



# **BORDERS: WALLS OR BRIDGES?**

Proceedings of the First International Forum  
ON  
**MIGRATION AND PEACE**

Antigua Guatemala, January 29-30, 2009

Edited by

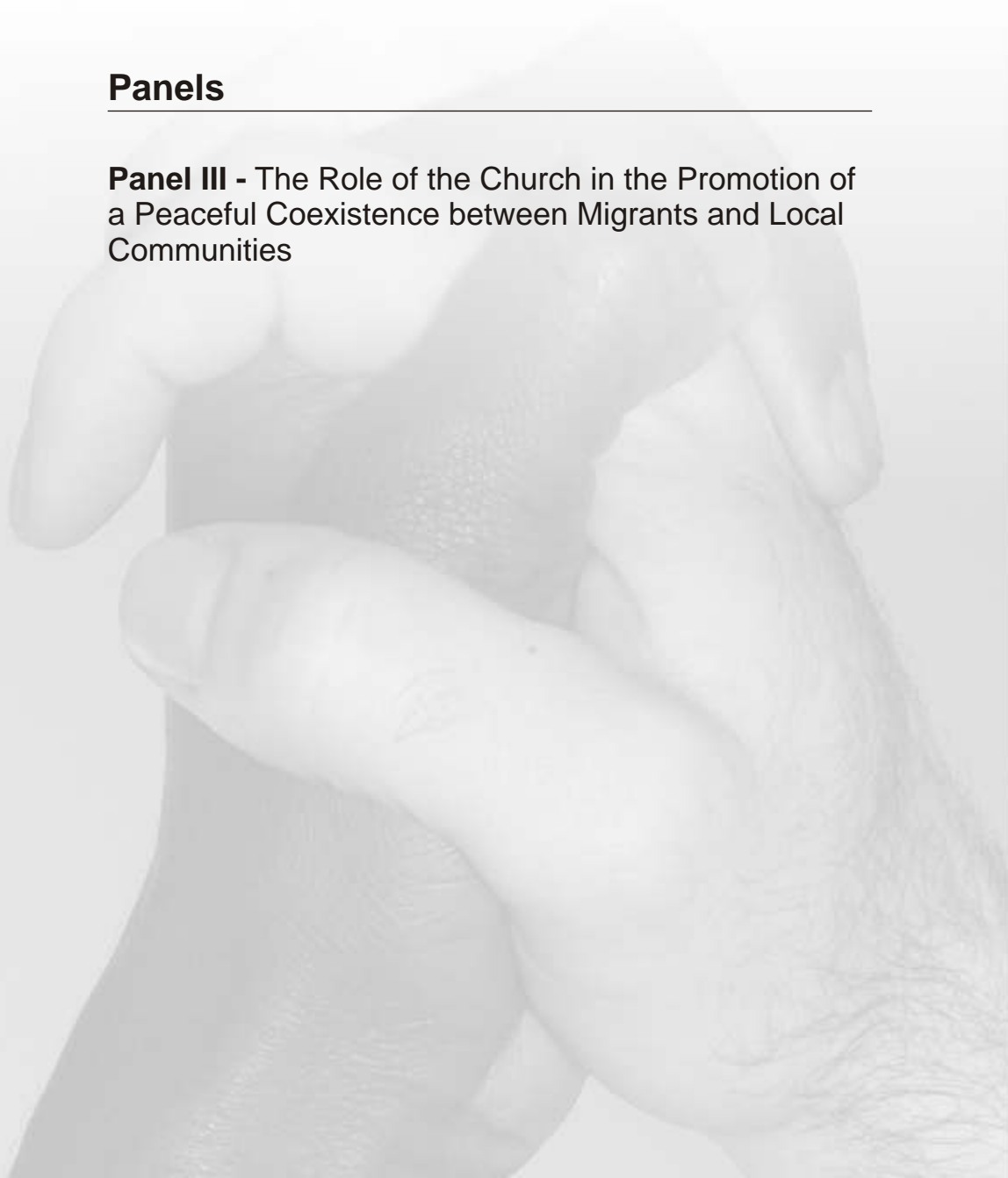
Leonir Mario Chiarello  
Maria Isabel Sanza Gutiérrez  
Ezio Marchetto

**Scalabrini International**  
 **Migration Network**

## Panels

---

**Panel III** - The Role of the Church in the Promotion of a Peaceful Coexistence between Migrants and Local Communities





## Introduction

### **Rev. Rui Manuel Da Silva Pedro**

*General Director*

*Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN)*

---

Good afternoon, everyone. As we all know, one of the objectives of this First International Forum on Migration and Peace, promoted by the *Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN)* of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Charles, Scalabrinians, is to reaffirm the Church's unwavering commitment to the migrant communities, as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*. In its 14<sup>th</sup> issue, the Exhortation realizes that in the Americas migrations were providential and gradual bridges for the religious and human identity of the American social physiognomy.

Experts from various Church entities involved in the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility will participate in this panel. Rev. Novatus Rugambwa, Deputy Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant Peoples, and Mr. Johan Ketelers, Secretary General of The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) will represent the Church's universality. Rev. Sister Erta Lemus, Secretary for the Human Mobility Commission of CELAM, and Rev. Sister Janete Ferreira, Coordinator on Migration and Human Trafficking of SELACC, will represent the regional Pastoral Care of Human Mobility. Finally, Rev. Maurizio Pontin, Coordinator of the Human Mobility Commission for the Colombian Bishops Conference, will represent the national level.

International migration, with its exodus of culture, language, religion, moral values, political participation, and quest for dignity, is an alternative bridge to peace in the American Continent and in the world. Migrants are peace builders, mediators of reconciliation, agents of change and meeting among peoples.

Before I give the floor to Rev. Novatus Rugambwa, from the Holy See, I would like to invite you to take a moment of silence. Let us pray for the migrants of the world who die in the name of peace and hope. [*Editor's note: During the moment of silence there was a PowerPoint presentation*

*prepared by the dioceses of Cadiz, Spain, about the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.]*

These are the prophetic words of Most Rev. Juan Gerardi, son of the traveling church in Guatemala, assassinated in 1998: *“Peace is possible; peace that is born from the truth of each one of us and from all of us, painful truth, memories of the afflictions of our country; personifying truth, liberator that empowers any man and any woman to find themselves in order to take charge of their history; truth that is challenging us to recognize our individual and collective responsibility and to commit ourselves to ensure that those abominable acts never happen again.”*

Once again, thank you, to all the participants on this panel. I will now hand the podium over to them.

## **Rev. Novatus Rugambwa**

*Deputy Secretary*

*Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People*

---

### **The Role of the Universal Church in Promoting Peaceful Coexistence between Migrants and Local Communities**

Excellencies and Distinguished Friends:

The most cordial greetings on behalf of the President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, His Eminence Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, and the Secretary of the Pontifical Council, His Excellency Archbishop Agostino Marchetto. We are very pleased with the celebration of this “First International Forum on Migration and Peace.” Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my reflections on the role of the Universal Church in promoting a peaceful coexistence between migrants and local communities.

#### **1. The Human Person: the Church's Core Concern**

The Church's pastoral concern in the area of migration became more structured in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when migration flows became a mass phenomenon under the pressure of acute poverty and economic insecurity. Since then, there have been many migration flows, affecting approximately 200 million people.

The main pastoral concern is “man's complete development and the development of all mankind” (*Populorum Progressio*, n. 5).<sup>1</sup> Naturally, this includes the migrant man. It is important to remember that “man is the main road the Church must travel in fulfilling its mission: he is the primary and fundamental road, traced out by Christ himself; the road that invariably leads to the mystery of Incarnation and Redemption. This man is the road for the Church, a road that, in a sense, leads to the origin of all roads the Church must travel, because each and every man has been redeemed by Christ, and Christ has bonded with each and every man, even if the man is

---

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967), p. 260.

unaware of it” (*Redemptor Hominis*, n. 14).<sup>2</sup>

Human migration follows two main directions: the first one is the dimension of poverty, suffering and need, which requires immediate assistance. The second direction is the one that shows the potential and the resources that migrants bring along in their progressive integration into their new socio-cultural world.

