

Statement Delivered at the

**High-Level Panel on Migration and Structural Transformation in
Africa**

25 September 2018

12:00 - 14:00, Conference Room IV, UN Headquarters

New York, United States of America

Good afternoon Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocols observed.

My name is Dr. Carol Labor. I am honored to deliver remarks at the 2018 High-Level Panel on Migration and Structural Transformation in Africa. I have vivid memories of my father, the late Rvd. Clarence Labor being called upon to make funeral arrangements for unnamed Africans who died during their migration whose remains were in the hands of authorities in the Philadelphia area.

To paraphrase a 2017 article by Abdulai Mansaray, unlike in those days when our ancestors were forcibly removed from Africa, today it's not only voluntary but it feels vocational. There are stories of people selling their family heirlooms to pay thousands of dollars to human traffickers. Thousands of men, women, and children experience trauma and tragedy during their migration from Africa such as drowning, disease, violence, and indentured slavery in their quest for "a better life".

The shores of the Mediterranean coasts are littered with the bodies of Africans. From Libya, Spain, Italy, Malta and right down to Morocco, the fishermen now have a different catch. They are faced with the traumatic and gruesome task of fishing dead bodies from the seas on a daily basis. As we all know, this senseless loss of African lives in the Mediterranean seas occurs daily. A few weeks ago encountered a woman who left Sierra Leone, traveled to Guinea, smuggled on a boat and spent months on a journey that took her to Columbia, the jungles of Panama, and Mexico, only to be captured at the US/Mexico border and detained.

In spite of all the gruesome stories, the inhuman conditions in which some are held in transit, and the near certainty of death, Africans are desperately determined to make these journeys. Let's take a pause and ask ourselves; "what drives a person to take such extraordinary risks?"

I commendable the laudable efforts made by many of you here today including honorable representatives of African Member States, the African Union, African regional economic communities, the European Union, and the United Nations system.

As Africans, we must address the ecological factors and their complexities including, but not limited to intrapersonal/individual, interpersonal, institutional/organizational. Community, and public policy factors that influence voluntary or forced migration and the conditions within our respective countries that individuals are fleeing. We in the diaspora must return home and reduce the brain drain and contribute to the development of Africa, one that will decrease migration from its shores and create and/or improve conditions conducive to current global development trends. It is incumbent on us to do so.

Thank you.

Dr. Carol Labor
Global Public Health Consultant