



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 54th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee
of the UNHCR on International Protection
Geneva, 26 June 2012

Mr. Chairman,

Protection remains an urgent concern. With 42.5 million persons forced out from their homes or remaining in exile for fear of persecution and of violation of their fundamental human rights, and in many cases life threatening hostility because of their religious convictions, the international community is challenged to devise creative responses adequate to today's circumstances. Unfortunately, the task is made more difficult by the fact that in addition to the traditional armed conflicts, forced displacement is exacerbated by climate change, lack of food, natural disasters and by the complex situations created by war-lords and rebels and by breakaway regions. Moreover, the political will to help is weakened by economic and domestic crises that make public opinion less generous to offer asylum and restrict, rather than enlarge, the number of countries ready to provide it. The 1951 Convention on the status of refugees was an important step forward sixty-one years ago; it shows some limits now in addressing the needs of an increasingly connected, globalized and complex world. Under the current understanding of 'refugee' many individuals are excluded from receiving the proper protection that should be afforded to them based on their human rights and on human rights law as well as on our collective responsibility of solidarity.

Protection of these vulnerable groups—refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, stranded migrants and other people obliged to move for survival—is an international imperative that requires a positive, institutionalized approach to humanitarian assistance. Every person's innate dignity calls for a response especially in situations of suffering and uprootedness. As the Holy Father Benedict XVI said a few days ago on the occasion of the World Day of Refugees: "...I express the hope that their rights may always be respected."¹

The international community can move to a non-categorical approach to the forced displacement crises without regard to the status of the people involved. The primary concern of States and relevant stakeholders should be to protect and promote the fundamental human rights of those who are forcibly removed from their normal situations

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, Sunday, 17 June 2012

in their places of origins. Humanitarian assistance, freed from a consideration of the status of a person, should aim at supporting their immediate needs and to plan long-term solutions leading to a normal life.

A non-categorical approach to humanitarian assistance is important so that each individual person is recognized and attended to. In fact, the individual person has to be afforded protection and assistance as the implementation of his or her human rights, and more importantly because of his inalienable human dignity. A useful step to achieving the protection of all people seeking refuge is to universalize legal obligations on States in relation to protection and assistance of internally displaced persons.

An additional benefit of a non-categorical approach is a more comprehensive opportunity to sustainable resettlement with a shorter period to determine its implementation. At the same time, the unity of the family remains an important and even necessary resource in making any long-term solution really successful. Education also is a critical resource for protection. It should be provided to both boys and girls in order to give them tools to succeed and as a means against their falling victim of trafficking, abuse and other similar atrocities. These policies of international protection have to continue to be inclusive and non-discriminatory on matters of age, sex, religion or race.

In conclusion, as traditional distinctions among categories of people on the move are increasingly blurred, the existing normative framework can be interpreted with a serious concern for the human rights for all and reinforced by a sense of human solidarity. To remedy the protection gap at this moment when political and economic conditions do not seem favorable to new international norms, more generous interpretations should find wide agreement, national and regional policies should find greater support and more practical cooperation should develop among the existing institutions concerned with displaced people. Of course, the best solution resides in hearts disposed to peace and in a political determination to work at pre-empting conflicts in the first place.

The protection system needs greater policy attention. Affected countries should be helped in improving their capacity to protect and measures enacted to interdict and expedite removal and immigration-related security programs should not prevent bona fide asylum-seekers and people looking for survival from reaching territorial protection.

Mr Chairman,

Persons fleeing their home leave because of fear and desperation. But more importantly, their decision is an act of faith and hope that the solidarity of the human family and the actions of the international community will continue to witness and provide compassion and support that will enable them to enjoy again their human rights and a normal existence.