

International Migration Review Forum (IMRF)

Side event:

“Upholding the human rights guiding principle in the Global Compact for Migration”

Thursday, 19 May 2022, 1.00-3.00 pm EDT / New York

Opening remarks

Ms. Juliana Macedo do Nascimento

Deputy Director of Federal Advocacy at United We Dream

Hello everyone,

I want to start by thanking the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other organizers for putting this event together and inviting me to be here. Thank you High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet and Ambassadors Fatima and Maes for opening the space.

My name is Juliana Regina Macedo do Nascimento, I was born in Natal, Brazil and at 14 years old my family and I moved to the United States. I grew up in California as an undocumented immigrant and even now, I have not yet had the chance to regularize my status and I am a DACA recipient. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, DACA for short, is a policy created to protect immigrant youth like me from deportation and provide us with a work permit. It does not create a pathway to citizenship and thus, hundreds of thousands of us remain in a limbo, having to renew this protection every two years.

I now serve as the Deputy Director of Federal Advocacy at United We Dream. We are the largest immigrant youth-led grassroots network organization in the United States. We organize thousands of people on the ground and reach millions of people every month through our social media platforms and our mission is to fight for the dignity and the lives of all immigrants and we believe that our lives are intersectional, making our fight for immigrant justice the same as our fight for racial and gender equality as well as other social and economic justices. That includes people’s right to move freely in the world.

So in my experience, I find that migration is inevitable and undeniable. My own life shows it, and I see it every day in my work. Human beings move and migrate for all different reasons, sometimes simply looking for a better life, like my parents, sometimes looking for safety, or fleeing violence, persecution, war, natural disasters and more. It is the job of governments to create a welcoming and safe environment not just for those who are born within their borders, but for all who arrive at them as well.

Millions of people are displaced every year because of violence, and it's also true that millions more are forced to migrate due to natural disasters made worse by climate change. Countries have to be ready to welcome and integrate large numbers of people, and it absolutely can be done, we just need the political will to do so.

Developed countries, especially, have a higher responsibility towards vulnerable migrants. Our economies, foreign policies and devastating climate policies have wreaked havoc in the world. We must stand up for those who have suffered the consequences of our actions and take responsibility for fixing what we have broken.

When vulnerable migrants arrive at our borders, we must be ready to receive them with open arms, provide them with the resources necessary to acclimate and a pathway to full citizenship. Immigrants are positive additions to any country and enrich the receiving communities they become a part of. They deserve full participation in the societies into which they integrate. A right to vote, to work, to access social safety nets, to attend schools, to go to the doctor, to realize their full potential, are all things that should be easily accessible to all immigrants no matter where they come from and no matter where they arrive.

I know there is a lot of talk about vulnerable migrants, and they are absolutely in delicate situations that deserve special attention and care. But I don't think I would've qualified to be one when we arrived in the US. So I must believe that all migrants deserve to have their human rights respected and to be treated humanely and with dignity. And even though I've never been in a detention center or deported, having had to live under the threat of such events happening in my life has been extremely difficult. Living without certain rights has taken away some of my dignity and felt inhumane at times.

As I said before, it is the job of governments to ensure those under their care are treated humanely and with dignity. But governments are made of people and people are fallible. But people can also do amazing things and overcome their shortcomings, and so can governments. My hope is that this Compact can help us get ever closer to treating each other with the respect and care that we all deserve.

Thank you for your time and attention.