



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See  
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee of the  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
3 October 2017

Madam President,

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to congratulate you on your election and to take this opportunity to thank the High Commissioner for his inspiring remarks.

My Delegation also wishes to reiterate Pope Francis' prayers and support for the migrants and refugees fleeing from war, persecution, natural disaster and poverty. At the same time, we wish to express deep gratitude to the countries that have opened their doors to refugees.

In September last year, through the adoption of the New York Declaration, the international community recommitted to the Refugee Convention and to the international protection regime, which sets out the fundamental rights of refugees to seek safety in other countries and be received with care and dignity<sup>1</sup>

In spite of such positive momentum, the global refugee regime continues to be increasingly challenged both *de jure* and *de facto*. The noble goals set by the 1951 Refugee Convention are progressively being eroded. Existing rights in refugee law are no longer honored because of security concerns and, as a consequence, the adoption of stricter acceptance policies impacts dangerously on the safety of refugees and inevitably leads to increased smuggling. The securitization of border control and the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers should not be seen as a dichotomy, but rather as mutually reinforcing.

Defending the inalienable rights of refugees, "ensuring their fundamental freedoms and respecting their dignity are duties from which no one can be exempted. Protecting these brothers and sisters is a moral imperative which translates into adopting juridical instruments, both international and national, that must be clear and relevant; implementing just and far reaching political choices".<sup>2</sup>

Madam President,

While many have interpreted the current situation as a crisis of numbers it is, in reality, more a crisis of attitude and values, where indifference implies complicity. "Our commitment to migrants, exiles and refugees is an application of those principles and values of welcome and fraternity that constitute a common patrimony of humanity and wisdom"<sup>3</sup>. The way in which we treat refugees and the way we support those States that are carrying the brunt of caring for the refugees they have welcomed into their territory is a true litmus test of our humanity and solidarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Address of the High Commissioner for Refugees to the GA*, 18 September 2017

<sup>2</sup> *Address of Pope Francis to the International Forum on Migration and Peace*, 21 February 2017

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Pope Francis dedicated his message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees to the theme of “*Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees*”, thus calling for the promotion of an integral human development of migrants and refugees. “The principle of the centrality of the human person... obliges us to always prioritize personal safety over national security.”<sup>4</sup>

Following Pope Francis’ inspiring words, my Delegation wishes to make an appeal to renew our common determination to find a new consensus on humanitarian principles: refugees are not numbers to be distributed and allocated, but persons with a name, a story, hope and aspirations for an integral human development, who have been forced to flee their country and now need protection and assistance. This new consensus requires a coordinated and global effort involving the political community, civil society, international organizations and religious institutions.

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to highlight only some of the concrete measures suggested by Pope Francis to promote the respect of the God-given dignity of every human person who is forced to migrate: the implementing of a more widespread adoption of private and community sponsorship programs; the opening of humanitarian corridors and special temporary visas for particularly vulnerable refugees fleeing conflicts in neighboring countries; the need to respect the universal right to a nationality duly certified for all children at birth; the need to do more to respect the unity of the family, the natural and fundamental unit of society and an essential right of the refugee; the need to avoid detention and find alternatives; the need to guarantee regular access to primary and secondary education for child refugees.

At the same time, it is important to recall that every refugee has duties towards the host country, which require in particular that he/she respect its laws and regulations for the achievement of the common good of all.

Madam President,

It is of the utmost importance to break down the misconception surrounding the narrative on refugees. Too often they are blamed as responsible for the situation in their country of origin. Not only are they fleeing conflict and persecutions they had no control over, but they are often subjected to discrimination and resistance in host countries. The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to denounce the duplicity and cynicism of providing humanitarian aid on the one hand while adopting policies that foment conflicts on the other, without solving the underlying political causes.

Madam President,

In conclusion please allow me to share a few words on the development of the *Comprehensive Refugees Response Framework* (CRRF). While it is our common hope that there would be no refugee, unfortunately, refugees have always been part of our human history. Bearing in mind that since 2007 the population of concern to the UNHCR has more than doubled, the plight of refugees continues to be “*a shameful wound of our time*”<sup>5</sup>, it is important to put in place far-sighted strategies and structures that serve the common good not only of those who arrive but also of the citizens of the host countries.

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<sup>4</sup> *Message of Pope Francis for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*

<sup>5</sup> cf. Saint John Paul II, *Letter to the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees*, 25 June 1982

As we had the opportunity to hear during the special segment, thanks to the considerable efforts of the UNHCR, the CRRF is now being applied in 11 countries. The lessons that can be drawn from these experiences will be instrumental in the development of a sound and people-centered Global Compact on Refugees.

It is my Delegation's hope that the CRRF will be effective in alleviating the stories of pain and in supporting the stories of hope of women, men, and children fleeing conflicts, persecutions and other forms of violence in their desperate search for a more secure and dignified existence.

Thank you, Madam President.