



**Statement of Rev. Msgr. Daniel Pacho,
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Head of Delegation of the Holy See to the 74th Executive Committee of the
United Nations High Commissioner's Programme for Refugees**

Geneva, 9 October 2023

Madam Chair,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies and distinguished Delegates,

The number of forcibly displaced people, which at the end of last year exceeded 108 million, once again portrays an appalling image of the absence of peace and unspeakable suffering that afflicts our human family. We should always remember that human faces are behind these statistics. In fact, we need to recognize a person in every number, a brother or sister in every data.

Conflicts, violence and persecution, which includes increasingly high instances of discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs, as well as the consequences of climate change continue to cause massive displacement. Indeed, as Pope Francis affirmed, “*we are living at a crucial moment for humanity, in which peace seems to give way to war. Conflicts are growing, and stability is increasingly put at risk*”¹ in what he has described as a third World War, being fought piecemeal.

The Holy See continues to follow with great concern and sadness the conflict in Ukraine and its repercussions, without forgetting other conflicts affecting many parts of our world. The toll of the dead and wounded, the number of refugees and displaced persons, the destruction and the economic and social damage that have been inflicted, all speak volumes and show, once again, the tragic absurdity of war.

Madam Chair,

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Security Council of the United Nations, 14 June 2023.

The recognition of human dignity is the cornerstone of any authentic response to the plight of refugees.

The protection granted to refugees is not simply a concession. Refugees are not mere objects of assistance, but rather subjects of rights and duties. In fact, they are often victims of humanitarian emergencies that they have had no part in creating. Therefore, the principle of safe and voluntary repatriation must be scrupulously observed in the treatment of refugees. No person should be returned to a country where he or she could face grave human rights violations or even worse life-threatening situations.

At the same time, as Pope Francis has repeatedly said, “the future cannot lie in refugee camps”.² Displacement should not become a common, long-term collective experience. Temporary solutions devised in a time of emergency should give way as soon as possible to the implementation of durable solutions and interim alternative pathways. These include accelerated resettlement to a third country; the judicious concession of humanitarian visas; the establishment of individual and community sponsorship programs; the opening of humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable to displacement; and ensuring family reunification.³

Madam Chair,

The right to seek asylum is ultimately based on the recognition that every person has an inherited God-given dignity which makes us all members of one human family. If we consider each other as brothers and sisters, then every death is the loss of a member of our own family. In this regard, I wish to echo the recent appeal of Pope Francis in Marseilles to “*avoid turning the Mediterranean from the cradle of civilization into the graveyard of dignity*”, and reaffirm his call that “*people who are at risk of drowning when abandoned on the waves must be rescued. It is a duty of humanity; it is a duty of civilization!*”⁴

The Holy See welcomes the continued generosity of many donor Countries and of host Countries and communities that have welcomed millions of forcibly displaced persons, often at great sacrifice. Such solidarity and shared responsibility towards refugees should not be conditioned by the acceptance of certain ideas and ideologies.

² Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the meeting with IDPs, Juba, 4 February 2023.

³ Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, § 130.

⁴ Pope Francis, Moment of Reflection with Religious Leaders near the Memorial dedicated to Sailors and Migrants lost at Sea, Marseilles, 22 September 2023.

In this regard, the Holy See is deeply concerned about the growing politicization and instrumentalisation of the protection needs of people and the support that should be given to host communities. It is particularly disturbing to note the increasing resources used and pressure exerted by richer countries to instill an “ideological colonization” on developing countries, by imposing cultural models which they do not share. The tactic of making the concession of financial assistance conditional on the acceptance of such ideologies only serves to aggravate the debate within international organizations, weakening their core mission, while running the risk of further victimizing refugees. We cannot allow ideologies and politics to overshadow the need for protection!

Madam Chair,

It is deplorable that we are still witnessing tragedies of lives lost on land and at sea. We cannot allow such tragedies to occur without taking action.

The absolute priority remains the need to protect and save lives. It is not a question of whether the people concerned have a legal right to international protection or not. Shifting responsibilities, blame games and treating human beings as bargaining chips are all symptoms that clearly show the urgent need for concerted action, including to properly address mixed flows. In this regard, Pope Francis recalled that the “*real social evil is not so much the increase of problems, but the decrease of care*”⁵.

“*We find ourselves at a crossroads of civilization*”⁶. If we continue to treat refugees merely according to the opportunistic criteria of convenience and self-interest, ignoring not only their human dignity but also the common good, it will be the death knell of our civilizations.

Without a sense of fraternity, it is impossible to build a fairer society and a solid and lasting peace. It is the hope of my Delegation that the Global Refugee Forum to be held next December will represent a concrete and tangible application of those values of welcome, protection, and *humanitas* of a true family of nations.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

⁵ Pope Francis, Address to the Final Session of the “*Rencontres Méditerranéennes*”, Marseille, 23 September 2023.

⁶ Pope Francis, Moment of reflection with religious leaders, during the conclusion of the “*Rencontres Méditerranéennes*”, Marseille, 22 September 2023.