



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 63rd Session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR
Geneva, 2 October 2012

Mr. Chairman,

The surge in the number of recent conflicts has produced new waves of refugees and displaced persons. The futility of violence as a method for resolving disputes is evident in the price in suffering that hundreds of thousands of persons, mostly women and children, are paying as a consequence of political decisions that disregard their human impact. Forcibly uprooted people challenge the international community, that has failed to prevent it, to respond to their vulnerability. Family life has been disrupted, minors find themselves in a lonely life in refugee camps or in dangerous urban environments, and for all refugees the traumatic experience of death and destruction left behind marks their existence forever. These facts are all too familiar as they repeat themselves with every new crisis without, unfortunately, teaching us to avoid such tragedies.

The media spotlight focuses on the more politically interesting cases for them and leave in the shadows of public awareness other masses of displaced people forgotten and left to their tragic destiny. The Holy See Delegation takes note and is grateful for those countries which have kept their borders and their hearts open to receive refugees fleeing conflict in neighboring States and calls on all member States to assist in sharing the burden these new refugee populations place on many of their hosts.

New complicating variables make the obligation to assist today's refugees more difficult. Not only the persisting economic crisis limits the options of response to the current emergencies, but also a devastating drought in some parts of the world has damaged crops and further weakened economic recovery. Food prices are volatile and foodstuff is excessively used for biofuels. Thus, food for refugee camps costs more and risks to be inadequate. It would be an additional tragedy if food speculation were to aggravate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the increasing number of refugees and forcibly displaced persons.

Regarding burden sharing in the present circumstances, a country's wealth and level of development needs to be taken into account. Allow me to quote a pertinent remark by Pope Benedict XVI writing to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany: "The Holy See has repeatedly insisted that, while the Governments of poorer countries have a responsibility with regard to good governance and the elimination of

poverty, the active involvement of international partners is indispensable. This should not be seen as an “extra” or as a concession which could be postponed in the face of pressing national concerns. It is a grave and unconditional moral responsibility, founded on the unity of the human race, and on the common dignity and shared destiny of rich and poor alike, who are drawn ever closer by the process of globalization.”¹

The limits now experienced with implementing the classical durable solutions of voluntary return, resettlement and local integration should encourage both new efforts to prevent refugee flows and to imagine some concrete mechanisms for a fairer distribution of responsibility in today’s globalized world. The application of the concept of citizenship as an equalizing basic right instead of ethnic or religious affiliation for the population of a country could serve as a good example of a new understanding of social cohesion that helps to prevent conflicts. The commitment to formation of a reconciliation attitude instead of approving and teaching hatred and revenge to children, especially those affected by forced uprooting, will alleviate the risk of future revenge and violence and consequent refugee production. The vicious circle can be broken by forgiveness, dialogue and reconciliation.

Mr. Chairman,

An inevitable consequence of protracted refugee situations is that children born into them get older. Like all children they need hope for their future and an opportunity to develop into productive adults. Education is a key factor in this development. My Delegation welcomes the UNHCR’s expanded vision of education announced in its recent education policy. The preparation of teachers, the availability of education facilities no matter how simple, regular teaching programs, are invaluable resources and good evidence of their value is provided by their implementation in the largest world refugee camp of Dadaab (Kenya). Very important is also the recognition in the UNHCR’s policy that ending refugee education with primary education is to stunt development of the children in our care. The Holy See calls on States hosting refugee populations to remove all barriers to further education for these children, barriers such as study permits and lack of access to government sponsored scholarships, so that their potential might be realized. For the countries unable to meet these objectives, international solidarity should help them. Even though resources are really stretched at the moment, investment in education assures benefits for the future.

Mr. Chairman,

It is once again a fact this year that there are more persons internally displaced by conflict in the world than there are refugees. My Delegation is also aware that the topic of the extent of the UNHCR’s involvement in providing assistance to IDPs is one on which States differ. In some instances, there is a genuine fear of “mission creep” and

¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20061216_vertice-g8_en.html

a concern that the core mission of the UNHCR, protection of refugees, will suffer. In other instances, there is reason to suspect that the presence of neutral, international eyes during internal armed conflict or the provision of life saving assistance to locally disfavored groups might not be welcome. The Holy See encourages the High Commissioner to continue to go the extra mile with regards to those displaced by armed conflict. This should be done in the first instance by seeking humanitarian access to affected populations to assess their protection needs and in the second instance in coordination with other United Nations bodies by providing crucial assistance to these people. In connection with this the Holy See welcomes the humanitarian efforts being made by the UNHCR on behalf of the people of the Eastern area of the Democratic Republic of Congo. At the same, time my Delegation sincerely hopes that the pleas from the religious leaders of the region be heard and acted on by all parties to the conflict in that region that the killings, rapes, and forced recruitment of child soldiers end.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, as armed clashes persist and new uprooted people are obliged to seek survival in exile and in precarious conditions of physical and psychological suffering it becomes our common responsibility to search and apply more creative and concrete forms of solidarity and protection.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.