



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer
of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the
Global Refugee Forum - General debate on burden- and responsibility-sharing
Geneva, 18 December 2019

High Commissioner,

The Holy See Delegation wishes to commend the UNHCR and the co-hosting States for the substantial efforts undertaken to convene and prepare for the first Global Refugee Forum.

On the occasion of this Forum, the Holy See wishes to reaffirm the centrality of the human person, as well as the principles of solidarity, humanity and non-refoulement which underlie the international protection regime. It encourages States to fully respect their commitments, through greater international cooperation and burden sharing.

The statistics are well known and the reality of the human tragedies in the refugee crisis is evident. Each year, the number of those forced to flee and to seek refuge from war, persecution, human rights violations and natural disasters increases. Therefore, our first task is to put faces to these numbers and statistics. Only then can we address indifference and begin to take responsibility for the crises that bedevil our age.

In this regard, the Holy See would like to acknowledge the generosity and solidarity shown by countries that continue to welcome and host displaced persons, in spite of their own hardships, as an essential witness to the way forward: human fraternity. Moreover, the engagement of faith-based organizations and religious communities, which have an enduring presence in the field and are often the first to provide protection during emergencies, is a reminder of the crucial role that society plays in this effort.

High Commissioner,

The Holy See is deeply grateful to those countries that continue to receive and resettle refugees both internationally and regionally. Indeed, the vast majority of refugees continue to settle in bordering States and in some of them, refugees even outnumber the local population, presenting obvious challenges and substantial sacrifice.

As a family of nations, we share a common destiny and a common home. When host States receiving large influxes of refugees are left alone, it is inevitable that refugees may not always receive the welcome they deserve. Therefore, we cannot abandon host communities. In this regard, responsibility sharing and international cooperation cannot be limited to the provision of financial resources to host States. It should also include a complementary commitment to resettlement and local integration from donor States as well.

Refugees who have found shelter and protection in neighboring countries should also be able to return voluntarily to their homelands and to remain there safely. This aspect is particularly important when considering religious and other minorities. Furthermore, addressing the root causes of forced displacement requires courage and political will to end conflicts and to encourage peace, reconciliation and respect for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

High Commissioner,

The Holy See welcomes the focus given by the Global Compact on Refugees to health and education, two areas where the Catholic Church, through its many institutions, is actively engaged. Indeed, access to education and healthcare inspires hope and allows refugees to seek meaningful work, helping them to integrate into the societies that welcome them. This is especially true for refugee youth, which represent half of the refugee population. The Holy See commends the numerous pledges made for their education. Access to quality education from the early stages of displacement protects our youth from human trafficking, forced labor and other forms of slavery.

For its part, the Holy See Delegation is pleased to announce that Pope Francis will launch a Global Compact on Education next year to reinforce the dedication of the Church to open and inclusive education.¹ Similarly, the Holy See will continue to insist that the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is non-negotiable. It must also be realized through non-discriminatory, comprehensive laws, policies and practices rooted in the centrality of the human person. These policies must respect the right to life and women's dignity, including their specific cultural and moral values.

High Commissioner,

Prevention, protection and durable solutions are inevitably interlinked. If one fails, the others will not adequately to deliver. The Holy See hopes that the Global Refugee Forum will address each through "burden and responsibility sharing", translating them into concrete "solutions sharing" not only today, but in the years to come.

I thank you.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education, 12 September 2019