Naturally, the Church feels committed to both directions and works with institutions and volunteers who defend migrants. In this manner, the Church aims at establishing a collaborative relationship, knowing that migration offers the ecclesial world the opportunity to join efforts with society in an environment prone to dialogue.

## 2. The Church's Magisterium

Solidarity and subsidiarity are fundamental principles of the Church's Social Doctrine. They ratify the basic rights of a person. “To work for the unity of the human family means to reject all discrimination based on race, culture or religion.” It means to be a testimony to a fraternal life based in the Gospel, respecting cultural diversity and remaining open to dialogue. It entails defending the right to live in peace, as well as keeping vigilant, so that the immigration laws of each state recognize basic human rights.”<sup>3</sup>

In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, referring to the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*, entered into force on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, stated that “the Church supports the ratification of the proposed international agreements to defend the rights of migrants, refugees and their families, and offers much needed advocacy through its various institutions and associations.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important rights of a person is the right to emigrate and settle where he/she considers the best place to better realize his/her capabilities, aspirations and projects.

This right is subject to each state's right to manage its own

---

<sup>2</sup>AAS 71 (1979), pp. 284-285.

<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: *People on the Move* XXVII (81, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Benedict XVI, Message of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: *OR* 264 (44.40615.XI2006), p. 5.

immigration policies, but should not be subordinated to conditions that render it banal.<sup>5</sup>

Within the current socio-political context, more important than the right to emigrate is the right not to emigrate; in other words, conditions must be set in place to enable a person to remain in his or her own land, as emphasized by John Paul II: “The primary right of man is to live in his own land. This right may only be exercised if the state keeps constant control over the factors that cause migration.”<sup>6</sup> On the American Continent, emigration is not always a free choice, but a need caused by natural disasters, wars, social conflicts, extreme economic hardship and the lack of essential goods. In many cases, emigration constitutes the only true alternative for survival. In these cases, just as life is sacred, the right to emigrate is sacred.

The causes of migration are not limited to those previously mentioned. Another frequent cause is lack of socio-economic balance, which has been worsened by globalization. Immigration of undocumented persons creates human trafficking and exploitation. The Church condemns such situations, and calls for regulations to control migrant flows. It challenges us to take responsibility and find solutions. We must go beyond simple verbal statements in favor of the economic development of the migrants' countries of origin; we should put more emphasis on the war against human slavery and trafficking; we must take care of those special cases that require humanitarian protection beyond political asylum, all the while denouncing the criminalization of undocumented aliens as an inhuman act.

It is therefore necessary to enact regulations to ensure stability and the protection of rights. The Church does not participate in the enacting of legislation, but reserves the right to contribute with timely proposals or with moral criticisms and defenses so that such actions may inspire respect of the fundamental rights, which are based in the great Christian tradition. In turn,

---

<sup>5</sup>“Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there.” John XXII, Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, First Part, 25: AAS LV (1963) 263, Cfr. also *EF* 79; *GS* 65, 69; *DPMC* 7; *EMCC* 21, “at the same time one corroborates the right any country has to practice a migratory policy that corresponds to the common good” (*EMCC* n. 29).

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Discourse of the Holy Father: Pontificio Consiglio della Pastorale per i Migranti e gli Itineranti*, Atti del IV Congresso Mondiale sulla Pastorale dei Migranti e dei Rifugiati (October 5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, 1998), Città del Vaticano 1999, p. 9; cfr. *EMCC* 29.

secular people, groups, associations and organizations of Christian inspiration must abide by such legislation.

Successful migration entails the transformation from a multi-cultural society, where ethnic groups are simply superimposed, to an intercultural society, where ethnic groups interact and enrich each other.

### **3. The Intervention of the Holy See**

In the area of human mobility, before making a call to action, the Church takes on the responsibility of proposing the motivations that justify and support the commitment. This is how the Church has produced, particularly in the last 60 years, important legal, organizational, pastoral and, above all, doctrinal documents in support of migrants.

The recent Church's documents regarding the pastoral care of human mobility have a novel flavor, not because they introduce into the Church's patrimony anything new, but because they emphasize eternal principles, while applying them to historic situations. It is the renewing of continuity.

The Church remains very vigilant to the pastoral acceptance of all migrants, particularly the undocumented migrants, who suffer fear and, more often than not, are criminalized. Additionally, unscrupulous thugs, who participate in human trafficking, feed the xenophobia and sometimes provoke racist outbursts that cause suffering among migrants.

### **4. The Church's Commitment from her Magisterium**

The Church's Magisterium in the area of pastoral care of human mobility offers suitable, analytical and synthetic considerations but, most importantly, points out directives and itineraries on how to carry on with migrants. All of this is specifically articulated in the following pronouncements:

1. The Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* written by Pope Pious XII (1952)<sup>7</sup> is commonly known as the “*magna carta*” of the Church's thoughts on the migratory phenomenon. The first part describes the history of migrations. The second part has a legal and prescriptive nature. It is an

---

<sup>7</sup>Cfr. AAS XLIV (1952) 649-704.

open invitation to the Pastors of local dioceses to create favorable conditions for the religious life of migrants by establishing national parishes or similar structures to be entrusted to priests or missionary chaplains who speak the same language and are of the same nationality as the migrants. Likewise, the document prescribes the profile of such priests and directors as well as responsibilities for Bishops of the churches from the migrants' country of origin and destination.

2. The *Motu Proprio De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* by Pope Paul VI (1969)<sup>8</sup> with the corresponding Instruction of the Congregation of Bishops, *De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura*,<sup>9</sup> declares that “the migrants' spiritual patrimony and their own culture must be taken into account with great consideration; thus, a major concern is the importance that must be given to the national language through which they express their thoughts, mentality and religious life.” From which we conclude that “pastoral assistance for migrants will reap more fruit if it is entrusted to those who know these issues very well and have better mastered the migrants' language” (n. 11). In this manner, important work proposals are open in pastoral and social fields to address the responsibility of the local Church, the cooperation of the whole Christian community, the fundamental role of the lay faithful, the very definition of the concept of migrants and their specific pastoral care, which is not limited to the first and second generation but extends over the whole time that is needed.

3. *The Church and Human Mobility* (1978).<sup>10</sup> This Third Document has as an objective to translate everything that has been written for those “responsible for the work” into a current language format accessible to all and into a comprehensive summary for all the various form of human mobility.

4. The Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (2004),<sup>11</sup> in continuity with the previous pronouncements of the Magisterium of the Church, and updating many of the aspects of the ecclesial pastoral care in the

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. AASLXI (1969) 601-603.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. AASLXI (1952) 614-643.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. AASLXX (1978) 357-378.

<sup>11</sup> The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People published in 2004 the Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, which can be found in AAS XCVI (2004), 762-822, in the Journal of Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *People on the Move* XXXVI (95, 2004) and on the web page:

[www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/index\\_it.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/index_it.htm)

area of migrations, presents a global vision of the migratory phenomenon emphasizing, especially, religious and social cultural aspects, while promoting the commitment for a fair and ethical economic and political order. This document calls attention to the necessity for an improved perspective in which the migrants feel that their own experience, frequently a painful and dramatic one, contributes to the creation of a world that is more just and prosperous for all, a world where development is not only understood in economic terms but as a new world that promotes and takes care of the centrality and the sacred nature of the human person: the “culture of welcome” (EMCC, n. 39). The Church, in this manner, manifests her own conviction that the human person occupies a central place in society; hence “the immigrant thirsts for some ‘gesture’ that will make him feel welcome, recognized and acknowledged as a person” (EMCC, n. 96). While States, typically, fight for their own interests, the Church, on the contrary, supports the perspective of an economy truly global that co-integrates all nations and all population segments, starting from within each country, combining the national common good with the universal one.

