

**“Ensuring the right of all to remain  
in dignity, peace and security in their countries of origin”**

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*Closing Remarks by*  
Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo, Secretary General  
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As I shared the theme of this event with several of my professional colleagues, who are engaged in both advocacy and service for and with migrants, I was confronted with puzzled stares and grimaces. Why would the Holy See and Catholic-inspired, migration-related organizations address the theme of “right to remain” during an event aiming to gather input for the Global Compact on safe, regular, and orderly migration? His Excellency Archbishop Auza offered us a concise but compelling rationale for the choice of this theme. The distinguished representation of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) presented a fuller account of mixed flows of migrants and cautioned against a simplistic tendency to divide them between refugees and so-called “economic migrants”.

In fact, this is not a new topic in the migration field. Upon the conclusion of the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, civil society put forward The 5-year Action Plan for Collaboration. It called for a post-2015 development agenda that would “affirm both the right to migrate and the right to remain at home with decent work and human security.”<sup>1</sup> Fr. Czerny pointed out the need to re-affirm this right and to make those conditions of peace, security, and dignity a true reality. The distinguished representative of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) gave us an in-depth account of what needs to be done to assure the right to adequate nutrition in countries of conflict and among populations that suffer from severe economic deprivation.

In June 2014, civil society participating in the 2014 Global Forum on Migration and Development, issued its “Stockholm Agenda” on migrant and migration-related goals and targets to be considered for the Sustainable Development goals. It urged addressing root causes and conditions that force people to migrate, especially ... global inequalities ...” More pointedly, it called for creation and preservation of “...decent work opportunities...” and for ensuring “stable and peaceful societies.” The Stockholm Agenda also made the forceful claim that “...

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<sup>1</sup> The 5-year Action Plan for Collaboration: Civil Society's Proposal for an Outcome and Follow-up to the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development 2013,” [http://hldcivilsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/0261-HDL\\_The-5-year-Action-Plan-GB-web2.pdf](http://hldcivilsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/0261-HDL_The-5-year-Action-Plan-GB-web2.pdf)

better policy planning and coherence .. can make migration a choice and not a necessity ...”<sup>2</sup> Fr. Czerny proposed three essential actions in that regard: stop the sale of arms; reduce unscrupulous exploitation of territories and resources, and be open to new and accessible channels of secure and orderly migration. Her Excellency Madame Arbour said, “We must strive to eliminate the drivers of forced migration and maximize those drivers that bring hope through voluntary migration.”

In a similar vein, during a visit to the UN Office in Nairobi Pope expressed a broad and far-reaching hope that the COP21 Conference, scheduled to take place shortly afterward in Paris, would “... achieve a global and “transformational” agreement based on the principles of solidarity, justice, equality and participation; an agreement which targets three complex and interdependent goals: lessening the impact of climate change, fighting poverty and ensuring respect for human dignity.”<sup>3</sup> In short, Pope Francis was calling for global commitment to integral human development, which has been enshrined as a fundamental value and goal of Catholic teaching and tradition for many centuries, and to which our speakers in this session have passionately testified. Mme. Arbour emphasized the need for collective action to make the Global Compact on Migration a success.

While in full agreement with a macro approach to human development, I also would like to propose the dignity of each person and family created in the image of God, as the cornerstone of promoting the right to remain. Her Excellency Mme. Arbour maintained that our focus should not be on stopping migration, but we need to learn from individuals on why people are undertaking migration – that is the only way we can help to make migration safe, orderly and regular. Sr. Norma shared with us the pain deep needs of those who are forced to migrate. Too often we forget that it is the force and the spark of their search and right to human dignity that pushes them on their dangerous and painful journeys. Zaid made vividly real for the fear of persecution and loss of dignity that force people to leave and sacrifice their physical, emotional, economic, and cultural security that results from their flight from home. Zaid, despite your many sacrifices, you feel welcome, secure and hopeful in your new land.

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<sup>2</sup> “Stockholm Agenda” on migrant and migration-related goals and targets,” June 2014, <http://gfmcivilsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Civil-Society-Migration-Stockholm-Agenda-June-2014.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Address of Pope Francis, during his visit to the U.N.O.N. United Nations Office at Nairobi, 26 November 2015, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151126\\_kenya-unon.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151126_kenya-unon.html)

My own organization, the International Catholic Migration Commission, learned an inspiring lesson in that regard a few months ago. We had completed an intense process of facilitating application for the resettlement, in the United States of America, of two Syrian women, who had applied for family reunification with the brother, who had fled Syria many years before and now claimed his right to sponsor his two sisters. Our caseworkers, based at the ICMC Resettlement Support Centre, in Beirut, worked tirelessly to present the situation of these two women for review and security vetting by the U.S. authorities. The caseworkers also collaborated closely with the staff of the Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, their diocesan affiliates, and our own Liaison Office in Washington, DC, to assure a warm and responsive welcome in the USA, in hope that the applications would be approved. At a certain moment, however, we were shocked to hear that Wadia wished to withdraw her application and had decided not to join her sister, Joulia, for the much-anticipated reunion with their brother Joe.

We could not imagine the reason for Wadia's change of mind. It was only months later when we learned that Wadia's daughter had been killed by a sniper years before. Wadia was still grieving deeply over the loss of her daughter. But, most importantly, she lived with the pain that her daughter had been buried in a public cemetery since the Catholic cemetery in her town had been destroyed. Wadia knew that the Catholic cemetery was being rebuilt and she could not leave Syria before she accorded her daughter the dignity of being buried in consecrated ground.