



Statement of the Permanent Mission of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the
**83rd meeting of the Standing Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Refugees – Regional update on Europe**
Geneva, 9 March 2022

Mr. President,

At the time this Standing Committee takes place, our gaze is directed towards the war in Ukraine and rightly so. The Holy See continues to follow the conflict with profound sorrow and great concern. Pope Francis has sent medical supplies to assist the Ukrainian population through the Office of Papal Charities, and wanted to be present among those suffering in that Country and meet the refugees through Cardinal Krajewski, the Almoner and Cardinal Czerny, interim Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. On the other hand, several Catholic organizations are offering their assistance.

Let us think of the tragic suffering of mothers fleeing with children, of families being separated. Let us think of the unaccompanied children and of the elderly uprooted from their homes. The Holy See, echoing Pope Francis, wishes to renew its gratitude to Ukraine's neighbouring countries, and in particular Poland, for the generosity that they are showing in welcoming people in need as a true family of nations. The Holy See also welcomes the decision of the European Union to offer Temporary Protection to Refugees fleeing Ukraine as well as the assistance to third-country nationals in Ukraine stranded amidst the conflict.

There is an urgent need to establish and sustain humanitarian corridors and safe passages as well as to make use of community-based sponsorships of individuals and families. This is of utmost importance in order to save lives and also to shield and prevent against exploitation perpetrated by criminal organizations that may take advantage of the vulnerable situation of many, creating even more victims of human trafficking in such a rapidly evolving situation.

Mr. President,

While the situation in Ukraine is a dramatic priority at the moment, we should also not detract attention from numerous other situations which equally require urgent humanitarian assistance, nor lose sight of protracted situations of displacement which unfortunately continue to affect several parts of the world, including Europe as well. As highlighted by UNHCR, there is a continued concern over increasing reports of expulsions and often violent pushbacks of refugees and asylum-seekers at Europe's land and sea borders.

Mr. President,

Everyone has a right to seek and enjoy asylum from violence and persecution, and there is an absolute prohibition of forced return to a place of danger. The protection of human lives and non-refoulement has to be respected in all cases; it cannot be guided by cherry-picking or selective contexts. In this regard, it remains concerning that a number of countries have increased the burden of host-communities through an unsustainable strategy of externalization of asylum procedures, thus avoiding direct responsibility.

It is worth recalling that the response of countries in close proximity to such crises is only as strong as the unity and effectiveness of the international community as a whole, in extending

financial and technical support to first responders and to local populations that are struggling to continue on with daily life.

Mr. President,

Faced with increased dramatic situations of forced displacement, the real question is: how do we prevent further atrocities and forced displacement?

For this Delegation, it is incumbent upon all of us, in a spirit of international solidarity and human fraternity, to address the root causes of forced displacement. This requires constant sincere dialogue and engagement to work towards disarmament and arms control. It requires courage and political will, bringing to an end conflicts which breed hatred and violence, and striving for peace, reconciliation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. President,

The Holy See wishes to renew the appeal of Pope Francis to reject war as a means to settle disputes. It is important to return to negotiations before it is too late. Dialogue is still possible – but the longer the procrastination, the greater are the losses, especially in terms of human lives, the harsher the animosity will become and thus the harder reconciliation efforts will be.

As recognized in the Constitution of UNESCO, adopted in 1945 at the end of the tragedy of the Second World War, it is worth recalling here that – “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.¹

The tragic absurdity of conflicts all over the world has to stop. The sacredness of life must be respected in all contexts and at all times. As Pope Francis affirmed: “There will be no peace without sharing and acceptance, without a justice that ensures equity and advancement for all, beginning with those most vulnerable.”²

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ Constitution of UNESCO, signed on 16 November 1945, entered into force on 4 November 1946, Preamble.

² Address of Pope Francis at the Interreligious Meeting, Plain of Ur (Iraq), 6 March 2021.