On the subject of respect for the fundamental rights of the person, and also for those who are involved in human mobility, and with particular concern in the area of pastoral care, the Church is continually championing them through several levels, such as the specific initiatives and Messages of the Holy Father as well as through sensitizing activities by International Organizations and by the governments of the migrants' countries of origin, transit and destination. Moreover, we stress the recommendations of the five world congresses organized by our Pontifical Council, in the Vatican, while the sixth one is approaching, which will take place in November 2009. These Congresses structure the Church's strategy starting from the centrality and sacred nature of the human person, especially in cases of vulnerability and marginalization.<sup>12</sup> We also have continental conferences.

*Exsul Familia, De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura, Church and Human Mobility*, and now *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*: at various moments, the Church has offered the world decisive principles of her Social Doctrine, among them, the centrality of the person, defense of his/her fundamental rights, protection and appreciation of minorities in civil society

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2007, “The human person, peace's heart”: *OR* 146 (44.429-13.12.2006), pp. 4-5.

and in the Church, the value of culture in the work of evangelization, contributions by migrations to universal peace, the ecclesial and missionary dimension of the migratory phenomenon, the importance of dialogue and meeting deep down within civil society and the ecclesial community across the various denominations and religions.

In fact, the Church is interested and is attentive to all categories of human mobility: besides the migrants in search of jobs, domestically or abroad, there are also refugees, fugitives, displaced people, those who are victims of human smuggling or trafficking, foreign students, nomads, circus and funfair people, tourists and pilgrims, fishermen, sailors, those who travel by air and land, youngsters and street women, and the homeless. In such monumental work, complex and honorable, there is the ever present search to obtain the same collaboration from all of those who carry in their heart the cause of millions of brothers and sisters co-involved in human mobility. Lastly, along with the major International Organizations, it is ever more difficult to find opportune solutions to migratory problems, especially in the fight against the trafficking of minors, smuggling and trafficking of organs; thus, the Church has focused particularly on prevention and proper training of personnel, protective services, formation of committees and support groups, and emphasis on legislative reforms related to migration.

## **5. Outstanding Matters**

It is important to underline the positive aspects that the Social Doctrine of the Church has received from the migration phenomenon in order to better structure her responsibility in the promotion of peaceful coexistence between migrants and local communities. In fact, the Church's perspective on migrants is derived from the faith in God the Creator and His Providence, Who bestows all things created to the whole of humankind and redeems it in Jesus Christ and makes it part of the life of God. It is about a perspective that, in the end, creates predisposition for inclusion, reciprocity and dialogue. In this manner, we are paying attention in order to discover the socio-economic factors, and especially the cultural ones, that fundamentally put the migratory reality in a positive perspective.

From that coexistence, cultural pluralism will arise, at least, through the tolerance and respect for the various cultural expressions dynamically living together, side by side, which is the most favorable form, as intercultural, which is the result of the exchange of authentic values amongst

diverse cultures. Without exaggeration or naïveté, the Church seeks the following objective: “In contemporary society, to which migration contributes by making it more and more multiethnic, intercultural and multi-religious, Christians are called to face a substantially new and fundamental chapter in their missionary duty, (...). With great respect and attention for the migrants' traditions and culture, we Christians are called to bear witness to the Gospel of love and peace” (EMCC, n. 100).

From the previous quote arises a perspective of peace, we could say a possible and constructive meeting within diversity: “Cultural plurality thus invites contemporary man to practice dialogue and also face basic questions such as the meaning of life and history, suffering and poverty, hunger, sickness and death. Openness to different cultural identities does not, however, mean accepting them all indiscriminately, but rather respecting them, because they are inherent in people, and, if possible, appreciating them in their diversity” (EMCC, n. 30).

In fact, mobility offers an opportunity to promote men to living interpersonal relations in accordance with essential values of life, peace and justice, while being conscious that “notwithstanding the repeated failures of human projects, although noble, no doubt, Christians, roused by the phenomenon of mobility, become aware of their call to always be renewing a sign of brotherhood and communion in the world, by practicing respect for differences and common interests in their ethical encounters with others,” (EMCC, n. 102).

Then the possibility emerges to individualize factors and aspects of migrations that help us discover the value of the phenomenon, in itself, with the objective of interpreting with a Christian spirit this “sign of the times.”<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* promotes a unprecedented perspective of the migratory phenomenon by declaring that “The cultural situation today, global and dynamic as it is, calls for the incarnation of the one faith in many cultures and thus represents an unprecedented challenge, a true *kairòs* for the whole People of God” (n. 34). In fact, this profound expression refutes a series of elements, shedding light on the difficulties and shadows of migrations, especially stressing that “The

---

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: OR254 (29.10.2005), p. 4: A. Marchetto, “Le migrazioni: segno dei tempi”: PONTIFICIO Consiglio della Pastorale Per I Migrante e gli Itineranti (a cura di), *La sollecitudine della Chiesa verso Imigrante*, (Quaderni Universitari Parte 1), Libreria Editrice, Città del Vaticano 2005, pp. 28-40.

passage from mono-cultural to multi-cultural societies can be a sign of the living presence of God in history and in the community of mankind, for it offers a providential opportunity for the fulfillment of God's plan for a universal communion (n. 9). Next, turning from the migratory phenomenon to the people involved, we must recognize that “Migrants, too, can be the hidden providential builders of such a universal fraternity together with many other brothers and sisters. They offer the Church the opportunity to realize more concretely its identity as communion and its missionary vocation (n. 103). Finally, even in a wider perspective “today's migrations may be considered a call, albeit a mysterious one, to the Kingdom of God, which is already present in His Church, its beginning (cf. *LG* 9), and an instrument of Providence to further the unity of the human family and peace” (n. 104). Thus, this broadened vision, certainly, considers that “the migratory phenomenon which, by bringing together persons of different nationalities, ethnic origins and religions into contact, contributes to making visible the true face of the Church (cf. *GS* 92) and brings out the value of migrations from the point of view of ecumenism and missionary work and dialogue” (n. 38).

In sum, the ecclesial perspective directs to disseminate the concept that the migrants' presence in contemporary society is not temporary but structural, and thus represents “a great richness in the development of humanity.”<sup>14</sup>

At any rate, the fact that we are still missing that solidarity, cooperation, international interdependency, and fair distribution of the fruits of the land, points to the necessity of working with depth and strength in the areas of origin of migratory flows, so as to be able to mitigate those factors which compel people, whether individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural place (cfr. *EMCC*, nn. 4; 8-9; 39-43).

Thank you very much.

---

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007: *People on the Move* XXXIX 104, 2007, p. 29.

## **Mr. Johan Ketelers**

*Secretary General*

*International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)*

---

### **The Role of the Church in Promoting Social Cohesion Between Migrants and Local Communities**

There are many aspects of peace and migration that determine the level of social cohesion (*peaceful coexistence*) in and of our societies at community level, intercommunity and national levels, regional and international levels. Many actors are involved in very complementary ways and among them are the various Church structures, including the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). Promoting social cohesion between migrants and local communities is in fact identifying and establishing a link between international and local realities. A first reading and understanding of the tools that genuinely enhance social cohesion reveals that any international work disconnected from daily realities very often hampers and diverts local initiatives. This is to say that the Church, with its most important and yet still insufficiently recognized capillary structures that have the capacity to reach every last person in remote geographies, is an excellent medium to contribute to the strengthening of social cohesion and the implementation of peace.

But the Church is more than a structural means. It adds vision and message, ethical and moral dimensions: in this way, it is a true builder of society. The work of the Church is concrete and human-oriented in order to preserve the dignity and well-being of people at both the spiritual and social levels. In line with Catholic social teaching, ICMC believes that social cohesion is so real you can touch it: it is also about life without running or hiding; it is about a fair wage and decent working conditions; it is about decent housing, access to health care and education that is no different for migrants and refugees than it is for the nationals of a country. ICMC's work, directly and through members and other partners, aims to be that concrete.

