



# Building Political Will in the Americas

An Opportunity for Global Leadership  
on Forced Displacement

**Event Report**

World Refugee & Migration Council



## ▶ Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Responsibility Sharing	4
Political Actions	7
Panelists & Moderator	9

### Acknowledgements

This event report was produced following a virtual panel discussion held by the World Refugee & Migration Council with the Aspen Ministers Forum.

Special thanks to Philip Jones for writing this report.

Copyright © 2021 by the World Refugee & Migration Council

World Refugee & Migration Council event reports provide information to support the work of the Council, but do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council itself.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution — Noncommercial — No Derivatives License. To view this license, visit [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). For re-use or distribution, please include this copyright notice.

Cover image credit: UNHCR/Daniel Dreifuss.

### World Refugee & Migration Council

44 Eccles Street #200  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1R 6S4  
[www.wrmcouncil.org](http://www.wrmcouncil.org)

The World Refugee & Migration Council is supported by a partnership with Cuso International.

## ► Introduction

Domestic and regional actions and policies as well as international peace and security diplomacy are needed to build political will and transform governance to reset the response to forced displacement.

To identify much needed actions for this response, the World Refugee & Migration Council (WRMC) and the Aspen Institute's Aspen Ministers Forum held a panel discussion with three leaders — former United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Former Foreign Minister of Canada and WRMC Chair Lloyd Axworthy and former Foreign Affairs Minister of El Salvador Mayu Brizuela de Ávila. Led by moderator *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, the group discussed domestic and regional actions and policies as well as the international peace and security diplomacy needed to build political will and transform governance to reset the response to forced displacement.

Secretary Albright introduced the session by noting that refugees only leave their homes for places such as the EU, US, and Canada because they cannot remain where they are due to economic situations or the dangers of living there.

What follows is a review of the discussion and a list of suggested political actions that emerged from the event that the WRMC is seeking to pursue through its research and advocacy as we seek to reset the response to forced displacement around the world.

## ► Responsibility Sharing

The WRMC believes that it is in the interest of all states that there is an effective system through which refugees and forcibly displaced persons are protected and assisted. However, many of the existing architectures in place to protect refugees

**“Now’s an opportunity now to start collaborating to bring in not just governments in the region, but the private sector, major civil society groups and academics.”**

– **Lloyd Axworthy** on collaboration to address planning for migration flows

and internally displaced persons are not working. In order to resolve this, there is a need to consider and invest in regional architectures that can mitigate the negative impacts. Accordingly, there is space for Canada and the United States to address

current shortcomings and lead new approaches to ensure responsibility is shared among states. Consequently, the Biden Administration along with partners including Canada should look to more regional collaboration between the Caribbean and Americas to develop tools and either reset the response of countries to crises or renew the architectures that are currently fit for purpose.

Secretary Albright observed that any behavioural change will require cooperation and dedication from leaders to have lasting impacts. Subsequently, Canada and the United States can seek to support countries in Central and South America taking in migrants from neighboring countries such as what has occurred in the Middle East. The administrations can work through their foreign policies, locating and working with organizational structures at the local level to

**“Nothing will happen if there is not work done in countries so that people will be able to make a living without fear.”**

– **Madeleine Albright** on Addressing the root causes of migration to the US

support countries as they take in migrants from their geographical region.

WRMC Chair Lloyd Axworthy suggested that a top-down approach to implementing change will not be successful in the longer term. Collaboration across all parts of society is critical to resetting the response to migrants and internally displaced peoples. Governments need to involve local community groups in the resettling of forcibly displaced persons. When local

## ► Responsibility Sharing (continued)

groups are involved in the process of resettlement – such as through Canada’s sponsorship model – assisting to provide schooling, assistance finding a bank or a job, the pressures of national governments are mitigated as responsibility is evenly across society, helping migrants integrate into, and become contributors to the societies they reside in.

Both formal and informal frameworks for how countries respond to migrants are critically important. Formally, the granting of refugee status to migrants is crucial to the personal integrity of migrants and helps protect their rights. Yet, these frameworks are slow and often cannot keep up with the demands placed upon them. Conversely, informal approaches are often able to provide solutions to the problems that occur as a result of the inability of formal

frameworks to respond to crises fast enough and are essential to providing migrants and forcibly displaced people with immediate support and safe refuge. To this end, a hybrid approach to responding to forcibly displaced persons and refugees is critical to a timely and effective response that helps and protects migrants in the immediate to long-term future.

