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Vatican UN delegate pleads on behalf of immigrants

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The Vatican representative to the United Nations in New York, Indian Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, addressing the Commission on Population and Development, asked that nations make a greater effort "strengthening bonds of friendship and brotherhood within the human family", above all by helping immigrants integrate better.

Citing the current economic crisis that is affecting developed and developing economies, the Indian Archbishop said many of the millions of men women and children leave their country of origin because of "situations of unsustainable socioeconomic insecurity and poverty," according to Vatican Radio.

Describing the current state of migration a "social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions", the Vatican representative noted the need to "promote family reunification, integration of migrants, recognition of the qualifications of skilled migrant workers, new approaches to assist elderly migrants, cost reductions of sending remittances, as well as protection of female domestic workers and migrants in irregular situations, especially women and children vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation, abuse and human trafficking."

The full statement follows:

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation congratulates you and the bureau on your election and looks forward to working with you during this session to address the urgent needs of our fellow brothers and sisters in situations of insecurity and poverty due to migration.

The globalised economy, by putting human beings increasingly in contact with each other across borders,

has contributed to creating and strengthening bonds of friendship and brotherhood within the human family. At the same time, increasing social and economic inequalities have been a source of division in the world and among our peoples. Situations of unsustainable socioeconomic insecurity and poverty have forced more and more individuals, families and entire communities to pursue their destinies in foreign lands and have driven them to leave their homes and families in the hopes of a more secure future in different countries and communities. In addition, millions every year are constrained to abandon their lands and the lands of their ancestors out of threat of war, humanitarian crisis, civil unrest and famine in order to survive. Whether due to a search for better living conditions or a flight from persecution, war, violence, hunger or natural disasters, [migration] has led to an unprecedented mingling of peoples, with new problems and challenges.[1]

The current state of migration presents a social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions[2] where families are forcibly divided, children are rendered vulnerable, labourers face abuse without recourse to remedies, and migrants are incarcerated without due respect for their human rights and dignity. Women migrants, in particular, face threats of sexual abuse and trafficking as if they were mere commodities. Accordingly, my delegation is pleased that, in his Report,[3] the Secretary-General has highlighted the need to promote family reunification, integration of migrants, recognition of the qualifications of skilled migrant workers, new approaches to assist elderly migrants, cost reductions of sending remittances, as well as protection of female domestic workers and migrants in irregular situations, especially women and children vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation, abuse and human trafficking.

Solutions to the predicament that migration provokes for millions of our brothers and sisters ought to be far-reaching and sustainable if they are not to exacerbate an already tragic situation for many. Whereas States are possessed of a right to protect the integrity of their territorial borders, the frank reality of migration necessitates the measure of this right against the right of all people to migrate and pursue a standard of life befitting their human dignity. Where this right cannot be realised, necessity ordains that each one of us would seek it elsewhere and thus countries of destination have a moral duty to treat each migrant with respect for their human rights and dignity. Controlling borders therefore requires treating migrants with justice and mercy rather than as dangerous criminals or unwanted elements of the society. It also requires extending due protection of the law and respecting the universal rights of migrants, regardless of their migratory status, especially their right to life, development, education, clothing, food, shelter and basic health care.

Mr. Chairman,

A first step towards solution must be the frank recognition of the presence among us of migrants, and an acknowledgement of their humanity. It is not a reality that can be washed away. The presence of migrants among us confronts us with the ancient question, "Who is my neighbor?"[4], and invites receiving countries to evaluate their hospitality in terms of their commitment to brotherhood enshrined in the very first article of the Universal Declaration of Human rights.

Migrants count among "the simple, the humble, the poor, the forgotten," that Pope Francis pleaded for in his recent Palm Sunday Homily[5]: "those who do not matter in the eyes of the world". Their human dignity requires that we accord to them their fundamental rights, including their right to migrate. Migrants are human persons, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, members of the human family, struggling with the challenges we all face, oftentimes under infinitely harsher circumstances. This should augur for the establishment of a stronger sense of solidarity between peoples and amongst nations which requires collaboration between countries of origin and destination and the adoption of adequate international norms so as to protect the rights of migrants and members of their families.

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Mr. Chairman,

Migrants' courageous pursuit of development for the good of their families naturally predisposes them to serve as an inspiration for their host communities. Their presence, courage and willingness to work can be a boon for both receiving and sending economies, and an enrichment of the common good through the cultures and values they bear. They are a source of immense social and economic potential which must be nurtured or risk being squandered. The Secretary-General reports an increase by some 60 million of the number of international migrants during the past 20 years, most of whom migrate from developing to developed countries ? suggesting that migrant families are providing vital human resources in these rapidly ageing regions of the world where fertility rates are often well below replacement levels. Thus, migration brings host countries many benefits ? and these ought honestly to be acknowledged and accorded the appropriate legal recognition.

Ultimately, the only appropriate response to the ongoing phenomenon of migration must be the development of the sending countries whose encounter with the globalised economy has not rendered them able to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. Development of the poorer countries is the real and urgent challenge we have as a human family, calling for our active and concrete engagement. Redoubling border controls or tightening visa restrictions only serves to bolster migrants' resolution and risk-taking, aggravating a sense of civic alienation to the point where it could threaten to undermine stability and the common good. Such an approach functions to harness a force of great potential good to precisely the opposite ends.

Further, we cannot fail to recognize the impact that the enactment of draconian population control policies have wreaked on countries whose populations can no longer sustain themselves, nor the destructive impact that the forced promotion of harmful notions, such as reproductive rights, has had on migrant families, trivialising marriage and the family and denying the very right to life for the unborn. Such a promotion of population control as a way to development has also led States to use forced abortion and sterilization as a means for controlling or mitigating the demographic and racial impact of migrants on their countries. States, on the contrary, have the duty to bolster the family, ?the fundamental group unit of society?[6], so as to provide support for the institution where the relations of tomorrow must be cultivated.

My delegation will continue to advocate for and provide economic, social, political, cultural, ethical, and religious resources for migrants regardless of their legal status and hopes that through this session we may find the political, legal and economic will necessary to make a lasting difference for those migrants and refugees longing for a better life.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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