

KENYA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS



KENYA CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT

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Our Ref:

PRESS STATEMENT ON REFUGEES AND THE PROPOSED

Your Ref:

**CLOSURE OF REFUGEE CAMPS BY KENYA CONFERENCE OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS (KCCB)**

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” Matthew 25:36

We, the Catholic Bishops of Kenya, in solidarity with humanitarian voices, wish to raise our voice in expressing our deepest concerns regarding the Government’s directive on the proposed closure of refugee camps in Kenya. We view the two statements separately issued through the Ministry of Internal Security & Interior Coordination on Friday 6th May, 2016 and Wednesday 11th May, 2016 as regrettable and therefore request the Government of Kenya to reconsider this position.

“As people of faith, we wish to join our voices to speak out on your behalf” (Pope Francis to Refugees during his recent visit to Greece)

Over the years, Kenya has been at the forefront of the noble humanitarian effort of hosting refugees from neighbouring countries and beyond which is commendable. Any form of involuntary repatriation therefore is a serious concern for the Catholic Church and the Catholic Bishops. From a humanitarian point of view, closing the Dadaab Refugee Camp will without any doubt have far reaching implications not only for hundreds of thousands of refugees but to our region at large.

Guided by the principles of Catholic social teachings on migrants, we emphasise that Kenya's regulation of borders and control of immigration, particularly forced migration, must be governed by concern for all people, mercy, and justice.

We remind the Government that it bears the primary responsibility to prioritise humanitarian principles in accordance with its international and national laws. Indeed, Article 27 (4) of the Constitution stipulates that *“The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth.”* We therefore urge the Government to show a sincere humanitarian commitment to the needs of all people including refugees and asylum seekers.

Furthermore, Kenya is a signatory to both the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1968 OAU Convention which obliges the Government to protect refugees during their stay in Kenya, prohibits any form of forced return, and maintain the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps.

Keeping in line with national and international obligations as well as the Catholic social teachings, we urge the Government to show a sincere commitment to the needs of all regardless of difference, especially refugees.

The Government of Kenya has cited national security as the main reason for this decision and, of course, security is an integral part of any nation. We acknowledge these genuine concerns raised by the Government and do appreciate the determination to reinforce

safety, but this must be done out of care and protection for all those within Kenya's borders. Thus, we request the Government to protect and pursue national security interests in accordance with the Constitution whereby Article 238 (2) (b) of the Constitution of Kenya outlines that *"national security shall be pursued in compliance with the law and with utmost respect to the rule of law, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms."*

Individuals seeking asylum in Kenya have a right to be protected and enjoy basic services until lasting solutions are found in their home countries, or within the country of asylum as well through third country resettlement. We reiterate that any form of involuntary repatriation may expose the returnees to dangers of persecution. We are deeply concerned that forcible return of hundreds of thousands of refugees will cause catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

Based on the forgoing, We wish to make it clear that, We, the Catholic Bishops of Kenya remain committed to working with the Government of Kenya in the search for long-term and sustainable solutions for refugees. **We therefore urge the Government to reconsider this decision and pursue opportunities for dialogue and work with relevant actors to ensure the smooth and voluntary repatriation of refugees as well as prioritisation of a long-term dignified refugee response.**

In the meantime, we recommend the reactivation of the Department of Refugees Affairs in Kenya and immediate security enhancement mechanisms within the camp by all security organs.

To all Kenyans of good-will, we urge you to respect the obligation to love your neighbours including refugees and uphold dignity of their creation in God's image.

During the Holy Father's visit last year to East Africa, he reminded the faithful that **"how we deal with refugees is a test of our humanity, our respect for human dignity, and above all our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need."**

We appeal to all people of good will – in Kenya and beyond – to join us in this journey of welcoming the stranger and standing in solidarity for those in need of protection.

Signed:



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Rt. Rev. Philip Anyolo

Chairman – Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops/Homa Bay

Date: May 18th, 2016

Rt. Rev. John Oballa Owaa, Vice Chairman of KCCB/Ngong

His Eminence John Cardinal Njue, Nairobi

Most Rev. Zacchaeus Okoth, Kisumu

Most Rev. Peter Kairo, Nyeri

Most Rev. Martin Kivuva Musonde, Mombasa

Rt. Rev. Cornelius Arap Korir, Eldoret

Rt. Rev. Joseph Mairura Okemwa, Kisii

Rt. Rev. Alfred Rotich, Military Ordinariate

Rt. Rev. Maurice Crowley, Kitale

Rt. Rev. Norman Wambua King'oo, Bungoma

Rt. Rev. Peter Kihara, IMC, Marsabit

Rt. Rev. David Kamau Ng'ang'a, Aux. Bishop Nairobi

Rt. Rev. Anthony Ileri Mukobo, IMC, Isiolo Vicariate

Rt. Rev. Virgilio Pante, Maralal

Rt. Rev. Salesius Mugambi, Meru

Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Okombo, Kericho

Rt. Rev. Anthony Muheria, Kitui/ Apostolic Administrator,
Machakos

Rt. Rev. James Maria Wainaina, Murang'a

Rt. Rev. Paul Kariuki Njiru, Embu

Rt. Rev. Maurice Muhatia Makumba, Nakuru

Rt. Rev. Dominic Kimeng'ich, Lodwar

Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Barbara, Malindi

Rt. Rev. Joseph Mbatia, Nyahururu

Rt. Rev. Joseph Alessandro, Garissa

Rt. Rev. Joseph Obanyi Sagwe, Kakamega