



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva

Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Office in Geneva, at the Standing Committee of the UNHCR Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (39th Meeting)

25 June 2007

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, the Delegation of the Holy See congratulates and welcomes the new Deputy High Commissioner and expresses its support for the continued attention given to protection.

The global refugee population has begun to increase again and the population of concern to the UNHCR Office is now well over 32 million. People forcibly displaced are a stark reminder of persisting conflicts and violations of human rights. The Delegation of the Holy See greatly appreciates the UNHCR's courageous service and openness to creative responses to the plight of all forcibly uprooted persons. In the present spiraling crisis of people obliged to move from their homes, while factual information is available, the complexity of the issues and perhaps some deficit of political will slow down the possibility of solutions.

Grey areas of concern seem to increase where existing protection instruments cannot apply or lack clarity of mandate. Reference is made to a phenomenon that now continues for some years, the terrible loss of life in the attempt to reach a safe haven on the part of thousands of people forced by desperate circumstances to look for survival outside their own country. The phenomenon is not just regional. It is present in the Mediterranean where people try to cross from Africa to Europe; in the Atlantic where they cross from West Africa to the Canary Islands. Other people lose their lives moving from East Africa to the Arabian Peninsula; from Caribbean islands to the American continent; from Mexico across the desert to the United States; in some areas of Asia. The questions arise of how the obligation to protect of the international community can be exercised in such a situation; if a normative vacuum exists for the protection of these victims who meet death in trying to escape some other forms of physical or psychological death. The UNHCR could raise the issue of a coordination of policies at the United Nations level that could focus on this trans-regional problem taking into account new developments, initiate a systematic study of how protection can be provided and even develop a specific protection cluster. Of course, in the long run a positive and preventive approach would require the transformation of conditions in the places of origin through greater security, respect of human rights, effective political participation, the creation of jobs, and an environment of peace. But this local transformation cannot happen without the involvement of the international community for better organized and wider legal channels for the movement of

people and without fair agricultural, financial and trade policies that would not impact in a negative way the poor countries thus triggering forced displacement.

A second point my Delegation wants to return to is that of the Middle East refugees and the worsening situation of ethnic and religious minorities cleansing. It seems that there is no way forward because of the inadequate acceptance of needy cases for resettlement and no way backward because of the impossibility of return due to persisting insecurity and refusal of coexistence among different religious communities. Christians in particular are confronted with a renewed era of martyrdom. Besides, the necessary funding for an adequate response to the suffering of Iraqi refugees is not yet sufficiently available. Adding his voice to the recent celebration of World Refugee Day the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI stated: "Welcoming refugees and giving them hospitality is a duty of human solidarity so that they may not feel isolated because of intolerance and lack of concern." He appealed that asylum and the rights of refugees be guaranteed and that the leaders of Nations should offer protection to all in need of it. Burden sharing, both in terms of funds and provision of resettlement, remains a major challenge, as it is protection in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

Critical refugee and internally displaced people situations around the world call for a renewed commitment and an active engagement on the part of the international community. It is an obvious form of solidarity within the human family. Today's developments in the vast world of forced displacements and tomorrow's consequences of climate change forcing people to move call for intellectual creativity and pragmatic programs of action that may give an answer to the new demands for protection.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.