



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 64th Session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR
Geneva, 2 October 2013

Madam President,

In recent years, crises have multiplied in different regions of the world, and they have produced growing numbers of forcibly displaced people. By some estimates, 100 million people have left their homes involuntarily in order to seek freedom, safety, and survival outside their region or their country. These uprooted masses represent a protection concern that challenges States and the international community. Often going unnoticed among the available statistics are some particularly troubling trends: in 2012, there were 21,300 applications by unaccompanied or separated children among the overall number of 893,700 claims; 15.4 million refugees were counted in all parts of the world; mixed migration groups took to the sea, which caused increasingly complex normative and practical challenges for efforts to assist them; 26 million people were displaced by armed conflicts, violence and human rights violations and whose presence adds a serious strain on very weak national and local institutions. Syria is an emblematic case, as the special High-Level Segment has shown. Legal instruments have been developed for the protection of these people, but a significant gap persists between the implementation of agreed standards and reality on the ground. Thus, it becomes clear that humanitarian solutions cannot be effective unless the underlying political factors are solved.

Emergencies, such as the conflicts in Syria and in the African and Asian continents, have motivated an admirable and generous response of host countries, that keep their borders open to even large numbers of persons in need of refuge, and the practical importance to further develop effective partnerships to meet the increasing demands. Faith-based communities are immediately open and responsive to the first impact of new arrivals and provide emergency relief. With limited resources, and putting to best use their identity and base in local communities, knowledge of the territory, and their influence, they strive to create a climate of acceptance and support. Their engagement continues on a long-term basis and, whenever possible, they accompany forcibly displaced people during their life in camps, or in poor urban neighbourhoods, and provide counselling and education, job placement, food and shelter. By establishing friendly human relations with the refugees after their inhuman treatment, these organizations facilitate a healing process.

An important dimension of protection in the uncertainty, isolation and abandonment experienced by forcibly uprooted persons is offering them some hope about the future, a

sense of meaning that may serve as a compass to their lives despite the disruptive and painful circumstances they face. In this way, refugees can muster the psychological strength to cope with their situation, plan for the future, and maintain initiative no matter how depressing the environment. In this way they also become agents of development and creativity and enrich the communities that welcome them. Refugee children in particular – over one million of them have just crossed the Syrian borders – need access to education to serve as a guarantee for their future, so that immediate survival may turn into the beginning of a constructive journey toward a normal existence.

Madam President,

Solidarity and burden sharing on the part of countries receiving refugees should not diminish because of compassion fatigue. The long years of giving should be considered in relation to the protracted situations of some 7.5 million refugees trapped in exile and to the traumatic and multi-faceted suffering of newly produced forcibly displaced people. Today millions of uprooted persons send a new appeal to the international community: to share the means of survival; to recommit to prevention of new refugee flows; to ensure a good future for those who have fled. The links between extreme poverty, inequality and violations of human rights, on one hand, and conflicts and wars on the other, is well established. The only reasonable and advantageous path ahead is dialogue to prevent new catastrophes, additional vulnerable groups, new victims, especially women and children, who, in many cases, are subjected to abuse, new suffering, expensive refugee response programmes, and new instability for everyone. As already John XXIII observed in 1962: “Promoting, favouring, accepting conversations at all levels and in any time, is a rule of wisdom and prudence which attracts the blessings of heaven and earth.”

Madam President,

In conclusion, the Delegation of the Holy See shares in and supports the contribution to the cause of refugees, of host and donor countries, and of local communities. It constantly encourages concrete responses, especially on the part of religiously motivated communities and organizations, working in partnership with others. Pope Francis has recently said: “Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity.”¹ Indeed, a new effort is required: to go at the root of refugee production and to address squarely the political responsibility to work together to prevent forcible uprooting of people and promote the respect of the God-given dignity of every person.

Thank you, Madam President!

¹ Pope Francis. Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 19 January 2014.