



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 International Dialogue on Migration of the International Organization for Migration
Panel 5 – “Social cohesion and community resilience: countering discrimination and xenophobia against migrants”
Geneva, 16 October 2020

Mr. Chair,

It is undeniable that migration continues to be one of the most powerful forces shaping the economic, social, political, and cultural aspects of our societies. While accompanied by challenges, for the most part, migration happens regularly and benefits countries of origin, destination, and migrants themselves.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to witness an increasing number of deplorable episodes of discrimination, racism and xenophobia, including those targeting refugees and migrants. Many migrants have become particularly vulnerable and are burdened by unequal access to adequate healthcare; additionally, they face heightened discrimination as a supposed COVID-19-related health risk, including when they try to return to their country of origin.

On the one hand, migrants labor is in high demand and welcomed by the markets of developed and emerging economies to compensate for labor shortages. On the other hand, migrants are often rejected and subjected to resentful attitudes by many in receiving societies. This sad reality is a glaring contradiction. Regrettably, such double standards stem from the predominance of economic interests over the human person. This tendency became particularly evident during the COVID-19 “lockdowns”, where many of the “essential” workers were migrants.

Mr. Chair,

In his most recent Encyclical Letter, which was released this month, on the 3rd of October, entitled “Fratelli Tutti” (in English, “All brothers”) Pope Francis decries that “migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person;”¹ the Pope suggests, instead, that migrants can be a gift and invites us to change the way we perceive migration, acknowledging that “migrants bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of all”².

For these reasons, the Holy See Delegation wishes to emphasize Pope Francis’ assertion that the debate about migration is not only about migrants. Rather, it is about all of us, and about the present and future of our societies. As we witness a growing trend towards extreme individualism and the “globalization of indifference”, we must work together to ensure that no one is excluded, including the poor and the most vulnerable, who often become the emblems of exclusion and discrimination.³

In this regard, this Delegation wishes to stress, once again, that there can be no successful and sustainable migration policy without a simultaneous, comprehensive, and mutually-enriching integration strategy. In light of the resurgence of racism and xenophobic incidents, further exacerbated by economic slowdowns caused by the ongoing pandemic, we would like to ask the panelists if they could share some best practices, including at a local level, aimed at improving social cohesion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter “Fratelli Tutti”, par. 39.

² Ibid, par. 133.

³ Cf. Pope Francis, Message for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 29 September 2019.