The previous speaker, Msgr. Novatus, has already focused on the theological and pastoral aspects related to the moral, ethical and practical values of integration and community-building. I will therefore very briefly

and solely touch on *how* the Church, including through its ICMC structure, can meaningfully contribute and engage in promoting social cohesion and, therefore, peace both in practical programming and policy-building.

**1. Increasing efforts in the promotion of social cohesion (*peaceful coexistence*) by advocating a correct vision, a more holistic, and, above all, human vision of development**

“Development is the new name for peace,” wrote Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*. Peace is indeed not so much the absence of the various levels of conflict but the co-creation of global, international and local environments in which progress and development are secured, where rights and duties have become relevant reference frameworks, where justice in economic, political and social realities is guaranteed; it is about an environment that no longer divides but embraces and unites. In his message for the celebration of this year's World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI concluded that “*in today's globalized world, it is increasingly evident that peace can be built only if everyone is assured the possibility of reasonable growth: sooner or later, the distortions produced by unjust systems have to be paid for by everyone.*”

Peace is therefore to be defined in terms of global progress and globally shared prospects. These can be economic, social and environmental, but they have to be moral and ethical. It is evident that the Church, the bearer of a message of freedom, morality and ethics, has a very important pastoral and social role to play in however such progress and prospects are constructed. Very concretely: the Church will always put the human person in his/her human dignity in the centre of any man-made strategy and accompany the local, national and even global communities in their proceedings.

The relationship between peace, development and social cohesion is eloquent: peace and social cohesion are in large part carried and driven by the concrete concepts of progress and development. However, without clear and shared societal objectives (and societal vision), social cohesion and development typically shrink to the level of individual aims which tend to result in mechanisms that focus only on specific profit-oriented goals, and which in fact generate inequity, division and social tension. These mechanisms of profit become even more appallingly clear in countries

wider. Civil society organizations in Latin America, including the Church, have repeatedly called attention to this risk, and more than once denounced such mechanisms, declaring emphatically that they cannot be understood as a sign of true development because they do not include the quality criteria of human dignity and equity.

## **2. Strengthening the tools that regulate the transit from less humane conditions to more humane conditions**

Given that development is indeed the new name for peace, *Populorum Progressio* then defines development as “the transition from less humane conditions to those which are more humane.” Peace, therefore, depends upon a complex process of transitions at individual, community-based, international and even global levels. That is where peace and migration are linked: because global efforts meant to increase development and progress have not yet provided the kind of results people may have wished for themselves, or, as conditions and situations in too many places have actually deteriorated, growing numbers of people decide individually and as communities to leave those places of less humane conditions to look for safer havens, where more humane conditions exist and where a new future can be built. Very worryingly, many meet even worse conditions, enduring them in the hope of finding better economic prospects in order to provide a better income for their families and give their children a better upbringing. In these human choices, undeniably, often forced, migration is nothing less than the search for, and a road to, peace as an immediate or long-term individual or family project.

Distortions in growth and development are at the heart of the migration phenomenon, arguably even the central element of classic “push-pull” forces. When the migration is actually forced, as a reaction to such distortions, it is not only a measurable indicator of a breakdown in social cohesion but, in the absence of accompaniment and policies that are sensitive to needs as well as rights, also often the cause of further breakdown of cohesion among migrants, their families, and their communities. Just consider the millions of families and spouses scattered and separated for years, and their children left behind. Indeed, these and other more notorious signs of the times, such as the recent collapse of financial markets, and to some extent the failure of the mechanisms that govern these markets, invite us to invest much more in humanity and mankind, but, above all, to develop

policy responses that improve the situations of migrants as and after they consider a decision to migrate and organize humanitarian and social assistance that responds to their needs.

### **3. Promoting social cohesion (*peaceful coexistence*) between migrants and local communities by standing for families and family unity**

Family reunification promotes strong family values, and family values are powerful building blocks for any nation. In our encounters with and accompaniment of migrants in societies worldwide, the simple presence of family drives migrants to search for stability and peaceful integration. At the same time, the presence of family raises the migrant worker and the members of his or her family to a sociologic position comparable with the native-born, promoting not only participation in and contribution to the society, but genuine well-being. Were we to lose the human and sociologic dimensions of family unity among migrant families, as one group or among any other groups, individuals and society would lose one of the most powerful forces positively affecting social cohesion, coherence and societal development.

It should also be emphasized here that a family does not cease to be a family because its members have crossed borders, no matter how legal systems may today suggest differences. Any modification to the status of a genuine family relationship brought about by the simple fact of crossing a border is a new, artificial and unsustainable construct imposed upon the family. In that context, policies that disfavor family reunification in favor of strictly economic or utilitarian values of labor migration, not only deny the right to family unity and its value in building social cohesion, they clearly generate social tension, indeed, the very opposite of social cohesion, within the families themselves, and within the multiple societies in which the migrants and their families are kept separate by those policies. At a minimum, support of these fragile families and the upbringing of children who in many cases grow up in a more consumerist-oriented reality artificially constructed on remittances, calls for differentiated accompaniment to avoid reduced cohesion in future societies.

### **4. Contributing to a rights-based approach and quality integration**

Integration that aims at the full respect of both the arriving persons or families and the existing communities cannot be done without a well

implemented and transparent legal framework. From time to time, we hear the suggestion that rights-based is not practical, that it is not “concrete” enough. May we say most clearly, that in our experience, the rights-based approach is not only solution-oriented, it is a factory of solutions, for migration as well as development, for social cohesion and ultimately also for peace.

We at ICMC see all too well what happens when, for example, laws ask people to choose between compliance with those laws and the unity of their families, and in particular the terrible risks that migrants and families take, in irregular migration, when the law says “no” to legal reunification: deaths and disappearances at sea, in deserts and on so many other borders; the desperate travel of unaccompanied women and children; the exploitation, violence and enduring trauma in the smuggling and trafficking of vulnerable human beings. While the Church does not endorse irregular migration, these realities offer additional reason to recognize that it is the laws that are wrong and need to change, not the people migrating.

Perhaps most notable in this regard is ICMC's emphasis on the value of international rights frameworks. While all of these issues can benefit from concrete bilateral or region-specific approaches and cooperation, the activities of all actors, that is, states, international organizations, civil society and even the private sector, should be conducted with full respect for universal frameworks for human rights and obligations. Given the widespread ratification of so many international human rights treaties whose protections generally cover migrants equally with citizens, there is no reason for states to further delay ratifying the Migrant Workers Convention, which, to a large extent, gathers rights from those other treaties but which is today ratified by only 41 countries, including 13 Latin and Central American countries. ICMC urges greater ratification and implementation of the Migrant Workers Convention as a distinct complement to the other human rights treaties, and no less than a recipe for better cooperation, coherence and cohesion in and among countries of origin, transit and destination.

##### **5. Promoting social cohesion (*peaceful coexistence*) between migrants and local communities by accompanying individuals in their journey**

In the migration debate, the world continues to be divided into countries, to, through and from which people migrate. While such distinctions are not always so clear, they are helpful for the purpose of

examining the role of the church in promoting social cohesion (*peaceful coexistence*) between migrants and either *new* local communities (in countries of destination), their *former* communities (in countries of origin) and even in communities of temporary stay (in countries of first asylum or transit.)

- *Promoting cohesion in new local communities (in countries of destination)*

Great attention needs to be given to migrants who have arrived in new environments and who need to develop ways to adjust to the new societies. Social awareness-raising, for both the migrant and the hosting community, is an essential field of action for the Church. ICMC, for example, prepares people for their resettlement with cultural orientation classes whereby we provide the migrant a bridge to the new local community.

