response on protection and solutions through the four regional technical teams, working closely with the lead countries to promote peer-to-peer learning and regional cooperation; ii) increase the participation of stakeholders in the national action plans and regional action plan; and iii) further develop existing talent in the MIRPS team and standardize data collection, sharing and reporting. Finally, Belize will promote coordination with other regional mechanisms and initiatives such as the Regional Conference on Migration, Quito Process and Cartagena+40.

The Government of Panama handed over the “MIRPS banner” to the Government of Belize, as a formal recognition of the MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency 2024, as well as conferred recognitions to the Government of the United States as Outgoing Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform, and to UNHCR and OAS as the MIRPS Technical Secretariat.