



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Head of Delegation
at the 114th Session of the Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Geneva, 29 November 2023

Mr. Chairman,

According to the IOM's World Migration Report 2022, the number of international migrants has been increasing over the past 50 years, with nearly 281 million people living in a country other than their country of birth in 2020.¹ Wars, persecutions, poverty and climate change are some of the leading causes of today's forced migration. In 2022, new crises such as the war in Ukraine and natural disasters in the Horn of Africa have caused mass displacement.² "Eliminating these causes and thus putting an end to forced migration calls for shared commitment on the part of all [...]. We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people's resources and the devastation of our common home."³

We urgently need to work in this direction, since far too frequently people are forced to go along migratory routes, risking their lives and sometimes even dying or losing family members. As Pope Francis reminds us, "the change of direction in our communities lies in treating them as brothers and sisters whose stories we know, not as troublesome problems or chasing them away, sending them home; it lies in welcoming them, not hiding them; in integrating them, not evicting them; in giving them dignity".⁴ Recognizing this God-given dignity is the first step in this change of direction. We must not let ourselves succumb to the "culture of indifference", which only leads to more human suffering and despair in the pursuit of political agendas.

In order to develop a more respectful and integral humane governance of migration, the Holy See encourages a more structured dialogue among the States from which migrants originate, transit and settle. This dialogue can be strengthened on the following issues: the expansion of regular and safe migratory channels, better coordinated search and rescue operations that save lives, and the safe and just reunification of families. "There is an urgent need to find dignified ways out of irregular situations [...]. The more legal routes

¹ IOM World Migration Report 2022, p. 23.

² Cf. IOM Abridged Annual Report for 2022, p. 1.

³ Pope Francis, Message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 24 September 2023.

⁴ Pope Francis, Address during the final session of the "Rencontres méditerranéennes", Marseilles, 23 September 2023.

exist, the less likely it is that migrants will be drawn into the criminal networks of people smugglers or into exploitation and abuse while in contravention of the law”.⁵

Furthermore, the Holy See is deeply worried about the safety and welfare of the ever-increasing number of minors on the move, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their families. All policies and practices related to these young persons should always prioritize their best interests and family reunification at all stages.

Mr. Chairman,

Irrespective of their regular or irregular status, migrants must be recognized and respected as human beings with rights and dignity. It is deeply regrettable that while migrant labour is much needed and welcomed to fill labour shortages, these same individuals are often rejected and treated unfairly, discriminatorily, and exploitatively in many host societies. Their treatment should not be determined by their usefulness.

My Delegation would also like to draw the attention of this Council to certain expressions that are often used in the debates on migration, such as “emergency”, “burden sharing”, “reallocation” and “invasion”. These terms reduce migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to mere commodities or “liabilities”. As Pope Francis stated, “those who risk their lives at sea do not invade, they look for welcome, they are looking for life. As for the emergency, the phenomenon of migration is not so much a short-term urgency, always good for fuelling alarmist propaganda, but a reality of our times”.⁶

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See welcomes the IOM’s increased focus on the impact of climate change on human mobility. There is growing evidence that this phenomenon plays a significant role in the decisions of millions of people to leave their home countries or regions. Pope Francis has repeatedly insisted that to seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true problems of the global system.⁷

Most recently, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis noted that climate change is increasingly affecting the lives of many, with an impact “on healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations,”⁸ thus, he calls “for the involvement on the part of all”.⁹

⁵ Pope Francis, Message to mark the 70th anniversary of the International Organization for Migration, Geneva, 29 November 2021.

⁶ Pope Francis, Address during the final session of the “*Rencontres méditerranéennes*”, Marseille, 23 September 2023.

⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, 111.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.* 58.

Mr. Chairman,

In accordance with the responsibilities of each, “joint efforts are also needed by individual countries and the international community to ensure that all enjoy the right not to be forced to emigrate, in other words, the chance to live in peace and with dignity in one’s own country. This right has yet to be codified, but it is one of fundamental importance, and its protection must be seen as a shared responsibility on the part of all States with respect to a common good that transcends national borders”.¹⁰

Mr. Chairman,

Integrating migrants is “*a tiring effort but farsighted*”¹¹ for the future that awaits us. A future in which everyone can play a distinctive role and contribute to the growth of society. In this spirit, we cannot overemphasize the importance of integration while honouring the laws and traditions of the host communities and embracing mutual openness.

In conclusion, please allow me to echo Pope Francis’ unambiguous call that: “we find ourselves at a *crossroads of civilization*. Either the culture of humanity and fraternity, or the culture of indifference”.¹²

Thank you.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023, 24 September 2023.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Moment of Reflection with Religious Leaders near the Memorial dedicated to Sailors and Migrants, Marseilles, 22 September 2023.

¹² Ibid.