

“Migration in the Commonwealth:
International Movement and Human Rights –
Challenges and Opportunities”
New York – 18 September 2016

Panel Presentation by:
The Reverend Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo
Secretary General, International Catholic Migration Commission

Your Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by thanking Her Excellency Amina Mohammed, the government of Kenya, and the Commonwealth Secretariat for the kind invitation to address this distinguished audience. I serve as the Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), which was founded in 1951 by Pope Pius XII. He gave our organization the mandate to bring vital assistance to, and to resettle and repatriate, those people who had been displaced by the tragic World Wars that so deeply affected Europe and other parts of the world. From the very beginning, we were expected to serve all people in need, without regard for their religious, national or ethnic status.

At the present time, we work in close partnership with multi-lateral organizations, with national governments, and with local communities, all of which remain, to this very day, essential pillars in our ICMC vision, mission, and action. Our direct operational activities include humanitarian assistance and protection for refugees and forced migrants. We deploy legal and other experts to work in close collaboration with UNHCR and national governments in assessing refugee status applications and evaluating special needs, particularly for minors and other vulnerable persons. We assist governments and civil society to develop integration programmes for arriving refugees and migrants. Finally, we prepare, process, and orient refugees for third country resettlement if it is evident that they cannot safely

return to their home country or be integrated into the country of asylum within a reasonable period of time.

Moreover, for many years, ICMC has played a strong role in coordinating the international activities jointly undertaken by civil society in promoting a more effective, well-planned, transparent, and sustainable response to large movements of refugees and migrants in all parts of the world. We accompany and hear the pleas of refugees and migrants on a direct and daily basis. Our voices, and, most especially the voices of refugees and migrants themselves, must be considered as essential components in follow-up of the Summit for which we all have gathered.

Two specific initiatives of civil society networking might be of particular interest to the participants in today's event; they are: MADE (Migration and Development Civil Society Network) and SHARE (the network of cities, regions and local actors, including NGOs, churches, and other faith-based organizations) committed to offer protection and welcome for refugees resettled in Europe).

MADE evolved out of the context of civil society organizing related to the Annual Meetings for Global Forum for Migration and Development. It was launched in 2014, as a platform in which civil society organizations of four continents come together to advocate for rights-based policies and practices affecting migrants and their communities worldwide. MADE is partly funded by the European Union, with contributions from several governments and foundations. Implemented in close coordination with ICMC headquarters and located in Brussels, at the offices of ICMC Europe, the MADE Network is structured around **regional and thematic working streams**, with four regional networks in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, and three thematic working groups on diaspora, Post-2015 and recruitment and a global coordinating office. Together, these groups have organised 32 regional, thematic and civil society network meetings and webinars around the world, with 865 participants from more than

70 countries.

In 2015, the MADE Working Group on Global Governance and Post-2015, advocated for the explicit inclusion of migrants and migration in the new global **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. MADE also continued its policy work on the **reform of migrant worker recruitment practices**, in order to end and prevent widespread abuse, particularly in sectors such as domestic and homecare work, construction, agriculture, tourism and hospitality.

Together with the Global Coalition on Migration, MADE regional coordinators organized civil society involvement in the **Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) initiative**, a States-led process aimed at increasing the protection of migrants before, during and after a crisis, such as a conflict or a natural disaster. ICMC was pleased and honoured to serve as co-lead in organizing civil society participation during this process and in the ongoing meetings of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, the next session of which will be held in Bangladesh during December of this year.

Established in 2012 and having engaged more than 1200 stakeholders, **SHARE** is an EU-wide resettlement network for cities, regions and their civil society partners which is led by ICMC Europe, in partnership with the city of Sheffield, UNHCR, European networks (ECRE, EUROCITIES) and other local stakeholders. SHARE facilitated structured dialogue and exchange of best practices in resettlement, reception and refugee integration, in 25 European countries. SHARE increased its activities considerably in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly after the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi – who had drowned together with his 5-year-old brother Ghalib and mother Rehan in the Mediterranean sea. This tragic event inspired a powerful emotional response from citizens across Europe who wanted to provide safe and legal access and welcome to refugees

(resettlement, sponsorships, scholarships) to prevent further deaths at sea.

During the past five years the SHARE network convened city leaders, NGOs, churches and other local actors to exchange experiences during visits to the City of Sheffield in the UK and by organising training seminars and European events. SHARE thus strengthened advocacy on resettlement (Resettlement Saves Lives) and exchanged practices on how to facilitate welcome, reception and integration of refugees at local level. Special attention was given to cities in Central and Eastern Europe, where the numbers of refugees being welcomed is still modest and there is still need to set up programs and partnerships to receive refugees. In the context of ongoing refugee arrivals to Europe during 2015, SHARE and partners have looked at how to expand service capacity, by developing creative housing solutions, engaging in public private partnerships such as sponsorships or family reunification schemes and by setting up volunteer programmes. Volunteering has increased exponentially across many cities in Europe. SHARE organised training and exchange on ways to coordinate and sustain volunteering programmes, including such areas as learning languages, social guidance, early employment, homework classes for children, and accompanying patients to hospital visits, etc.