- *Promoting cohesion in communities of temporary stay (in countries of transit)*

Communities in transit countries often struggle with the burdens and challenges of the presence of large numbers of refugees, displaced persons or other migrants. Especially in countries that themselves are poor or developing, infrastructures and services can be too limited to adequately accommodate the new arrivals. ICMC, therefore, develops specific programs to assist the extremely vulnerable in larger situations of crisis of massive influxes such as the Iraqi's arriving in the neighbouring countries.

- *Promoting cohesion in former local communities (in countries of origin)*

Whatever the journey will be, there is a need to be present with those that have been left behind and a need to foresee, for many, the possibility of return. Income generation and community building are often essential, a vision ICMC is e.g. implementing in its various return programs.

## 6. Conclusion

We need to continue to combine, coordinate and reinforce our efforts as Church to achieve a paradigm shift in the global discussion of migration and development. In a sentence, the shift that is needed is to an

explicit preference for dignity in the debate: the fundamental human dignity of a migrant, his or her labor and family; and the dignity of states and other international, regional and political actors to discuss these matters honestly and with humanity, not only with respect to the economic and social forces involved in migration today, but also the lives, hopes, challenges, contributions and common good that migrants and citizens share and can benefit from together.

This is not a soft shift; in fact, it is not even an option. Rather, it is essential to moving forward: as a matter of obligations to respect universal rights and as a key to social cohesion, in countries of origin as well as transit and destination.

May I close by pointing to three specific areas in which we can collaborate better, areas that flow one into the other, and in which ICMC and ICMC members work in operations and policy-building:

- Building new *needs-based* protections for migrants who are vulnerable or hurt, manifestly:
  - victims of violence and trauma when crossing borders on boats, trains and trucks, and crossing deserts,
  - unaccompanied and separated children, and children left behind,
  - broader legal residence and working statuses for migrants from countries profoundly debilitated by environmental degradation, manmade disaster, or conflict,
  - permanent legalization of undocumented workers, beginning with law-abiding, tax-paying long-term residents,

Such a *needs-based* approach, focused intently on people who are vulnerable or hurt and the protection they require, properly leads, but must be guided, to a recognition of rights.

- Strengthening emerging and existing rights-based protections:
  - to preserve family unity and reunification-and stop enforcement-induced de-unification-of close family members,
  - to secure durable solutions for 1951 Convention refugees, including expanded opportunities for resettlement in this region,
  - to universalize recognition of men, women and children who have been trafficked as victims of the crime, not criminals, and entitle them

to protection and assistance,

- to ensure rights, that is, relief at last, to migrant workers and members of their families, including under the UN Migrant Workers Convention, in which the states of this region have led the world in drafting and ratifying the Convention, and promoting its ratification by other countries.
- Engaging in regional and global processes:
  - deepening participation in regional consultations, such as the South American Conference on Migration, not only to address regional issues (including rights and root causes of migration) but to generate leadership on such issues at the global level,
  - achieving more full and formal participation in the new Global Forum on Migration and Development,
  - emphasising the role and dignity of migrants in development and co-development approaches,
  - insisting on attention to root causes, so that men, women and children may exercise their right not to migrate.

This is urgent work always, and a particular challenge as the world confronts a global economic disruption of epic proportions. May we here, our Church and those we work with, meet the challenge as community, searching for, and truly on the road to, peace.

## **Rev. Sister Erta Lemos**

*Secretary for the Human Mobility Commission of the CELAM*

---

Thanks to the organizing team for inviting me to participate in this magnificent Scalabrinian event. I would like to mention that I will present a brief summary of what we do as an Ecclesial Institution in the area of Pastoral Care of Human Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean, following precisely the instructions presented by Rev. Novatus Rugambwa, Deputy Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in his address.

CELAM is the Episcopal Council for Latin America. It is a Council, and as such its objective is to serve the Bishops Conferences in Latin America and the Caribbean, among other things, articulating, motivating, coordinating activities and events to foster communion and to reach important common objectives for all of the Latin American Continent.

Since July 1987, CELAM has been servicing pastoral care to peoples in mobility. First, its name was SEPMOV-Secretariat for Pastoral Care of Human Mobility. Now it is called the Section of Human Mobility of the Department of Justice and Solidarity beside the Social Pastoral Care and Lay Faithful. At the beginning, we created ministries to serve seamen and tourist industry workers. Now, in addition to those previously mentioned, we also work with trafficked persons, itinerant people, and the new phenomena of environmental migrants as another dimension of the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility that we are beginning to study. The Section of Human Mobility of CELAM develops its work according to the Global Plan and the directives established by the general assembly at the start of each period.

Its mission is to do the best it can, not only to create but also to become a bridge among cultures, peoples and ethnic groups by the power of the Holy Spirit under the light of Jesus Christ, to please the Father who wishes that we all become one with his beloved Son. We work not only within the social dimension but also the pastoral and spiritual ones. Through the example of the migrants and itinerant people, we walk along with the Church, which is also a pilgrim, hoping for a new world of peace, joy, justice and solidarity, "*for the world is the homeland of man,*" as John

Baptist Scalabrini, the Father of the Migrants, used to say.

Regarding its organization, CELAM is always communicating with the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and works under the coordination of the Council. We also work with the Episcopal Conferences whenever we are asked, take care of regions or dioceses where we are assisted by a support team, and participate in congresses and meetings whenever we are invited. We have a bishop as a supervisor and an executive secretary. We maintain and carry out several programs. We serve the Migratory Pastoral Care directed to migrants, refugees, human trafficking victims, itinerants, displaced people, and the homeless.

Moreover, we serve the Ministry for the Sea for seafarers, artisanal and industrial fishermen, and people from the seas, lakes and rivers. Likewise we are on board with projects linked to the Pastoral Care of Tourism, where we assist tourists, tourist industry workers, including also ecology and sustainable development.

Currently we are beginning a study of environmental migrants.

Within each of these programs, we develop a range of activities: meetings throughout Latin America, regional gatherings, seminars, publishing, advisories, hosting and coordination for the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility, and networking.

The objectives of each program are as follows:

- Regarding the Pastoral of migrants, it is about reinforcing the dialogue and cooperation among the churches of the countries of origin, transit and destination, attempting to give legal and pastoral humanitarian assistance to those who are mobilized, supporting them in their religious beliefs and valuing their cultural expressions in everything related to the Gospel, motivating them to become disciples and missionaries in the countries and communities where they were received.
- Regarding the Ministry for the Sea, the objective is to promote the Ministry in the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Conferences, so seafarers and fishermen from the seas, lakes and rivers become disciples and missionaries of hope, accepting the Word of God and bearing witness to His fraternal welcome.
- In relation to the Pastoral Care of Tourism, we want to strengthen the work with the Episcopal Conferences to increase common courses of

action in this pastoral venue in Latin America and the Caribbean, such that, along with entertainment, respect is paid to the work of creation and the cultures of the receiving communities.

In summary, our work is to be bridges among the churches and migrants, to facilitate relations between cultures and promote the value of diversity as a source of wealth that makes visible the infinite creativity of our God. At the same time, we want to walk always with our hearts full of hope in the construction of a better world, where we all may be brothers, children of the same God the Father, and bearers of universal solidarity, thus building peace and a culture of global citizenship.

## **Rev. Sister Janete Ferreira**

*Coordinator of the Migration and Traffic Program of SELACC*

---

I would like to begin by saying that the Secretariat of Latin America and the Caribbean of Caritas does not have a major structure at the regional level but, indeed, is a service center with one full-time position, the Executive Secretary. Currently, it is Rev. José Antonio Sandoval. The rest of us are working in each of the Caritas Social Pastoral centers throughout the continent in support of diverse tasks.

