



**Intervention by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič,
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other
International Organizations in Geneva
“4th Geneva Interfaith Dialogue: Global Solidarity and Welcoming the Stranger”
Geneva, 12 February 2019**

Thank you, Mr. Moderator

allow me to express, first of all, a warm welcome to everyone and to thank the organizers of this significant initiative, which has become a good occasion to begin the working year here in Geneva. I would also like to reiterate the Holy See's appreciation for the leadership of the Kingdom of Jordan in promoting interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence between the faithful of different religions.

The theme chosen this year, 'welcoming the stranger' is of central importance for the Holy See. Throughout history, humanity has been characterized by a fragile distinction between "them" and "us".

The concern for those who are excluded and marginalized is always at the core of the Holy See's diplomatic actions. Pope Francis has said that we are living in "a time of fear before the vast dimensions of globalization: fears that are often focused on the stranger, on he who is different, poor... as if he were an enemy."¹

1. Migrants and refugees

The first idea that came to my mind when I received the theme of this year's interfaith dialogue was about all our brothers and sisters who leave their countries seeking for a better life, fleeing from poverty, hunger, conflicts, discrimination, persecutions, natural disasters and environmental degradation. I thought of the millions of migrants and refugees.

As Pope Francis repeatedly said, we must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best as we can to their situation. In order to respond in a way, which is always humane, just and fraternal, we need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

"This Rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use

¹ Pope Francis, 50th Anniversary of the Sant'Egidio Community, 12 March 2018.

for us. The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.”²

We know that it is not enough to open our hearts to the suffering of others. Welcoming others requires concrete commitment to also fight the root causes of forced migration, in a true understanding of the common good, that is, bearing in mind the needs of all members of the human family and the welfare of everyone.

In one of his very first visits after his election, Pope Francis travelled to Lampedusa to remember the thousands who had drowned in the Mediterranean Sea as they tried to reach the shores of Italy from North Africa. Speaking on that occasion, he had denounced “the globalization of indifference.”

This indifference, or even opposition, to immigration finds its explanation in an innate fear of the “foreigner”, a fear exacerbated by the wounds caused by the economic crisis, the unpreparedness of the local communities, and the inadequacy of many measures taken in an emergency atmosphere. In this context of uncertainty, having doubts and fears is fully comprehensible and legitimate. “The sin”, as Pope Francis said, “is to allow these fears to determine our responses, to limit our choices, to compromise respect and generosity, to feed hostility and rejection. The sin is to refuse to encounter the other, to encounter the different, to encounter the neighbor”.³

In a world that is every day more interconnected, but at the same time, that faces divisions and crisis on a daily basis, it is crucial to stress once more the essential value of solidarity, which should never be replaced with feelings of distrust and rejection.

2. Religious minorities

The second idea that came to my mind was the struggles of the religious minorities.

The right to religious freedom is a fundamental right which shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbors. The promotion of interreligious dialogue, mutual respect and mutual understanding becomes fundamental in our interconnected societies. It is concerning that in many regions around the world, a growing attitude of rejection towards religious freedom is emerging, marginalizing and opening the way to persecution of religious minorities.

Last week Pope Francis made a historic visit to the United Arab Emirates, aimed at promoting interreligious dialogue. During his visit, the Holy Father expressed his concern on growing individualism, which is the enemy of fraternity and inclusiveness.

Individualism, in the words of Pope Francis’, leads “to the desire to affirm oneself and one’s own group above others. [...] True religious piety consists in loving God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbor as oneself. Religious behavior, therefore, needs continually to be purified from the recurrent temptation to judge others as enemies and adversaries. Each belief system is called to overcome the divide between friends and enemies, in order to take up the perspective of heaven, which embraces persons without privilege or discrimination.”⁴

² Pope Francis, Address to the United States Congress, 24 September 2015.

³ Pope Francis, 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 14 January 2018.

⁴ Pope Francis, Address to Interfaith Meeting at Founder’s Memorial, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019.

One of the outcomes of this visit was the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living together, which was co-signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. I wish to recall some of the passages from this document which I found particularly inspiring and which emphasize the importance of the role of religions in the construction of world peace:

“[...] Authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence; to re-establish wisdom, justice and love. [...] Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives. Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected, as too the imposition of a cultural way of life that others do not accept”.⁵

3. Global Solidarity

Finally, please allow me to offer a few thoughts on the importance of global solidarity with and within the human family. Before the challenges of our contemporary reality, the only reasonable response is one of fraternity and mercy. It is therefore important to foster dialogue, a culture of tolerance and acceptance of others at all levels.

Pope Francis has encouraged on several occasions the international community to pursue a “globalization of solidarity and of the spirit” by building bridges, keeping dialogue open and favoring encounter. In line with the overarching objective of ‘leaving no-one behind’, the centrality of the person, in its individual dignity and collective solidarity, must be put at the center of every discussion, and must be preserved and mainstreamed in all the economic and political decisions.

I would like to conclude by quoting some other inspiring words: “solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”.⁶

Thank you.

⁵ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html

⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, para. 38