



Presentation by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 26th Session of the Human Rights Council
- Item 3: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants
Geneva, 13 June 2014

Mr. President,

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants clearly points out several critical issues concerning exploitation of migrants and underlined the emergence of new vulnerable groups among people on the move. He also has rightly emphasized that the role of the recruitment agencies should be analyzed in a specific way. Migration is certainly beneficial for all involved, countries of origin, of arrival and for migrant themselves. After the anxiety and adjustment difficulties of the first impact between newcomers and host population, ample documentation supports the conclusion of the overall beneficial contribution of migrants, a fact that should be highlighted for an appropriate public perception of this phenomenon. As recalled by Pope Francis “A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees 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 capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world”¹. There remains, however, a tragic and suffering side of this experience: trafficking of persons, abuse of migrant domestic workers and slave labor. Among the relatively new categories of people on the move who call for a new form of protection and urgently demand the attention of the International Community are unaccompanied minors, whose numbers and abuses are fast growing

Forced displacement of people caused by current wars and the multiplication of violent conflicts in several regions of the globe is pushing hundreds of thousands of people to risk their lives in the search for survival. A poignant reminder of the futility of violence is the thousands of children who leave their homes and become asylum seekers. In 2011, 12,225 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in Europe. They represented all the trouble spots of the Middle East and Africa. Symptomatic is also the explosion of child migrants travelling alone in the hope of crossing the border into the United States. The child migrants surge has resulted in a steady increase from 2008 to today so much so that in 2013 38,883 unaccompanied minors were apprehended at the United States-Mexican

¹ Pope Francis, Message for the World Day for Migrants and Refugees, 2014.

border and authorities anticipate that the numbers will double to well over 70,000 for 2014. On make-shift boats that cross the Mediterranean or on the railroads that connect from Central America to the North, these children are exposed to sexual violations, to starvation, to mutilations when they fall and even to the loss of life, when their boats sink or they get lost in the desert. This child exodus is primarily caused by the destabilization and endemic violence in the home-countries. Some children want to exercise their natural right to be with their families since these may be for years residing in another country without proper documentation. Others are faced with the necessity to escape an environment where more than 90% of the victims of homicide are young male adults and where as well 90% of those who commit homicide are young male adults: both are prompted to escape for survival. Others still prefer to die on the way to a dreamed destination of survival rather than dying of hunger or being killed by gangs and organized crime at home. Finally, the allure of a different life style presented by television pre-socializes other children to move.

In this complex situation it would be useful if the Special Rapporteur would add his contribution in helping Governments to devise some urgently needed solutions. Children on the move constitute a humanitarian emergency that calls for immediate remedies. Detention of minors is not an option and the best interest of the child should prevail even in these challenging circumstances. In an effort to prevent the continual flow of minors, international solidarity can be effective by helping to address urban violence at the source of the children's exodus. Legal channels for family reunification will also avoid children resorting to unsafe routes where their exploitation becomes almost unavoidable. Humanitarian values suggest as well the creation of some mechanisms of regularization that would allow children to live with their parents. This natural human right certainly takes priority over administrative infringement of border regulations. Finally, joint projects could open up some educational and employment opportunities for young people that would give them a sense of hope for the future and the reason to stay at home.

Thank you, Mr. President