



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 International Dialogue on Migration – Migrants and Cities:
New Partnerships to Manage Mobility
Geneva, 27 October 2015

Madam Chairperson,

The Delegation of the Holy See is pleased to participate in this High-Level Conference on Migrants and Cities, a theme which is filled with challenges and opportunities. As is well known, urbanization is a global reality that has witnessed exponential increases in the last decades. Over 54 per cent of people across the globe were living in urban areas in 2014. It is estimated that the number of people living in cities will nearly double to some 6.4 billion by 2050, turning much of the world into a global city.¹ For the first time in human history, we are witnessing the density of population in urban areas surpassing the population in rural areas. In general, urban settings constitute a pull factor, offering the promise of economic progress, of upward social mobility, of greater access to jobs, as well as improved education opportunities and better health care. Such a changing demographic provides challenges and opportunities for the migrants themselves and the host cities, both on the cultural, social and economic levels.

Many cities have tried to approach these challenges by forming urban areas for migrants. In countries with a significant gap between the haves and have-nots, public spaces are often made exclusive, the so-called *gated communities*. These areas function as a type of exclusive social “barrier”, a sort of enclave for the wealthy classes, who shelter themselves up within walls as protection against the insecurity that derives from social inequalities. Within such areas, the standard of living, including the amenities and civil infrastructure is not comparable to those conditions experienced by those who are outside of those walls. This situation poses the need to rethink the relationship between the city and migrants from the urban space to which they are destined, as well as their interactions with other social groups. Therefore, it is necessary to think on how to break a pattern of development that unravels the social fabric of urban life and design a new public policy of the city, directed to increase sustainable relationships between inhabitants.

Urban centers constitute the largest hubs of the world’s economy. They are the places where the most industry, investment, innovation are found, with the potential of job opportunities at all levels. In fact, it is well known that most all wealthy nations are predominantly urban in their demographic. Hence, there exists a strong association

¹ Cfr., IOM, World Migration Report 2015.

between scale of economic growth and increase in level of urbanization which is inherently linked to the reality of migration. As a result, the reality of today urban aggregations can be described through the concept of “super-diversity”, due to the heterogeneous migratory backgrounds and to their intersection with other types of diversity, often described as fostering economic competitiveness and common wellbeing. Migration flows not only provide a cheap labor force to sustain the everyday functioning of the urban economies; they also bring about new entrepreneurs, new contributors to an ever-evolving social setting.

When considering the role of migrants’ contribution for the economic and social development of hosting societies, a specific focus must be put on their civic engagement and desirable involvement in voluntary work within both ethnic and mainstream organizations. Besides producing a positive impact on the migrants’ empowerment and well-being, supporting their process of integration, their involvement in the social and civil life of the urban community, permit them to give back to the host country what they have received, according to the logic of reciprocity, and to feel more appreciated and welcomed. Moreover, migrants’ involvement in the civic and associative spheres has a positive impact on social cohesion. The presence of migrants among the staff of mainstream organizations makes it possible to mediate cultural values, to promote the dialogue between cultures, to improve the linguistic and cultural skills of other volunteers.

Migrants’ social involvement increases the associations’ expertise and expands their offer; enriches the problem-solving process; promotes international contacts and cooperation with the sending countries. Moreover, it allows local communities and newcomers to meet and to become involved together in issues of common interest thus boosting interethnic, interreligious and intercultural interactions, enabling them to deal with social change and to recognize the opportunities arising from a society that embraces cultural diversity. This promotes an attitude of openness to other cultures both in the receiving society’s population and in the ethnic communities, and leads to the development of a feeling of mutual trust and confidence that contributes to the dynamic two-way integration process required for the creation of a shared citizenship.

Migrants themselves share an essential element to design of a new public policy of the city, from their own contributions to social cohesion; in other words, through their perception of public problems and their social commitment. Within their civic and popular organizations, we can highlight those that contribute to the reduction of social inequality and the acquisition of social capital because these strengthen relationships within and among groups.

In spite of the asymmetry with regards to society, migrants establish groups for mutual aid also linked with members of other collectives. Through these organizations, religious organizations in particular, migrants increase the level of social cohesion, receive and offer ethical and civic guidance and create other spaces for sharing, for dialogue and mutual acceptance. Recent studies have evidenced the contributions towards social

cohesion on two levels. The first such contribution is through the insertion to their own organizations, of groups of volunteers or religious affiliation groups from the native population. Second, at the level of cooperation with NGO's and groups from various religious denominations, in projects that can range from courses to learn the local language, or food banks, to theater workshops, intercultural festivals, or information regarding election processes. The migrant organizations offer an open field for the formation of leaders and the recovery of self-esteem, among the people whose education or working experience is not recognized by government agencies or private enterprise.

Madam Chairperson,

“The multicultural character of society today... call us to deepen and strengthen the values needed to guarantee peaceful coexistence between persons and cultures. Achieving mere tolerance that respects diversity and ways of sharing between different backgrounds and cultures is not sufficient... a more decisive and constructive action is required, one which relies on a universal network of cooperation, based on safeguarding the dignity and centrality of every human person. This will lead to greater effectiveness in the fight against the shameful and criminal trafficking of human beings, the violation of fundamental rights, and all forms of violence, oppression and enslavement.”²

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

² Pope Francis, Message on the World Day of Migrants, 2014.