Since its inception, SHARE has produced a number of excellent the publications, toolkits and other resources, including:

- “Volunteering for Refugee Integration”: a Toolkit;
- “SHARE City Curriculum”: a resource designed to provide tools, templates and ideas to support those working in resettlement programmes;
- “A City says Yes”: Reflections on experiences of the Save Me Campaign to promote resettlement in Germany.
- “A Place to live, a Place to Stay”: A Good Practice Guide for Housing in Refugee Resettlement;

- “Welcome to Sheffield”: Reflections on 8 Years of Experience with Receiving Resettled Refugees at the Local Level.

To promote cross-European learning and understanding, the network has trained Refugee Ambassadors and produced numerous videos to raise awareness about refugee protection and the need to engage in coordinated reception and integration planning.

SHARE has included the following among its “Lessons Learned”:

All countries across Europe can and should engage in

- From big cities to small municipalities: all local actors have something to offer in supporting refugee reception and integration.
- Integration should be planned already before refugees arrive and include regional and local authorities and civil society partners from the outset.
- Effective reception and integration at the local level requires ongoing dialogue and adequate approaches to information sharing, partnerships and coordination mechanisms.
- Regional and local level coordination help in the management of refugee reception and placement and contribute and to achieve better integration outcomes.
- A secure legal status and placement into stable housing at local level are basic conditions to start integration.
- Achieving positive integration outcomes requires a holistic, personalised and coordinated approach, should be time limited, respond to specific needs and support refugee independence.
- Assessing individual integration needs and progress in the context of families and households, can enhance overall integration outcomes.
- Employment support within refugee integration should focus on identifying and developing the individual skills and capacities that boost refugee employability in the local job-

market. This can include validation of diplomas, competencies assessments, vocational skills development and workplace language-learning, within specialised labour market integration programmes or partnerships or mainstream employment services.¹

In conclusion, I would like to return to ICMC's roots as a Catholic Church-inspired organisation. Although we serve beneficiaries of any background and strictly prohibit proselytizing, we are motivated by religious values and tradition. For this reason, ICMC deeply appreciates and encourages the engagement of religious leaders from all faith traditions in advocacy for just, rights-based, person-centred, and inclusive migration-related policies and practices and in promoting attitude changes among their religious adherents and among all people of good will to welcome and include refugees and migrants as valued members of local communities. I will cite some examples from within the Commonwealth:

- In September 2015, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales declared: "The UK government has agreed to receive and resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees from the camps in neighbouring countries over the next five years. The Catholic Church in England and Wales will work alongside Government and local authorities to offer welcome and support to those in need. The refugee crisis is a huge challenge, not only in Europe and the Middle East, but in many others parts of the world where large numbers of refugees live deeply uncertain and perilous lives. Consequently, as a Catholic community, and as a country, we need to be committed to helping refugees over a long period. To sustain that effort we need moral imagination."²
- Also in September 2015, the Catholic Bishops of Canada

¹ *SHARE Network Magazine, Cities that Care, Cities that Share*, Issue 5, February 2016.

² <https://cvcomment.org/2015/09/09/statement-on-refugees-by-the-catholic-bishops-of-england-and-wales/>

made the following appeal: “As our world and our country debate how best to respond [to refugees from Syria], we as Catholics must ask what we might do personally and in our local communities. Here are a few suggestions on what we can do to help in this tragic, overwhelming and complex problem.

- **Sponsor a refugee family.** During his Angelus message this past September 6, Pope Francis invited parishes, religious communities, monasteries, and shrines throughout Europe to welcome refugee families in preparation for the Year of Mercy. Should we in Canada do less? When we refuse to welcome others, our country, our homes and our hearts become closed to life. Although many among us face economic difficulties, what we have and own is so much more than what is accessible to the world’s refugees.
- **Get involved politically.** Any response to a major emergency situation is always most effective when governments, local communities and committed citizens work together.”³
- In May of 2016, the Catholic Bishops of New Zealand stated: “Our migrant brothers and sisters are people whose dignity is to be protected and who have the capacity to contribute to the wellbeing of our common home. Many new arrivals will end up living in the poorest suburbs, because that is where cheap housing is available. We need to support the whole community so that both new arrivals and long term residents can have what they need to live in dignity. We are greatly encouraged by the response of parishes and religious brothers and sisters who are taking practical action to welcome refugees. Many have joined the call to increase our refugee intake and others have given time and resources to support families newly arriving to our country.”⁴

³ http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/Responding_to_the_refugee_crisis_-_EN.pdf

⁴ <http://catholic.org.nz/nzcbc/fx-view-article.cfm?ctype=BSART&loadref=83&id=1371>