



ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

Office of the Archbishop

Meditation for Prayer Service

Led by Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, Florida

New York, New York

September 13, 2016

Your Excellency the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon and Mrs. Ban Soon-taek,

Your Excellency the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Peter Thomson and Mrs. Marijcke Thomson and Family,

Your Excellency the immediate past President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft and Ms. Mette Holm,

Your Excellencies the Permanent Representatives, Permanent Observers and Diplomats,

Dear Members of the United Nations Staff and Personnel,

Brothers and Sisters, Members of various religious and faith communities,

Among the many challenges facing the global community in our days, perhaps there is none more pressing than the large numbers of persons on the move, fleeing their home countries for safety and/or opportunities. Next week and beyond, when you convene to discuss this humanitarian challenge, we pray that you are filled with wisdom, compassion, and a generous spirit, and that you are guided by God and his wisdom.

Every human being - just because he or she is a human being - has a right to live in conditions worthy of human life. When people do not find conditions necessary for human flourishing where they are - because of lack of economic resources, political oppression or religious or social persecution - they will seek or will be forced to seek such conditions worthy of human life elsewhere. More than 65 million persons in the world are forcibly displaced from their homes—the world's homeless—the most since World War II. Over 21 million of these are refugees who have fled persecution. Our world leaders must decide to meet this challenge by increasing their commitments to the protection of these vulnerable refugees and migrants.

The crisis in the Middle East is of staggering proportions: 11.5 million Syrians are displaced - 6.6 million internally displaced and close to 5 million living in neighboring countries and other parts of the world. Thousands of Syrians—women, children, and other vulnerable refugees—seek assistance in Europe and other parts of the world. Tragically, thousands have lost their lives along the way. While some in the world community have responded generously to this situation, others need to join them and share in the responsibility to respond to this humanitarian disaster.

Pope Francis, who has visited Lampedusa, Italy, and Lesbos, Greece, landing spots for these refugees and migrants, has decried the “globalization of indifference” to the plight of those fleeing their homelands. In his speech to the U.S. Congress last September, he spoke of these vulnerable persons as follows: “We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation, to respond in a way that is always just, humane, and fraternal.”

In this the second decade of the 21st Century, we need to pray that scourge of xenophobia and racism no longer be a part of our discourse when considering the well-being of those on the move. We must ensure that persons can practice their faith without fear of discrimination or harm. We must refrain from casting all persons on the move, many of whom are fleeing terror, as threats to us or our way of life. Human values must not be sacrificed in the name of security. To do so would make us all, both as nations and as a global community, less secure and not more secure. Enforcement only measures, fortified or militarized borders aimed at keeping people out will not solve the problem but simply redirect migratory flows to others always at the expense of the most vulnerable. If nations cooperate to extend enforcement in order to stem large movements of refugees and migrants, then they must also cooperate in extending protection to these populations.

Another statement or document will not resolve this crisis. Whatever you agree to in writing must be accompanied by concrete commitments and responsibility-sharing from all quarters. A plan of action must be implemented which not only offers care and respite to the millions in need of protection and assistance, but also addresses the push factors which have led to this humanitarian crisis. We must recommit ourselves to building peace and working for sustainable development in every corner of the globe - in other words, we must work to build a future of hope in those areas of the world that are experiencing a massive exodus of their populations so that people will not be forced to move to seek conditions worthy of human life.

Here in the United States, we have been witnessing a dramatic movement of people in our own backyard, with Central Americans from the Northern Triangle—unaccompanied children, women and children, and men—fleeing from violence in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. This crisis has been met with a deterrence policy which has featured such tactics as interdiction, detention, and an absence of due process. Our country and nations in the region should revise this policy so that protection, and not enforcement, is the first priority. While migratory flows especially when they take place in an irregular fashion present challenges and problems to the host countries, we must not look at the migrants themselves as "problems". No human being should be regarded by another human being as just a problem. To do so results in blaming those who are victims of forces that they often have little control of and such a reductive way of thinking dehumanizes the migrants who like us are children of the same God and thus our brothers and sisters.

In his remarks to United States Congress last year, Pope Francis suggested that we apply the Golden Rule in addressing these large movements of refugees and migrants. He said, "In a word, if we want security, let us give security, if we want life, let us give life, if we want opportunities, let us give opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us."

Let us pray tonight that, as a global community, we can heed the words of the Holy Father and follow the Golden Rule. This is not only the right thing to do, it is also the best practice. History will judge us on how we respond to this crisis; let it not be said that we were indifferent to it.