**“Family reunification [of refugees] definitely needs a much more cohesive and comprehensive approach to be successful.”**

– **Mayu Brizuela de Ávila** on Central American migration into the US

In addition to a hybrid approach to responding to refugees and forcibly displaced persons, countries need to reset

how they plan for crises around the world. Instead of reacting to crises that lead to migrant influxes they should be working with agencies and organizations to plan for and manage inflows rather than react to massive surges in people. Accordingly, governments, international and non-governmental organizations, must work together to raise awareness of impending crises and prepare for crises that can lead to mass migration - such as recent migration trends linked to climate change. By doing so, countries around the world can share responsibility and combine resources to ensure countries that are likely to face migration flows are not overwhelmed when they occur, and refugees and forcibly displaced persons are not placed in perilous situations. Such collaboration is increasingly important as issues that drive forced migration including conflict, climate change

## ► Responsibility Sharing (continued)

and economic crises often exist in conjunction with one another and will continue to drive forced displacement into the future.

Due to a lack of cooperation and a reluctance to share responsibility, current responses to refugee and forced displacement flows are too often met with force as opposed to compassion. Resetting the militarized response to migrant crises is necessary.

The militarization of borders further adds to the plights of displaced peoples, entrenching negative attitudes towards them. Priorities need to be set to ensure displaced persons have safe travel to their destinations, work placements are available for migrants, and families can be reunified with one another. As noted by Mayu Brizuela de Ávila, there needs to be a much more cohesive, comprehensive,

and compassionate approach to family reunification in order to be successful. Countries such as the US and Canada can make enormous contributions to Central and South America by reasserting the importance of democracy and helping countries to become democracies that respect human rights and the rule of law while improving their own domestic practices.

One way to encourage responsibility sharing as well as democratic processes is to repurpose frozen assets of corrupt leaders. This can greatly help relieve the financial pressures faced by countries seeking to help refugees and internally displaced persons. Working with courts - and possibly the creation of an international corruption court - to determine where funds are allocated to help those victimized by the stealing of state funds is fundamental in this regard.

**“In the Americas, there is a new context of climate immigrants, which is something that we have not yet seen.”**

– Mayu Brizuela de Ávila on new challenges facing Central Americans

Repurposing assets can help local groups to provide resources such as education, health and economic programs in areas where there is an influx of migrants. The freezing and repurposing of stolen assets will encourage democratic practices and respect for the rule of law in countries where rulers are currently able to rule with impunity without consequences for the forced displacement that are due to their actions.

## ▶ Political Actions

- ▶ Crises are not local. Problems in one country do not stay within that country but spread within a neighborhood of countries. As such, responses to the causes of forced displacement must be dynamic, with regional collaboration to ensure responses can address multiple issues at once.
- ▶ Gang violence, criminal activity, and a lack of economic opportunities are mutually reinforcing root causes of displacement in Central America. To address the migration flows at the US-Mexico border, there must be a concerted effort to tackle these underlying drivers of forced migration.
- ▶ Climate change and environmental factors are increasingly driving food insecurity and forced migration from Central American countries. The international community should be working with local actors to examine the needs that will have to be addressed due to these drivers of forced migration, and seek to preemptively manage the situation rather than simply responding when the next environmental crisis occurs.
- ▶ A polycentric approach is necessary to address the root causes of migration. Policies and policy responses should be shaped not only by governments, but with buy-in from non-governmental organisations, civil society, academia and the wider business community.
- ▶ A punitive attitude and militarized response towards displaced people and migrants exists. There needs to be a united effort to change the attitudes toward, and treatment of forcibly displaced persons and migrants – many of whom are children. Governments should ensure that travel is safe, and make sure there are safe places to stop along the way to get proper food, shelter and other humanitarian needs.
- ▶ Responses to forced migration should focus on supporting migrants to exercise their capabilities, utilising bottom-up approaches and local actors to meet migrants' needs and give agency to migrants.

