



**Statement of H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva at the 86<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Regional update on Europe Geneva, 7 March 2023**

Madam President,

The Holy See continues to follow the conflict in Ukraine and its repercussions with profound sorrow and great concern. The toll of the dead and wounded, the number of refugees and displaced persons, the destruction and economic and social damage that has been inflicted all speaks for itself and shows, once again, the tragic absurdity of war.

In war, everyone loses. Let us think of the soldiers fighting on the frontlines away from their families. Let us think of the suffering of mothers fleeing with children and of the families being separated from one another, sometimes forcefully. Let us think of the unaccompanied children and of the elderly men and women, uprooted from their traditions, history and homes.

In this regard, the Holy See wishes to renew its gratitude, in particular, to Ukraine's neighboring countries not only for respecting their international obligations, but for freely and generously welcoming over 8 million people in need of protection. The Holy See also recognizes the success of the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive to Refugees fleeing Ukraine, as well as the much needed assistance provided by the EU to third-country nationals stranded amidst the conflict. Such concerted action shows that solid responses are indeed possible when humanitarian concerns prevail over political impasses.

Madam President,

At the same time, we must ask ourselves if everything possible is being done to end the war and achieve a true, lasting and just peace. Here, the Holy See wishes to reiterate Pope Francis' clarion appeal to put an end to the war.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the response at the local level from of communities, civil society, and by the Catholic Church and its institutions that continue to provide healthcare to the displaced population, has been commendable and a true example of human fraternity. This

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Appeal after the General Audience of 22 February 2023.

includes the mental health and psychosocial support, as well as food and other types of assistance, including spiritual care.

Madam President,

While the situation in Ukraine is a dramatic priority, we should not detract our attention away from the numerous other humanitarian situations which require urgent assistance, nor lose sight of those protracted situations of displacement which continue to affect several parts of the world, including in Europe.

Among these issues of concern, the Holy See wishes to highlight the plight of unaccompanied children on the move, especially those trying to reach safe haven in Europe. Far too often, they are stranded in transit, and exposed to the risks of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. In this regard, the Holy See shares UNHCR's concern over the increasing number of violent pushbacks at Europe's land and sea borders, in flagrant violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Madam President,

It is deplorable that, we still have to bear witness to tragedies of lives lost at sea. This is not a question of whether the people concerned have a legal right to international protection. Such tragedies are always a loss for humanity as a whole. Shifting responsibilities and blame games only results in more suffering and the loss of human life.

Indeed, the sacredness of life must be respected in all contexts and at all times. The Holy See wishes to echo the hope of Pope Francis, “[m]ay the clear waters of the Mediterranean never more be bloodied by such tragic accidents! Let the human traffickers be stopped so they do not continue to dispose of the lives of so many innocent people! May the journeys of hope never more be transformed into journeys of death”.

Madam President,

The phenomenon of international displacement and the arrival of mixed flows is not limited to Europe. In this regard, even one single life lost is a tragedy, for all of us, and the magnitude of the suffering we are witnessing begs the question not only of how to properly fulfill the obligation to save these lives, but also of how to respond to the normative vacuum that currently exists in international law.

Thank you.