



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See  
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the  
**72<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High  
Commissioner's Program**  
*Geneva, 20 June 2018*

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Holy See Delegation wishes to take the floor to share its serious concerns about the document EC/69/SC/CRP.11, entitled “*Update on Age, Gender and Diversity*”. This is of particular relevance since the Program of Action of the Draft Global Compact on Refugees also contains references to these same considerations of “age, gender, and diversity”.

To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of interventions related to protection, assistance and solutions, which, in the view of this Delegation, constitute the essential mission and mandate of the UNHCR, it is critical that the UN Refugee Agency maintain a holistic and integrated approach to its activities. This is the only modality by which the UNHCR can best capture the whole spectrum of those who are in need of protection, can avoid any risk of stigmatizing particular individuals or populations, whether they be from majority or minority communities, and thus can best take into account the inherent dignity of the human person and his/her fundamental rights.

In this regard, the Delegation of the Holy See notes that the categories “sexual orientations” and “gender identities”, used in the text, find no clear and agreed definition in international law and, thus, risk the introduction of new forms of discriminatory categories within the international humanitarian community. In this regard, the Holy See recalls its statement, offered at the conclusion of the Beijing Conference on Women, on 15 September 1995: “... the Holy See associates itself with the common meaning of [the] word [“gender”], in languages where it exists ... The term “gender” is understood by the Holy See as grounded in biological sexual identity, male or female ...The Holy See thus excludes dubious interpretations based on world views which assert that sexual identity can be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes.”<sup>1</sup>

This Delegation greatly appreciates the High Commissioner’s determination and diligence in protecting the criteria for determining refugee status in accord with the 1951 Geneva Convention and the related 1967 Protocol. The urgency of this matter was repeatedly mentioned during the consultations related to the proposed Global Compact for Refugees

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Holy See’s Final Statement, specifically, Chapter V, para. 12, p. 159s. of the *Report of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women*:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>

(GCR). On the other hand, the “*Update on Age, Gender and Diversity*” could pose a serious threat to the proposed GCR and its eventual implementation since it introduces new and ambiguous categories of “refugees”. This updated document seems to delineate new categories of refugees, some of whom appear to merit more or better protection than others.

This Delegation respectfully reminds this committee that the Mission Statement of UNHCR specifies that “The High Commissioner for Refugees is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. UNHCR’s primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees.”<sup>2</sup> There is absolutely no mention in this Statement that UNHCR should give preference to one, or other, refugee individual or group. The Holy See has full confidence that the High Commissioner and his staff can and should respect the dignity, human rights, and diverse needs of each and every refugee boy, girl, woman and man, without introducing new and confusing categories of “diversities”.

Madam Chair,

Many Catholic-inspired and other faith-inspired organizations are working in the field, in synergy and close collaboration with the UNHCR, to achieve the common objectives of protection and assistance. They find themselves in a privileged position to promote and restore the dignity of refugees, based on strict ethical guidelines, rather than creating new and unclear distinctions on certain behavioral characteristics of these persons. The ambiguity of some of the language and phrasing of the policies proposed, that do not necessarily share international consensus, may undermine the impact and effectiveness of this vital cooperation, which contributes saving lives daily.

As Pope Francis said, “human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be.”<sup>3</sup>

I thank you, Madam Chair.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/4847b7832.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 213.