## ▶ Political Actions (continued)

- ▶ Once migrants have arrived in a host country, host countries should make efforts to integrate them into society. Governments can work with local groups such as places of worship, non-governmental organisations, and community networks to set up frameworks to assist newly arrived migrants in adjusting to their new surroundings, setting them up to live a viable life with economic and social opportunities. High-income countries such as Canada and the United States can help low-income countries support initiatives aimed at assisting newly arrived migrants.
- ▶ When kleptocrats run pseudo-democracies and high levels of corruption exist, there is a lack of trust in governments that they can manage domestic problems that lead to forced migration. Efforts should be taken to encourage and assist countries to become strong democracies that respect the rule of law and their citizenry and become part of the solution rather than the problem.
- ▶ Financial centres around the world such as Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and Switzerland can help change the behaviour of kleptocratic governments around the world by freezing stolen assets held by corrupt leaders in their jurisdictions. The frozen assets can then be repurposed, and redistributed to help those victimised by corrupt leaders whose bad governance led to forced migration and displacement.

You can learn more about this topic by reading the Op-Ed by Madeleine Albright, Lloyd Axworthy, Mayu Brizuela de Ávila and Fen Osler Hampson [Canada and the United States Must Unite to help Latin American Refugees](#) on the WRMC website, originally published by The Globe and Mail.



## ▶ Panelists & Moderator



### **Madeleine K. Albright, Former US Secretary of State and WRMC Honorary Chair**

Madeleine K. Albright is Chair of Albright Stonebridge Group and a professor, author, diplomat and businesswoman who served as the 64th Secretary of State of the United States. Dr. Albright received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, from President Obama on May 29, 2012.

Dr. Albright is a Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. Dr. Albright is Chair of Albright Capital Management LLC, an investment advisory firm focused on emerging markets. She also chairs the National Democratic Institute, serves as the president of the Truman Scholarship Foundation and is Honorary Co-Chair of the World Refugee & Migration Council.



### **Lloyd Axworthy, WRMC Chair and Former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs**

The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy is the chair of the World Refugee & Migration Council and one of Canada's leading voices on global migration and refugee protection. After a 27-year political career, where he served as Canada's minister of Foreign Affairs and minister of Employment and Immigration, among other postings, Mr. Axworthy has continued to work extensively on human security, refugee protection and human rights in Canada and abroad. He was presented with the Pearson Peace Medal by the Governor General of Canada in May 2017. In his term as president and vice-chancellor of the University of Winnipeg, Mr. Axworthy initiated innovative programs for migrant and aboriginal youth communities, and has also done a great deal of work on refugee reform as a Richard von Weizsäcker fellow at Germany's Robert Bosch Academy.



### **Mayu Brizuela de Ávila, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs for El Salvador, ICMP Commissioner**

Mayu Ávila is an El Salvadoran lawyer who served as the first woman Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1999 to 2004, she is also the first woman to become president of a private bank and an insurance company in El Salvador, and one of the first to sit on the regional Board of INCAE Business School. For a decade after 2007, she was Head of the pioneering Corporate Sustainability function at HSBC Latin America. Mayu has a solid academic background in Art, Insurance and Law, with a Masters in Business Administration and a Postgraduate qualification in Sustainable Business from the University of Cambridge.

## ▶ Panelists & Moderator



**Nicholas Kristof**, Moderator and *New York Times* Columnist

Nicholas Kristof has been a columnist for the *The New York Times* since 2001. He grew up on a farm in Oregon, graduated from Harvard, studied law at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, and then studied Arabic in Cairo. He was a longtime foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* and speaks various languages. Mr. Kristof has won two Pulitzer Prizes for his coverage of Tiananmen Square and the genocide in Darfur, along with many humanitarian awards such as the Anne Frank Award and the Dayton Literary Peace Prize.



## World Refugee & Migration Council

Chaired by former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the World Refugee & Migration Council offers bold thinking on how the international community can respond to refugees through cooperation & responsibility sharing.

This conference was made possible through a partnership with [Cuso International](#).

 [twitter.com/wrmcouncil](https://twitter.com/wrmcouncil)

 [facebook.com/wrmcouncil](https://facebook.com/wrmcouncil)

[info@wrmcouncil.org](mailto:info@wrmcouncil.org)