



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 63rd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the UNHCR
Geneva, 24 June 2015

Mr. Chairman,

Protection of forcibly uprooted people remains a priority for the international community. The UNHCR High Commissioner reminded the world that in 2014, a daily average of 42,500 people became refugees, asylum-seekers, or internally displaced persons. More than 60 million people for a variety of reasons are displaced from their homes, the highest number since the end of World War II.

The plight of so many exiles moves one to have both compassion and indignation because of the unjust suffering inflicted on them. It also generates an irrational hostility in some groups as if the victims of violence and abuse of their human rights were the culprits for their own condition. The international community has to go beyond emotions, however, and translate its duty to protect into action. This is the real test of solidarity. The first step is an attitude of acceptance that should start at the borders, as indicated in the guidelines produced by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in *Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders*. (A/69/CRP.1 23 - July 2014) In these present disconcerting circumstances, extraordinary solidarity is called for, specifically a more generous resettlement policy and a stronger commitment to responsibility sharing.

The present situation is also producing asylum-seekers who are not protected by existing juridical instruments. For example, Pope Francis writes in his new encyclical on the care of our common home (*Laudato Si'*): "There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever." (n. 25) A similar concern is addressed by the timely Nansen Initiative, that aims at meeting the needs of people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change.

Thus, the current emergency can become an opportunity to be more innovative and to explore new legal forms of protection like: the use of humanitarian visas in a wider way, the encouragement of community-based sponsorships of individuals and families, the opening of legal channels of passage so asylum-seekers may not have to risk their lives on rickety boats or deadly land-crossing or have to pay exorbitant sums to reach a safe haven where to apply for protection. An exclusively security-oriented approach overlooks two important facts: that asylum-seekers are not a problem but human persons who are

themselves the living victims of tragedies that forced them into exile; and that the common good extends beyond the national borders of a single State.

The dramatic increase in the number of persons requiring international protection is related to the growing phenomenon of failed States, the recourse to violence to solve disputes and the ravages of climate change. These crises, in turn, speak of failed global governance and of global powers becoming passive observers or a distant manipulative influence in the conflicts driving so many innocent civilians from their homes. The critical variable to end the bloodshed and the forced exodus of the population seems to be missing, the political will to reach a concrete solution as also underlined in the UNHCR's document *Solution Strategies*. While funding is necessary, prevention is to be pursued more urgently: it will spare much suffering and it will be much less burdensome financially. Again, a variety of national and regional interests impede both the necessary political dialogue and the contextualization of displacement as a consequence of confrontational international relations.

Neighboring countries to failed States, and to States at war, carry the heaviest burden of caring for the refugees they have welcomed into their territory. The international community, however, has to shoulder collectively the responsibility of assisting the victims of the many on-going conflicts. Thus, in the distribution of financial resources for development on the part of international institutions, special consideration should be given to refugee-hosting countries. It is a practical measure that strengthens these countries and prevents the risk of their destabilization and the eventual production of more internally displaced persons and refugees.

Looking ahead, the refugee and displaced persons situation will unfortunately continue for some time. A changed outlook is needed. Forcibly uprooted people can be a resource for their own country's reconstruction and stabilization in any political effort of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. In countries of new residence, they contribute their intelligence and their skills in building a common future that benefit all. They are human persons first and the protection of their rights and dignity is an investment that guarantees the respect and protection of the dignity of all.