We think it is also very important to note that, of the 19 countries that have Pastoral Care of Human Mobility at the Latin American and Caribbean level, 12 attend the Caritas Social Pastoral Care in each of their respective countries. For Caritas, the continent's migration and human trafficking issues are priorities. Therefore, rather than talk about Caritas' structure, a topic well known to all of us, I want to tell you about the experience of working to build peaceful communities on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border.

In Ecuador, the presence of the Colombian brothers and sisters is ever stronger. Generally we look at Colombia as the center of conflict, and partly it is, but the conflict is no longer just Colombian, it is regional. It is also in Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and neighboring countries. The international community often looks only to Colombia and forgets about the countries receiving Colombians.

The number of people that Ecuador receives increases every day, and, in this context, the presence of the Border Pastoral Care to carry out the work of the Caritas organizations is extremely important.

The social, political and military conflict in Colombia is more than 60 years old and has become the gravest humanitarian crisis in the Western hemisphere, and one of three most dire in the world: more than three million people displaced in the last 15 years, confinement of entire populations, and approximately eight thousand persons kidnapped in the last three years. The leftist insurgency, FARC, ELN, other armed groups, right wing paramilitaries, self-defense groups, the armed forces, and common criminals are all involved. The civilians are totally defenseless victims, most of all the poor, the peasants, and the indigenous people.

In Ecuador, the major increase in migratory flows from Colombia began in 2000 and was the result of the dynamics of the internal armed conflict in Colombia. The migration continues due to the combined consequences of implementing the Plan Colombia and the attraction of “*dollarization*.” It is, therefore, a forced economic migration that is part of an interaction in which it is very difficult to determine whether the specific causes arise from one component or the other.

Official records of migratory flows indicate that, from 2000 to 2006, there would have been 1,406,169 registered arrivals and 835,948 departures, yielding a migratory balance of 570,221, which accounts for 49 percent of the total increase in immigration.

The Ecuadorian provinces where most of the Colombian population lives are Pichincha, Carchi, Guayas, Sucumbíos, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Esmeralda, and Ibarra. In Guayas and Pichincha, we find the most educated Colombian population, whereas the poorest of Colombians have settled in the border provinces.

Colombians work in the formal sectors of agriculture and trade, but especially in the informal ones, manufacturing and domestic service. Agriculture prevails in the border provinces and in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas; whereas formal and informal trade prevails in Pichincha and Guayas.

There is much tension on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border due to the deteriorating relationship between the Uribe and Correa governments, since March 2008, because of the incursion of the Colombian army into Ecuadorian territory (at Angostura). Other factors that feed this tension are the built-up military presence of the Ecuadorian army, and of irregular armed groups, organized crime groups and drug traffickers. All of this has caused the Ecuadorian government to reinstate the requirement to have an immigration certificate from each Colombian citizen who immigrates into Ecuador, a reversal of the principle of presumption of innocence and the fundamental right of “universal citizenship” provided by the new Ecuadorian Constitution, which holds no one to be “illegal.” This is also a step back in the area of international law and human rights, as well as refugee and humanitarian rights.

Moreover, using the media, the official discourse has managed to break down the sense of solidarity and collective participation in the receiving community, stigmatizing and criminalizing everything

Colombian. This turns newcomers into victims of isolation, unemployment, labor exploitation, sexual harassment, and distrust by the community, which reacts in discriminatory and even xenophobic fashion.

For eighteen years now, the Border Pastoral Care has constantly worked and coordinated a string of Diocese on the border: four on the Ecuadorian side and four on the Colombian side. Against this backdrop, we have served as a defensive response, promoting and campaigning for the rights of the people; posing responses that seek the integration and peace for the community.

How can we build peace on that border? We could build it by doing little things at a time, working like ants do. We work to include persons in the support communities. It is a coordinated effort among the churches in each country with the support of national and international NGOs.

The dynamics followed by the Border Pastoral Care grow out of the annual meetings with the bishops of the respective dioceses and their support teams to update the context and redesign the humanitarian responses that the reality of the moment demands. These solutions are coordinated on both sides of the border, which results in a local as well as bi-national impact.

Here are some examples I would like to share. In Ecuador certain documents were required for Colombian children and teenagers to be able to go to school. We worked hard, in conjunction with civil society organizations at the local and national levels, so that these [migrant] children could be admitted into the school system. We were able to get the Minister of Education to sign decree 337, recognizing the right to education for children and teenagers in mobility, without regard to their immigration status or any documentary requirement other than an identity card. With this initiative, we contributed to helping migrant people to become participants in the process of community integration.

In addition, together with other civic organizations, the Border Pastoral Care has intervened on behalf of those who have been denied refugee status by the Ecuadorian government; and on behalf of those who have not been able to access the system and get their documents processed through the Registry.

These small joint achievements on both sides of the border help us to understand that building peace along the Colombian-Ecuadorian border

is a very complex task that is never easy, and that it requires the active participation of the population, as well as various organizing processes.

This is possible only if there is a constant assessment and sharing of experiences. The dynamics are very different in each country. Nevertheless, the ability to share experiences has helped us in the learning process. Pastoral care and support services, schooling, research and agency are important elements that complement our work.

Our great strength is the existence of other organizations, whose efforts along the border or the country's interior share our same concern: How to change the situation at the border? In this manner there are several important alliances with civil society and international organizations with which we build plans and joint strategies.

There are limitations and difficulties. It is a slow process because although we are able to make a difference, we cannot respond to all the current demands due to the growing complexity of the situation at the border. Another limitation is the sometimes divergent interests of the dioceses. Some commit themselves more than others, which results in some of the already established agreements failing to meet their goals.

Often our responses are for immediate aid, given the nature of the humanitarian crisis that prevails in the region, but they are necessary responses, and we know that this fieldwork also allows us to have an influence at the local and national levels. Therefore, fieldwork is important in order to build the kind of impact that enables us to influence policy. We know that the Church is a point of reference in migratory matters, as well as, a shelter on both sides of the Colombian-Ecuadorian border.

These are some of the issues and impacts that we deem important to highlight. Joint endeavors are being broadened and strengthened in many communities. We have participated in developing technical proposals on legal regulations. Presently, the Ecuadorian government is concerned with ensuring that we have a Comprehensive Law of Human Mobility, which includes the issues of shelter, migration, human trafficking, internal migration, and displacement of people. As part of civil society, we are working on this effort. There is a technical team, and we, as part of the Church, with our work, our agency, and our fieldwork capability, are having a definite input and making important contributions. We know that in so doing, we are also helping to build peace along the border.

There are many challenges, but we have a dream that there will be favorable public policies based on people's rights; that there will be more efficient regulation of migratory processes, and the recognition that the legalization of undocumented Colombians already in our territory is indeed a priority.

We have a dream that there will be respect for the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, or religion, as well as respect for due process.

We dream of forging solidarity among the people at the border by strengthening their cultural, social, and fraternal bonds.

We dream of a quality education for all children and teenagers without discrimination of any kind.

We have a dream that the population of the Colombian-Ecuadorian border will one day demand and enjoy the rights they are currently denied, such as the right to work, to healthcare, and to live in an environment of social integration and peace.

## **Rev. Maurizio Pontin**

*Coordinator of the Human Mobility Commission*

*Colombia Conference of Catholic Bishops*

---

### **Colombia: A Nation Searching for Peace as a Way to Stop the Exodus**

I want to begin with a song that the Colombian rock group *Aterciopelados* donated to “*Exile and Compensation*,” a project sponsored by the Antioquia Museum, the City Hall of Medellín, Region Corporation and *Semana* magazine, along with other partners, that has, since last September, sought to raise consciousness about the issue of the displacement of people in Colombia. The song “*Wandering Diamond*”<sup>1</sup> describes the situation of millions of Colombians forced to abandon their homes and migrate to the cities under deplorable displacement conditions.<sup>2</sup>

To start, I also will read two testimonies from displaced persons. One woman says: “They came asking for water and to be allowed to camp out: We just cannot say no. Right after, came the others, accusing us of being informers, rats, snitches, and we had to flee.”

