



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 106th Session of the Council of the International Organization for Migration
Geneva, 24 - 27 November 2015

Mr. Chairperson,

My Delegation wishes to thank the Director General for his comprehensive report and extend congratulations to you, Ambassador Bertrand de Crombrugghe, and to the Council Bureau, on your election, while recognizing Ambassador Eddico of Ghana, for his work as Chair of the Council over the course of the last year. In addition, we welcome the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Eritrea, Saint Lucia, and the Republic of Kiribati as new IOM Members.

Mr. Chairperson,

Violent conflicts and deep inequalities persist in many regions of the globe and precipitate a large displacement of people. As a result, we are witnessing around 240 million international migrants, of whom more than 60 million have been forcefully displaced. Human mobility is a megatrend of our times. It is not limited to the Mediterranean; it is a global challenge to which the international community needs to respond with a concerted political strategy and common humanitarian values, rather than with populist rhetoric. This “year of the migrant” is a defining moment for the evolution of our societies. The recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gives a clear sign that the international community has made a remarkable effort to act as a real family of nations. Recent terrorist attacks, however, have shifted public and political attention from development to security. The response to migration risks being jeopardized, becoming inadequate and disordered.

Mr. Chairperson,

As we gather today, thousands of men, women and children are trying to find their way to safe havens. Globalization has allowed for a free flow of money and of trade in goods and services; but as for human mobility – and especially that of migrants and refugees in need – enormous obstacles remain. The remedy begins with a realistic evaluation of the positive aspects of this phenomenon. Migrants provide a solid contribution to receiving societies through the taxes they pay, the skilled and unskilled labour they provide, and the balance they represent for the demographic circumstances of ageing host populations. More than a crisis of numbers, we face a crisis of trust and

solidarity. An enlightened management of migration requires a mobilization of political will and the vision to adopt viable and forward-looking solutions.

First and foremost, the priority must be to save lives, no matter what their migratory status. Simply closing borders and building barriers heightens the vulnerability of migrants in transit, giving opportunities to human traffickers to carry on their criminal business. Instead, training law enforcement officials to treat migrants in transit with dignity, and investing in cross-border partnerships for a speedy and just assessment of their status, is a more effective approach.

If we wish to address the root causes that trigger displacement, we must first address the destabilizing elements in the countries of origin of today's flows of displaced people. This may necessitate, among other things, supporting incremental peace processes to end ongoing conflicts and address humanitarian suffering, establishing and enforcing safe zones where civilians are protected from indiscriminate acts of violence, or undertaking the responsibility to protect wherever terrorists are acting with impunity. Without such steps, mass exoduses cannot be prevented.

Reception centres and well-functioning asylum systems, together with safe and legal channels of emigration created without being pre-selective with respect to background or origin, while ensuring that the truly needy are helped and effectively protected from new pressures and abuses, will make current flows more orderly and beneficial.

As reported by the Director General, "the migration debate today is largely one-sided, with emphasis on the short term and a strong security focus, driven by fears and destructive stereotypes."¹ In this regard, it would be useful if the forthcoming environment Conference, COP 21, were to look at the population consequences of environmental degradation. "There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation," observes Pope Francis. "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. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters' points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded."²

International migration is a very sensitive issue as it touches on national sovereignty and identity. It is therefore important to rebuild trust in migration policies and institutions. Sustainable Development Goal 16 of the 2030 Development Agenda seeks

¹ DG Report to the 106th Session of the IOM Council

² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, par. 25

to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”³ This objective cannot be achieved without an effective channelling of multiculturalism and diversity.

Finally, a failure of political will to address current population movements, in an objective and constructive way at the international and national level, would contradict the overarching need to manage migration in view of the common good. As Pope Francis recalls in his message for the 2016 World Day of Migrants and Refugees: “at this moment in human history, marked by great movements of migration, identity is not a secondary issue. Those who migrate are forced to change some of their most distinctive characteristics and, whether they like it or not, even those who welcome them are also forced to change.”⁴ Newcomers and local populations can develop together a richer identity. Integration, however, requires the acceptance of some basic values that allow for a peaceful and constructive coexistence: mutual respect, freedom of conscience, separation of religion and politics, acceptance of democracy and all fundamental human rights. Cities and local governments are the front line in the management of integration as they are the first to meet arriving migrants who move more and more into the urban context.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, migrants constitute an invitation to look anew at international relations and at our solidarity as a single family of nations, so that unjust inequalities and violence may not disrupt peaceful coexistence. Migrants can be builders of bridges among cultures, bringing their contribution in hard work, energy and new ideas. But their acceptance of fundamental human rights is indispensable for the development of a successful integration, for a successful story of mutual enrichment and renewed confidence in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>

⁴ Message of the Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, January 17, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html (4 October 2015)