



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 29th Session of the Human Rights Council
Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Migrants
Geneva, 15 June 2015

Mr. President,

The multilateral system, and immigration countries in particular, have not yet succeeded in effectively managing migration. While much generosity in receiving asylum seekers and migrants has been evident, a long-range immigration strategy is still lacking. The consequence, in Pope Francis' words, is abdication of responsibility because "leaving our brothers on boats to die... is an attack against life"¹. In fact, since January 2015 well over 1,800 migrants have already lost their lives while attempting to cross the Mediterranean². An estimated 25,000 Rohingyas and Bangladeshi have boarded smugglers' boats destined for Thailand and Malaysia³ in the first three months of 2015. A shocking total of 68,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol from October 2013 to September 2014⁴.

Mr. President,

The push factors for such gigantic migration and refugee flows are well-known to the international community: the organized business of human trafficking that exploits people in desperate situations; no end to poverty; lack of jobs; unstable political situations, discrimination, health crises, persecutions, bloody wars and famines. The multilateral system needs to work better together: migration and climate change are major challenges of the 21st Century. In the long term, it is necessary to address the root causes of such a global phenomenon. The clock is ticking and the longer we wait, the higher the costs will be. All these persons on the move for different reasons have rights that the national and international communities must protect and respect in practice. The Delegation of the Holy See would like to suggest some concrete steps.

First, search and rescue operations should continue and be further strengthened, as the need to protect the right to life of all, regardless of their status, must remain the

¹ Pope Francis, Address to participants in the meeting sponsored by the Science and Life Association, 30 May 2015

² <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/sites/default/files/pictures/IOM-Mediterranean-Update-26May2015.jpg>

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/554c8adf9.html>

⁴ <http://www.wola.org/commentary/latest-border-stats-point-to-heavy-child-family-migration-in-2015>

priority; second, resettlement in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, should be effectively carried out and more fairly distributed, with due attention for security and social needs, but without acquiescing to irrational populist pressures; third, competent authorities should provide safer legal channels of emigration and practical acceptance so as to reconcile migrants' rights and the legitimate interests of the receiving societies.

Mr. President,

The perception of migrants as a burden runs against the evidence of their contribution to the national economy of the host countries, to the social security system and to the demographic deficit.⁵ Accumulating evidence shows that, besides enriching the national culture with new values and perspectives, migrants contribute through the taxes they pay, the new businesses they start, as well as the array of services they provide. For instance, some stunning 497,000 new enterprises were run by foreign citizens in Italy in 2013⁶, and according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), migrants accounted for 47% of the increase in the workforce in the United States and 70% in Europe over the past ten years⁷. Far from being an obstacle, newcomers therefore prove to be a crucial positive factor for the economy and a creative presence in society.

Mr. President,

At the same time, other long-range strategies are required. The issue of migration is not an isolated variable, but an important component in the context of political, economic and trade relations between sending and receiving countries. No person with the possibility of living with dignity in his or her home country would feel compelled to flee it. International solidarity should then strive to create the proper environment "at home", thus making migration a choice and not a compulsive necessity. This may be accomplished by creating quality and decent jobs, promoting a more just and equitable financial and economic order, improving access to markets, trade and competition, by exchanging innovative technology, raising participation and political stability.

An increasing number of people are moving to urban centers, a development that calls for fresh reflection on integration to ensure peaceful coexistence in society. Aside from mere economic reasons, the interest of the receiving society is served in the long run by the acceptance of newcomers in their difference and by their openness to progressive integration in the new environment by accepting the fundamental values, rights and obligations, that make possible a common future.

⁵ *Fair Migration: Setting an ILO agenda*, 2014, p.4

⁶ 2015 ISTAT Annual Report, available at <http://www.istat.it/it/files/2015/05/Rapporto-Annuale-2015.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf>, p.2

Fairness demands that a positive image of newcomers be adopted with a common, friendly, and appropriate terminology for media at the national level, so as to avoid ambiguity, demagoguery and the stirring up of racism, discrimination, exploitation by unscrupulous politicians. Above all, respect for the dignity of the human person remains the touchstone. At the same time, receiving countries should put in place proper mechanisms for social acceptance of migrants, for example by drafting Charters on rights and responsibilities of migrants, which are readily comprehensible, so as better to integrate migrants and provide them with a secure legal status, with clear and specific rights and responsibilities.

In conclusion, we thank the Special Rapporteur for the best practices outlined in his report and for playing an important role in maintaining a high level of public awareness and we welcome resolution 26/19 of the Human Rights Council which further extended his mandate.

Mr. President,

The proper implementation of human rights becomes truly beneficial for migrants, as well as for the sending and receiving countries. The measures suggested are not a mere concession to migrants. They are in the interest of migrants, host societies, and the international community at large. Promoting and respecting the human rights of migrants and their dignity ensures that everyone's rights and dignity in society are fully respected.