Another testimony: “They destroyed everything: they ask for a share of the crops from the farm, take away food and animals; afterwards, they return for the children, the bullies, those between 12 and 14 years old. And if one refuses to give them up, you must give up the land or everybody will pay the consequences. There was nothing else to give them.”

Two previous speakers have talked about Colombia. Rev. Sister Janete Ferreira just told us that the major concern for Ecuador is precisely the existing problems at the Colombian border due to the large influx of

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the text in the annex. The song's video can be seen at [www.destierroyreparacion.org](http://www.destierroyreparacion.org).

<sup>2</sup> Definition: “Displaced is any person who has been forced to migrate inside his/her own national territory, abandoning his/her place of residence and everyday economic activities because his/her life, physical integrity or freedom have been violated or are threatened due to the existence of any of the following situations caused by man: internal armed conflict, disturbances or internal tensions, generalized violence, massive violations of human rights or other circumstances stemming from previous situations that could alter or drastically alter the public order.”

asylum-seekers. The representative for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also talked about the efforts that his organization is doing in Colombia to alleviate the needs of displaced people and facilitate the liberation of hostages.

Colombia is the country with the longest period of prolonged democracy in Latin America. It is the only country that enjoys this privilege: there has been no coup d'état. Paradoxically, Colombia, which has, nominally, the longest democracy in Latin America, also has the longest period of violent conflict in the history of Latin America.

To mention just one example in the last sixty years, we might remember the bloody conflict known as the *epoch of violence* that took place from 1948 to 1957.<sup>3</sup> In Colombia, during that period of fighting between liberals and conservatives, there were an estimated 300,000 deaths and 2 million displaced persons, although they were not referred to as such in those days. That label was ascribed around 1991 by the Inter American Committee for Human Rights in San José, Costa Rica.

During the “epoch of violence,” Colombia was practically depopulated. Those who were threatened or persecuted had the option of

---

<sup>3</sup>*Violence (1948 to 1957)*, a text taken from the website of *The Manuel Cepeda Vargas Foundation for Peace, Justice and Culture*. The political phase in Colombian history called “Violence” covered a period of armed confrontation of irregular character with terror and violent demonstrations of major proportions all over the country. The quarrels between the liberal and conservative parties in that era were the manifestation of a conflict of socio-economic interests, motivated by the expropriation and redistribution on thousands of acres of land. This conflict finished off small and medium-sized farms, strengthening the power wielded by the country's old and new landowners. The murder of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán worsened the political polarization, which in this period acquired national dimensions and gave way to the peasant and popular revolt, which constituted the basis for the first source of guerrilla fighters in the second half of the twentieth century in Colombia.

The foray by the incipient guerrilla movement marked this violent epoch with open and organized warfare amongst armed peasants, the leadership of the liberal party and the conservative government of Laureano Gómez. With the support of the Church and the National Army, the government started a campaign of political persecution in the cities under the guise of defending against the supposed threat of “international communism.” In the countryside, they formed paramilitary groups that called themselves “Los Chualistas.”

As the conflict heightened, the political process began to degenerate into a series of retaliations and acts of vengeance, which stained the national territory with blood. Two of the most unfortunate consequences of this phenomenon were the murders of approximately 300,000 victims and the forced displacement of large numbers of peasants, who moved to repopulate cities or migrated in search of new land far away from the mountain range, especially to the Eastern Plains, the Atlantic Coast, and Magdalena River region, where the development of settlements took place. To this day, those settlements remain. This first phase of “Violence” ended with a military coup d'état by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in 1953.

The government of Rojas Pinilla promised to stop the terror and to promote the economic reconstruction of the regions affected by the violence. General Rojas Pinilla offered a general and unconditional

moving to other parts of the country. If you did not consider yourself liberal, you could go to where the conservatives were; and if you did not consider yourself conservative, you could go to where the liberals were. And if you did not feel comfortable with either of them, you could go to an unpopulated area. And this is how Colombia was settled beyond the Andean region and the plains, extending as far as the borders with Venezuela, Brazil and Peru, the entire region surrounding the Amazons. This was the settlement period.

For 20 years, there has not been any neutral, unclaimed territory. Several groups and private persons began to seek complete control over the remaining lands. Thus, there is nowhere for the persecuted to escape. Colombian guerrillas derived from liberal peasant groups persecuted by the army due to their “pro-communist” ideals. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), and the M19 are some of the armed groups that have arisen at various times. Until now, none of them has been defeated militarily by the National Armed Forces.

The ideals of guerrilla movements began to lose credibility when, due mainly to economic subsistence needs, these guerrilla groups, or “terrorists,” as labeled by the current government, began to engage in drug trafficking, initially offering only territorial protection for the coca and poppy crops, but, afterwards, providing assistance along the trade routes, and, finally, managing their own business from production to sales.

What concerns us most is that, as reported during the last two weeks, there is an agreement between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Colombian Army to fight against the FARC in the border zone with Venezuela, in the Department of Arauca. The guerrilla leaders told the Army: “Give us the weaponry, and we will eliminate some of the members

---

amnesty to insurgents who were recognized as members of rebel forces. However, many of these promises went unfulfilled, and peace could not be consolidated in the country, which resulted in a resumption of the partisan violence of previous years.

On June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 1954, when the first civilian anti-government mass demonstrations took place, 13 students were murdered in Bogota by the National Army; this further eroded the government's prestige. The traditional political parties took advantage of the situation and created a civil front, which managed to overthrow the government three years later. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1957, facing the General's resignation, the elites belonging to the liberal and conservative parties founded the National Front, a political pact that consisted of taking turns in the national government. For the next four governments, liberals and conservatives shared, along party lines, bureaucratic national seats and alternately held the Presidency of the Republic.

your initiative against the guerrillas.”

This is the same as was done with the paramilitaries. These armed groups, organized by civilians, trained by the military and often even led by them, were in charge of the “cleansing” of citizens suspected of being pro-guerrilla or accused of being helpers. Justice finally has been served by the subsequent revelation that many events described by paramilitaries as clashes with subversive groups were really massacres perpetrated against innocent peasants, who were totally uninvolved in the conflict.

All of this background is helpful to better understand what we stated previously: in Colombia, currently, there is no available territory beyond the large cities. You are either on one side or the other; with the government or with the guerrillas; with the paramilitaries; or with drug trafficking, which permeates almost everything. Why? Because every little piece of territory must be utilized to control the population, whether by the paramilitaries or the guerrillas, for collecting illegal taxes, called “vaccines” in Colombia; or for planting psychotropic-plant crops such as marijuana (which is already out of fashion), coca to produce cocaine, or poppy to manufacture heroin. Other areas must be defended by these armed groups in order to operate their laboratories, maintain their drug-trafficking routes or routes for arms trafficking.

Under these conditions, the civilian population always ends up paying for the negative outcomes of these wars, which continue because of various vested interests.

One positive outcome of this humanitarian tragedy is that Colombia was the first country to develop a law to protect displaced persons, even before the United Nations promulgated its “Governing Principles.”

The Law for the Protection of Displaced People in Colombia dates to 1997. More than 11 years have passed since this law was enacted. However, the Constitutional Court had to intervene with its T-025 ruling of 2004, because in actual practice the law was not being enforced. There were signs, moments, elements of improvement, but the provisions of the law were not being fully complied with in terms of the protection of displaced persons.

Colombia was also one of the first countries where the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) received the specific mandate to concern itself with the well-being of displaced people

whom we may describe as “internal refugees.” These are people who exhibit the same needs as international refugees, because their lives are threatened due to their sociopolitical ideas or simply because they are in a region of the country that is of interest to armed groups. The only characteristic that differentiates them from refugees is their geographic location: they have not fled outside the national territory. Thus, within the country there is chaos, a demographic transformation that compels the nation to restructure, to relocate its population.

