



**Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Permanent Observer  
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva,  
Head of Delegation of the Holy See to the 75<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee of the  
United Nations High Commissioner's Programme for Refugees**  
*Geneva, 15 October 2024*

Madam Chair,

As we gather in Geneva for the 75<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner's Programme for Refugees, we must acknowledge that the already dire global situation is rapidly deteriorating. Our world is experiencing a period of distress and one of its resulting symptoms is the displacement of extraordinary magnitude that the international community is witnessing. This symptom is also a stark indicator of broader humanitarian, social, economic, political and security problems. The devastating conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as the significant number of other humanitarian emergencies, conflicts, persecution, natural disasters and lack of access to the most basic necessities of human life, have forcefully displaced millions of people to flee from.

As the Holy See has noted, time and time again, such a number is far more than statistical data: it refers to girls and boys, women and men, with personal histories of suffering and anguish, but also of hope and aspirations.

Madam Chair,

The Holy See remains concerned about the number of deaths along the Atlantic Route, the continuing plight of the Rohingya refugees, as well as the increasing number of crossings in the treacherous terrain of the Darién Gap, including rising numbers of unaccompanied minors. Such trends demand our concrete response and urge us to overcome all temptations of indifference. As we know, the utter desperation of these people is such that it makes them more fearful of remaining in their home countries than of falling victim to human trafficking, which is regrettably thriving in these areas.

Against this background, the Holy See expresses its gratitude to those countries that have opened their borders to refugees, despite the challenges and hardship often experienced by their own populations. It is also grateful to those who work against trafficking in human beings and other practices that violate human dignity.

However, host communities must not be left to fend for themselves. Collective and concerted efforts and solidarity are essential. International cooperation cannot be limited to financial assistance, which is too often inadequate, but it must include expanded commitments to resettlement and complementary pathways for refugees. In the midst of the uncertainty and abandonment experienced by refugees, these solutions can offer them a beacon of hope and the prospect of a safe and positive future for themselves and for their families.

The Catholic Church, through hundreds of its institutions around the world, remains deeply committed to work tirelessly so as to ensure that when refugees arrive, they find in the

Church a welcoming place where they can satisfy their hunger and thirst, and at the same time restore hope.<sup>1</sup>

Refugees, when offered access to just and fair labor opportunities, can become agents of development and enrich the communities that welcome them. In particular, refugee children need access to education. This will enable them to move beyond mere survival and embark on a constructive journey towards fully enjoying their God-given human dignity. Indeed, “only by including refugees as a part of the solution can they flourish as human beings”<sup>2</sup>.

Madam Chair,

The Holy See looks with interest at the route-based approach proposed by the High Commissioner, which is especially pertinent in the context of mixed migratory flows. Along the migratory routes, the large network of local Catholic institutions, while respecting the specific legal frameworks put in place by the respective governments, is profoundly dedicated, as Pope Francis stated “to welcome, protect, promote and integrate” refugees without distinction of any kind.

While attention is rightly given to those who have fled their countries of origin due to a credible fear of persecution, grave harm, or death, it is equally important to be attentive to the needs of those who are internally displaced within their home countries. At the same time, those who have decided to return voluntarily to their homes, when safe conditions once again prevail, need attention.

The Holy See also commends the efforts of UNHCR to address statelessness, which continues to affect significantly the lives of millions of people. As it is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to a nationality.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, my Delegation wishes to encourage States to undertake legal and policy reforms to address statelessness effectively and to prevent migrants and refugees from becoming stateless.<sup>4</sup>

Madam Chair,

It has come to the attention of my Delegation that several documents, policies and programs, developed by UNHCR without prior consultation with all States, include non-consensual language and concepts that have no agreed definition under international law. Subsequently, these same concepts are sorted in other documents, including the UNHCR budget, and then submitted to this Committee for approval. The Holy See remains concerned about this practice, which distorts the debate among States and seeks to impose a unilateral interpretation of certain concepts, such as that accorded to “gender” and “diversity”. The Holy See wishes to place on record its disagreement with and dissociation from such interpretation and practice.

In conclusion, as we all share the same objectives of protection and durable solutions, allow me to echo a recent prayer of Pope Francis and encourage all of the Government representatives that are gathered here in Geneva to work unceasingly to silence the din of weapons that generate death and to extinguish the violence, egoism and pride that brew in the heart of humanity, in order to eradicate the root causes of displacement.<sup>5</sup>

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Message to the participants in the meeting of Bishops from Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama, 19 March 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Message to the II Global Refugee Forum, Geneva, 13 December 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Points, <https://migrants-refugees.va/20-action-points-migrants/>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Prayer at the Recitation of the Holy Rosary for Peace, Basilica of Saint Mary Major, 6 October 2024.