



Intervention by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to
the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 67th Executive Committee Meeting
of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Geneva, 4 October 2016

Mr. President,

Appreciating the opportunity to address the Executive Committee of UNHCR this year, my Delegation would like to express its serious concern over the increasingly difficult challenges presented by the various refugee crises in different parts of the world. At the present time we are witnessing the highest levels of displacement ever recorded, with some 65.3 million people who have been forcibly displaced. Of these suffering individuals, a staggering 21.3 million refugees – the majority of them being minors under the age of 18, who, as we know, are frequently victims of modern forms of slavery including trafficking do not have access to education or are imprisoned in dreadful situations. In addition, there are also some 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights. While we must not lose our resolve in the face of these seemingly insurmountable challenges, we must also acknowledge that the increasing trend shows no sign of slowing down. The scale and nature of refugee displacement today “requires us to act in a comprehensive and predictable manner in large-scale refugee movements”. These movements are often the result of old conflicts not yet effectively addressed – we think of many situations in Africa, for example - nevertheless the International Community is still convinced that: “Through a comprehensive refugee response based on the principles of international cooperation and on burden- and

responsibility-sharing, we are better able to protect and assist refugees and to support the host States and communities involved.”¹

We have an urgent social, political and ethical duty to address these issues and their root causes in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity.

The recent New York Declaration is a positive sign that there remains a willingness on the part of the International Community to address the grave refugee crises unfolding in our world. The Declaration tasks the UNHCR to develop a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, setting out a blueprint for a stronger system with more reliable funding and early engagement of development actors to help those forced to flee their homes and the communities hosting them.

With these encouraging developments, we must also be realistic about implementation. Repeated promises and pledges have been made, but effective and durable implementation has been sorely lacking and the rights of refugees, as laid out in various international instruments, continue to be violated. Such violations constitute wounds to the international order, which risk provoking cynicism and the slide towards a true “globalization of indifference.”

Mr. President,

The Holy See, while assuring its firm commitment to work with all interested parties to assist the needs of refugees and migrants, wishes to reiterate a strong appeal for the implementation of the existing provisions contained in the Refugee Convention. From its inception, the UNHCR has been actively involved in promoting protection for refugees and finding solutions to their problems. This is the very reason the three durable solutions were developed: voluntary repatriation, reintegration and resettlement.

In fact, however, in many countries refugees are not allowed to work, while their movements are limited to the immediate surroundings of camps, often located in remote regions. Refugees have become dependent on food supplies, many times insufficient or reduced for budgetary reasons, while at the same time the food basket is not

¹ New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, doc. A/71/L.1, Annex I, par.1

sufficiently varied. The present situation has led to malnutrition in camps that for years have been administrated by the United Nations.

My Delegation believes that it would make all the difference if the existing rights of refugees were guaranteed, with additional economic and financial investments, and especially political will. Then refugees would become 'agents of development' even in their host country and not just recipients of aid or merely tolerated guests.

Closely related to respecting the existing rights of refugees is the urgent need for action on the underlying causes, the so-called "push-factors", be they domestic or international, of large-scale movements of refugees.

Priority should be given to addressing the root causes of displacement and to preventing them. Early warning and response systems that can foster reconciliation are needed when tensions emerge. International support is needed to strengthen good governance and the rule of law, and to address structural inequalities. The Holy See wishes to reiterate its urgent appeal for political and multilateral efforts to confront the root causes of large movements and forced displacement of populations. As Pope Francis has said, this "would mean rethinking entrenched habits and practices, beginning with issues involving the arms trade, the provision of raw materials and energy, investment, policies of financing and sustainable development, and even the grave scourge of corruption."²

Prevention, protection and solutions are strongly interlinked, to the extent that if one fails, the others will not be able adequately to deliver. Political will and leadership, both at the national and the global level, are essential for the effectiveness in these three areas.

Mr. President,

² Pope Francis, *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of New Year greetings. Vatican, 11 January 2016*

[I am particularly glad to mention a decision that further emphasizes Pope Francis' concern for uprooted peoples. In instituting the new Dicastery for promoting Integral Human Development in September last, Pope Francis placed *pro tempore* under his personal guidance the section that specifically oversees matters concerning refugees and migrants.]

Refugees need our solidarity, compassion and protection. In seeking to respond effectively to the challenges posed by unprecedented movements of refugees, while respecting the legitimate concerns of societies and countries, let us never lose sight of the real men, women and children involved in this human drama.

Thank you, Mr. President.