The Colombian Conference of Bishops was the first organization to carry out, between 1993 and 1994, the first national survey of displaced people, with the objective of bringing into public view an issue that nobody wanted to see or, much less, was willing to solve. As a consequence, between 1987 and 1994, more than 300,000 people have been internally displaced by violence. Against this background, the Church saw the need to establish a permanent Information System to continuously measure the number of people displaced by the violence in Colombia. This system was called RUTH.<sup>4</sup>

According to CODHES (Consultancy on Displacement and Human Rights), from 1997 to 2001 more than 1.5 million persons were displaced by violence, and from 2002 to 2005 another 1.2 million. Specifically: 207,607 persons in 2003; 287,581 in 2004; 310,237 in 2005; 221,638 in 2006; 305,638 in 2007; and 308,863 in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

To illustrate this situation, it will suffice to focus on the data we have for Bogotá: in five years, from 1997 to 2001, 263,000 displaced persons arrived in the city. From 2002 to 2006, more than 200,000 arrived. Thus, the city grew by approximately half a million people, just because of forced displacement. These were people who tried to register their status as persecuted and threatened, and stated that they had to abandon all of their possessions.

---

<sup>4</sup> RUTH is not an acronym with a specific meaning, as though it were a single registry for displaced persons. The name for this “Information System on Forced Displacement by Violence” and its corresponding Bulletin is taken from the Old Testament character in the Book of Ruth. She is a widow who decides to accompany her mother-in-law, Noemi, and tells her: “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1, 16). In this same manner, the Catholic Church, through different means and methods, wants to accompany the displaced people of Colombia, to share in their tribulations and anguish but also their dreams and hopes.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Fundación de Atención al Migrante (Famig) and CODHES, *Gota a gota: Desplazamiento forzado en Bogotá y Soacha*, First Edition, Bogotá, Colombia, July 2007.

Where do they normally arrive? They do not head to privileged places, and often they leave everything behind, typically fleeing under specific threats like: “You have four hours or six hours or until tomorrow to leave.” These people arrive penniless and have to look for shelter on the outskirts of cities, in marginal sectors, in the poorest of areas. What are the reasons why these persons who arrived in Bogotá, for example, had to flee? Actually, the majority state that they received a direct threat on their lives. They are people accused of being either collaborators for the guerrillas or the paramilitaries, depending on the place or date where they were. Another type of threat that is common lately is the forced recruitment of children over 12, or even 11 years of age, into the guerrillas or paramilitaries. Sometimes, the threats come simply because the Army or the illegal armed groups went through their land, and they offered resistance or failed to comply with extortion quotas either in money or produce. Other reasons for displacement include: the forced disappearance of the head of household, the children, or other family members; a neighbor's murder; fear of clashes; the clearing of zones, which many times is carried out by the Army itself, even with bombardments; and all forms of indirect threats deemed dangerous by the individuals, such as combat around them, stressful situations, public disorder, generalized panic, massacres, selective murders, or disappearances, in places close to where they live. In other words, in most instances the main motive is a simple psychological fact: fear, because everywhere in the world, violence engenders fear.

Besides arriving to the major cities in the hope of hiding in the anonymity of the crowd, many displaced persons remain in the provincial capitals, harboring hopes that soon they will be able to return to their districts, because the reason of their displacement stems from transitory clashes between the Army and the guerrillas, or from the path of the paramilitaries, who carry out what they call “social cleansing.” Humanitarian intervention by the government and the international community is thus necessary, both in the outskirts of major cities and in small municipalities.

What are the effects of these displacements? We will find out with the next population and housing surveys, if they are done accurately. The first effect will be noticed in the depopulation of the countryside and concomitant growth in *latifundios*, or large estates, because almost always the land abandoned by displaced people is taken over by the major

landowners, especially those who are backed by the paramilitaries. Another effect is the increase in urban marginalization: the need to respond to the rising demand for basic services, the need to strike a balance between responding to the needs of the resident “traditional poor” and the new arrivals of displaced people. The effect will also be noticed, although it is already evident, in the disintegration of the family, because often the breadwinner goes one way and the rest of the family goes another, leading to a change of roles at home.

In focusing on the home situation of the displaced population, we must stress the following: the percentage of households that have a woman as breadwinner rose to 49 percent among displaced people, from just 29 percent among the normal population. Often the head of household, the man, leaves the home because he sees himself displaced from his traditional role after displacement to the city. In urban centers, women are more apt to find jobs, whether by the day or by the hour, in domestic tasks or reselling, whereas men, accustomed to life in the countryside, do not succeed in getting hired in an urban context.

Another negative factor is victimization and discrimination. This still happens although it is being rather overcome: for most Colombians, the notion still stubbornly persists that “if he was displaced, there must be a reason... who knows what he got into.” Thus, a displaced person is always seen with the apprehension that “if I help him, he could get me mixed up in the affairs in which he is already entangled.”

Then, what do we do regarding these issues as the Catholic Church in Colombia? For more than 15 years we have undertaken several humanitarian initiatives supported, thank God, by many international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Consultancy on Displacement and Human Rights (CODHES), the International Organization for Migrations, Caritas International and many other national chapters of Caritas from Europe and the United States. Also, national and foreign NGOs, governments, and embassies from other countries contribute to the work the Church is doing in looking for solutions to this situation.

We are trying to be, as the Church, facilitators, but not mediators, in the conflict. We seek, wherever they give us the space, to facilitate the meeting and dialogue of opposing groups. Many times we have succeeded; others we have failed for lack of will between the parties. A National

Commission for Reconciliation has been created; there is an effort to increase those spaces for dialogue; whether official or not, regional peace dialogues are indeed held; and there is intervention for freeing prisoners and hostages.

From the very beginning, we have sought to offer humanitarian assistance, but, above all, we work in building communities, both displaced and receiving communities, because it is essential to foster that welcoming spirit for the people arriving to the cities. There are programs such as Peace Planters and Laboratories for Peace, and four national conferences for reconciliation and peace. This is, among many other initiatives, what we try to do as the Church. Another project that has emerged with the support of Colombian religious communities, and which has had its share of successes and difficulties, applause and harassment, is the creation of Peace Communities, those who have refused to be displaced and have asserted: "This is our community; we don't allow the use of weapons; we don't want the presence of either guerrillas or paramilitaries or the Army." This is because the official armed forces, too, were not considered to be as fair and impartial as they should be.

The road to peace in Colombia is a very long one indeed, especially if the government thinks that it is by force that it must be achieved, and continues to act under this premise, and continues to bet that the armed solution is the answer to the conflict.

For these reasons, we need the continued support and presence of international organizations and friendly countries that might help to find new avenues for dialogue, reconciliation, and reparation, in order to achieve peace.

*Addendum***“Wandering Diamond” Lyrics by Aterciopelados**

Oh! I left because it was my turn.  
Oh, but I left my heart.

I left the dinnerware and the TV,  
left my home, my land, my mattock.  
I also left my landscapes, my serene breeze,  
for cold traffic lights and dirty sidewalks.  
I exchanged my fruit trees  
for panhandling on the bus route.

Oh! I left because it was my turn.  
Oh, but I left my heart.

I left my family's corpses unburied:  
down the river the criminals were coming.  
I am a traveler of absences,  
with my backpack full of fear and loneliness.  
But if I am still alive, there must be a reason.  
Keep on, keep on, wandering diamond,  
a wandering hero, an aspiring saint.

The veil must be lifted.  
The horrifying truth and its miseries must be uncovered.  
Justice must become part of this terrifying story.  
May radiant faith be again by your side...  
and courage so enormous and a fearsome force so bright.

Keep on, keep on, wandering diamond.

ORGANIZED BY:

**Scalabrini International  
Migration Network**



WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



PASTORAL DE MOVILIDAD HUMANA  
CEB



FONDAZIONE CASSAMARCA  
Noni, spazio per il dialogo e il well

