



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
First Formal Consultations towards a Global Compact on Refugees
Geneva, 13 February 2018

Madam Moderator,

The Delegation of the Holy See extends its gratitude to the UNHCR and, in particular, to the Assistant High Commissioner for his leadership and his thorough presentation of the Zero Draft.

The New York Declaration set us on a journey to achieving global solidarity with refugees. To accomplish “a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility to be better able to protect and assist refugees and to support the host States and communities involved” is a task that surpasses the good will of any single country and calls for flexibility, coherence and cooperation within the international community.

By the large presence of so many Delegations in this room, one can easily grasp this historical moment as an opportunity to elevate the standard approach of the international community to protect, to assist and to find durable solutions, to that of a universal family, responding to the lofty principle of solidarity and fraternal compassion by offering a more concerted and equitable global response.

Pope Francis reminds us that “defending the inalienable rights of refugees, ensuring their fundamental freedoms and respecting their dignity are duties from which no one can be exempted.”¹ My Delegation, thus, welcomes the Zero Draft in its objectives and vision, which we all share. The dialectical tension between the ideal response and existential pragmatism is well known. Given such noble objectives, however, we should spare no ambition to set concrete policies and measures.

Madam Moderator,

The Zero Draft acknowledges the generous and admirable responses of those local families and communities that, in spite of their own hardships, have kept their borders and hearts open to welcome refugees. These societies ought to receive tangible and prompt support from the international community. In fact, without solidarity, it would be impossible to assure refugees “the widest possible exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms” to which they are entitled.

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the International Forum on Migration and Peace, 21 February 2017.

Political will, however, is also needed to make the responsibility to protect comprehensive enough to embrace the prevention of forced displacement tragedies. In this regard, the focus on development is essential, but this must go hand in hand with humanitarian assistance. To this end, we must bear in mind that refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. “They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more”².

The protection of the fundamental rights of all people is the key to changing the situation of refugees and displaced persons. At this preliminary stage, my Delegation would like to flag a few aspects of particular concern for my Delegation, which appear to have been left out of the Zero Draft such as the absence of a reference to the spiritual dimension of refugees and the right to religious freedom and the need to do more to respect the unity of the family, the natural and fundamental unit of society and an essential right of the refugee. Additionally, while we understand that some elements such as the reference to the principle of *non-refoulement* have been omitted as they are already spelt out in Annex I, it could be important to outline them again in the Program of Action.

Madam Moderator,

Finally, my Delegation welcomes the idea to assess periodically the progress and the feasibility of the Global Compact in light of subsequent developments and future situations, which we cannot now envisage.

Notwithstanding its non-binding legal nature, this document has a strong morally binding character. For these reasons my Delegation wishes to propose that an additional clause be added in the introductory part, highlighting two points: 1) first, that the measures recommended should be read as an indivisible and universal collective at the service, and in the best interest, of refugees and asylum seekers, rather than a mere list of disjointed best practices from which to draw here and there, according to national priorities; 2) second, that the human person remains, in all cases, under the protection of the principles of humanity and the dictates of the public conscience.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.

² Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 5 August 2013.