EXCERPTS – SPEECH FOR THE CO-CHAIRMANSHIP OF *METROPOLIS FRANCOPHONIE MONDIALE*, 2020

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean is the 27th Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada, former UNESCO Special Envoy to Haiti, 3rd Secretary General of La Francophonie and co-founder of the Michaëlle Jean Foundation.

The Francophonie is a space that links peoples across five continents through language and often a shared history and heritage. It is also a space of mobility, migration, and cooperation. Moreover, when we free ourselves from the neo-colonial stranglehold and set up a dynamic of reciprocal relations based on values, there arises a vision of universal humanism. It is these values of mutual recognition and coexistence in diversity – diversity being a precious treasure and not a problem – that enable the creation and implementation of the best integration models and practices for newcomers. What we are discussing here is not a matter of assimilation, but the encounter of cultures, the exchange of experiences, and the interculturality of living together in diversity and respect for the other. These good practices are also widespread throughout Francophone countries. Therefore, establishing a network of partners, which both operate in the field of immigration and originate from the various countries of the international Francophone community, to regularly exchange and [...] address the challenges posed by migration in the Francophone world seems critical to me to fight against indifference and to take action.

[These exchanges can also serve as a] counterweight to the populist, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant movements of the extreme right, which are gaining ground and permeating political parties, to the point that their views are infiltrating their way into the heart of debates and electoral campaigns. We have experienced this in Canada. We have seen how some of them work their way into power, and this is very disturbing, even destabilizing.

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From my own experience, myself and my own family, like thousands of others who have been there, having experienced this distress, this forced escape towards the unknown in dire circumstances involving life and death, through my presence at the UN during high-level meetings dealing with migration issues, I have been the only one that was able to say that migration is not just a matter of statistics. I have been through it. I know what it is like, what it took, and what made the difference for us to get through it. It is a fundamental duty of solidarity, but also an obligation to assist people in danger whose rights are being threatened.

Therefore, it is imperative that we bring people to the table who can share their experiences and who work in the field. It is not surprising to see, for example, that associations representing immigrant communities are the organizations that best report on how the consequences of COVID-19 impact immigration and reception policies regarding newcomers.