

# Refugees are Common Responsibility

Archbishop Jurkovic Urges International Community

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*Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, Holy See Mission (Geneva, Switzerland), Wikimedia Commons, Водник*

“The 1951 (UN) Convention clearly states that refugees are a common responsibility of the international community,” said Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva. “As a consequence, the international community has to shoulder collectively the responsibility of assisting refugees.”

His remarks came on October 17, 2017, at the 2nd Thematic Discussion towards a Global Compact on Refugees Panel 2: “How can we support States to receive large numbers of refugees in a safe and dignified manner?”

He commended nations that “in spite of their own hardships, have kept their borders and hearts open to welcome refugees” noting that “in the distribution of financial resources for development on the part of international institutions, special consideration ought to be given to refugee-hosting countries.”

**The Archbishop’s Remarks Follow:**

Mr. Moderator,

The generous and admirable responses of those countries that, in spite of their own hardships, have kept their borders and hearts open to welcome refugees, ought to receive tangible and prompt support from the international community. In fact, without this solidarity, it would be impossible to assure “the widest possible exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms” to which they are entitled<sup>1</sup>.

The 1951 Convention clearly states that refugees are a common responsibility of the international community. As a consequence, the international community has to shoulder collectively the responsibility of assisting refugees. Thus, in the distribution of financial resources for development on the part of international institutions, special consideration ought to be given to refugee-hosting countries, for projects that benefit refugees but also “reward” the generosity of local families and communities. After all, these are “investments” in humanity and peace for the sake of the common good.

At the same time, however, while ensuring better preparedness for large movements of refugees, this should not serve as a pretext for “subcontracting” the responsibility for protection to certain countries simply because of their geographical proximity to unstable areas. Nor should it be a justification for the “containment” of movement of refugees, but should truly be an expression of genuine international cooperation and solidarity.

Mr. Moderator,

As Pope Francis reminds us, “defending the inalienable rights of refugees, ensuring their fundamental freedoms and respecting their dignity are duties from which no one can be exempted.”<sup>2</sup>

A responsible and dignified welcome of refugees “begins by offering them decent and appropriate shelter. The enormous gathering together of persons seeking asylum and of refugees has not produced positive results. Instead these gatherings have created new situations of vulnerability and hardship.”<sup>3</sup>

To enable States to receive large numbers of refugees in a safe and dignified manner entails expanding space for asylum, for humanitarian corridors to avoid unbearably long waiting periods, for family reunification, for resettlement and other durable solutions; it

also entails promoting alternatives to detention; adopting policies and practices that guarantee religious freedom; raising awareness in public opinion regarding the underlying political causes and the search for peaceful solutions and co-existence.<sup>4</sup>

It also means further developing effective partnerships and synergies to help provide medical, educational, and social services upon arrival. In this regard, it is important to include civil society, religious institutions and faith-based communities, as they can readily respond to arrivals and often provide emergency relief.

In sum, as the first U.N. High Commissioner for refugees, Dr. Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart put it: “The essence is to find a little place, which is not just a roof over one’s head, not just a place to live in. It is [...] a series of elements which together constitute a man’s independence and therefore his freedom and his dignity.”<sup>5</sup>

I thank you, Mr. Moderator.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Preamble of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

<sup>2</sup> Address of Pope Francis to the International Forum on Migration and Peace, 21 February 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Address of Pope Francis, *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Points, Migrants and Refugees Section, Holy See’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

<sup>5</sup> Address of Dr. Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Oslo, 12 December 1955.

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