



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at Thematic discussion 1 of the Global Compact on Refugees
“Past and current burden- and responsibility-sharing arrangements”
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Geneva, 10 July 2017

My Delegation wishes to welcome the two co-chairs and would like to thank the panelists for their thoughtful presentations.

The values expressed in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly those related to respect for fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of the human person, must be at the heart of our response to the plight of refugees and migrants. These same fundamental principles are affirmed by most major religious traditions in the world and by people of good will. The Golden Rule enjoins us to treat refugees and migrants the way we would want others to treat us if we were in their situation. Through the 2030 Agenda and the New York Declaration, UN Member States have committed to a set of shared priorities. In the area of trade policy, such actions are facilitated through a specific “funding envelope”, called Aid for Trade. In the area of climate change, an elaborate system of financing vehicles exists to support adaptation and mitigation in developing countries. Similarly, we need a dedicated financing facility to support capacity development for the implementation of migration-related international commitments.

By including a number of migration-related targets in the 2030 Agenda and adopting the New York Declaration, States have begun to acknowledge that the management of international migration is a shared responsibility, and will require joint commitment to translate words into deliverables. The name “Global Compact” was chosen to ensure global action in response to a global phenomenon: presently, an unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from home, and among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees¹.

¹ UNHCR data, <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

When confronting this phenomenon, we are aware that solidarity with a significant portion of suffering humanity does not happen without sacrifice. In some instances, refugees outnumber the local population, presenting obvious difficulties. To manage this issue, it is necessary, therefore, that all governments and members of civil society share respective responsibilities and burdens, in a true spirit of solidarity. We need global action anchored in solidarity.

The Global Compact on Refugees should aim at delivering “agreements” built on the long-standing values and principles, already articulated by States and thus enshrined in international instruments related to mass movements of refugees. To this end, as Pope Francis has appealed, our shared response should “be articulated by four verbs: to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate”².

A constant priority for States will and should be to improve cooperation on reducing irregular movements and dismantling criminal networks that have made a business out of smuggling migrants or trafficking people, exploiting their desperation and their search for a better life. As public pressure to be tough on “illegal immigration” is mounting, States should, however, heed the lessons from response to other forms of illicit trade and avoid the criminalization of victims and reliance on border and law enforcement *only*. Bilateral, regional and inter-regional partnerships and cooperation platforms on migration can provide valuable venues for building trust and capacity-strengthening. This process also could play a pivotal role in ensuring that State practice and cooperation regarding irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling are guided by and adhere to international law, including human rights and refugee law, and do not undermine the right to seek asylum

Upon arrival at their respective destinations, refugees often find mistrust, suspicion, discrimination, racism and a lack of clear policies that hinder their acceptance. After being forcibly displaced from their homes, they too often face rejection, exclusion, and the absence of a welcome in the places where they seek welcome and protection.

A change of behavior is needed on the part of everyone, “moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture

² Pope Francis Message to the 6th International Forum on Migration and Peace, 21st February 2017. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/february/documents/papa-francesco_20170221_forum-migrazioni-pace.html

capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world”³. Even if we can find various organizations engaged in opening accessible and secure humanitarian channels, a sustainable, effective, and comprehensive solution does not seem possible without the commitment of all the stakeholders.

Moreover, efforts to shape action at the global level must inextricably be linked to the protection and promotion of human dignity of all refugees, which always has been an essential pillar in the mission and programmes of UNHCR.

Protection of the fundamental rights of all people is key to addressing the situation of refugees and displaced persons, to prevent root causes of further displacement, and to provide a safe and welcoming environment for those already forced to flee. No State can achieve these goals in solitary fashion. Once again, regional and global solidarity is urgently needed to promote more just and peaceful societies, which must be the ultimate goal in preventing the forced displacement of people. In this regard, as on many other occasions the Holy See expresses its commitment to participate in this urgently-needed common task.

Finally, it is of utmost importance that we encourage and facilitate the integration of refugees. Full and welcoming integration is the natural pathway toward ensuring the construction of peaceful societies, in which people coexist while simultaneously being enriched by their differences. As a matter of fact, the benefits of successful integration can be measured on an economic scale. A recent study found that refugees, during the first 20 years since their arrival, had individually contributed \$21,000 more in taxes than they received in aid⁴. Moreover, since one of the fundamental principles of the 2030 Agenda is to “leave no one behind”, the international community should include the anticipated contribution of refugees and asylum seekers in their respective plans for both medium- and long-term development.

³ Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 5th August 2013.

⁴ William N. Evans, Daniel Fitzgerald. *The Economic and Social Outcomes of Refugees in the United States: Evidence from the ACS*, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, June 2017.

Dr. Evans estimated the 2014 cost of resettlement was \$9,680 per refugee, which translates to less than six dollars per U.S. household. He found that it took refugees nine years to become net contributors to the society. After nine years in the U.S. refugees’ tax dollar contributions increased to the degree that they completely offset and eventually far outpaced social insurance costs (food stamps, welfare payments, social security, Medicaid and Medicare).

In conclusion Mr. Chair,

The New York Declaration set us on the journey toward achieving global solidarity with refugees. While continuing to recognize the unprecedented level of displacement currently being experienced, we must strongly affirm the rights of refugees, and commit ourselves to enhance the protection and durable solutions available to them, as provided for by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

To this end, we must bear in mind that refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. “They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more”⁵. Let us strive, therefore, to promote openness to refugees and forced migrants among all States and members of civil society in all parts of the world, since “it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace”⁶ while recognizing our common bonds in one human family.

⁵ Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 5 August 2013.

⁶ Pope Francis, Message to the 6th International Forum on Migration and Peace, 21st February 2017.
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/february/documents/papa-francesco_20170221_forum-migrazioni-pace.html