



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 High-Level Segment of the 65th Session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR: Enhancing International Cooperation, Solidarity, Local Capacities and Humanitarian Action for Refugees in Africa  
*Geneva, 30 September 2014*

Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See supports the UNHCR Executive Committee Statement on Enhancing International Cooperation, Solidarity, Local Capacities and Humanitarian Action for Refugees in Africa. The Statement is a timely reminder of the persistent flow of forcibly uprooted peoples and a call to overcome the globalization of indifference to their suffering.

Within the African continent, as well as from Africa toward Europe and the world, the search of a safe haven and of a decent life pushes many people to abandon their homes and to cross borders to escape danger and oppressive conditions. Knowingly they even risk death on flimsy boats and often the cruelty of smugglers. Too many victims have turned the waters of the Mediterranean into a silent cemetery. Excessively restrictive border regulation policies, which lend themselves to the dangerous practice of smuggling of human persons as “cargo”, have pushed thousands of asylum seekers to undertake a fatal journey along which their dreams and their lives are shattered.

The hospitality of African countries proved to be a major life-saver in the many crises that have tormented the continent in recent decades. Refugees were received and given a chance to survive until repatriation became possible. In many cases, the opportunity to resettle locally was generously provided. International solidarity has often matched African generosity but neither are inexhaustible resources. A renewed engagement in a policy of prevention is now urgent. The efforts of the International community to prevent conflicts, and bad governance which stifle development, are necessary in order to reduce the number of persons forcibly displaced. In essence, this requires a culture of peace, which is only possible when the human person is placed at the center of concerns, national plans and social goals, thus acknowledging his inherent dignity and the respect that his fundamental human rights deserve.

A change of mentality is required, one that rejects violence as a means of confronting personal and community differences and that transcends tribal, ethnic and national interests in the service of the common good.

African nations have invested political and economic capital in coordinating their continental action for a more efficient response to their need of development and peaceful resolution of differences. The juridical instruments produced for the protection of forcibly displaced populations offer useful tools to tackle the causes of forced displacement, so that today's asylum seekers and uprooted people may receive an adequate protection.

Additional practical steps are listed in the Executive Committee Statement. These measures can provide effective relief to the plight of asylum seekers and IDPs. Pope Francis pleads: "Above all I ask leaders and legislators and the entire international community to confront the reality of those who have been displaced by force with effective projects and new approaches in order to protect their dignity, to improve the quality of their life and to face the challenges that are emerging from modern forms of persecution, oppression and slavery."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. President,

Unfortunately, forced displacement continues on the African continent as a result of violence used in the pursuit of selfish power and ideological imposition. Developing new strategies, by incorporating the best of experience proven methods, is the only way to confront the current challenges. The political determination to prevent conflicts through dialogue and inclusiveness and an effective solidarity that bridges the gap between developing and developed regions of the world will open a path to a peaceful future.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 24 May 2013.