



U.S. Catholic Working Group on Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration Statement on Second Formal Consultations towards a Global Compact on Refugees

Introduction. Members of the U.S. Catholic Working Group on Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration¹ are deeply involved in the care and accompaniment of forcibly displaced people at every stage of their journey, often in partnership with the U.S. government and United Nations agencies. We thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for his able leadership in developing the latest draft for the Global Compact on Refugees. Through advocacy and service our work includes fighting against the root causes of forced migration, providing humanitarian support for internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees, seeking durable solutions with all stakeholders, and engaging local communities to provide protection and durable solutions through local integration, voluntary repatriation, and resettlement. While bringing a distinct American Catholic experience to our statement, we also echo and build upon the March 20, 2018 intervention by the delegation of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva.²

1. Foster the catalytic role of faith-based groups that accompany refugees at every stage of their journeys. We strongly believe that the Global Compact on Refugees should continue to emphasize an all-of-society approach to improve the situation of refugees, with a crucial role for faith-based organizations. Pope Francis reminds us all to defend the inalienable rights of people forced to migrate “as duties from which no one can be exempted.”³ As noted by the Holy See, faith-based groups play a crucial role in assisting refugees, with “an enduring presence” and a response “driven by solidarity, compassion,

¹ The working group includes Catholic Charities-USA, Catholic Relief Service (CRS), Center for Migration Studies, U.S. Liaison Office of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, Jesuit Refugee Services/USA (JRS-USA), and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services.

² “Statement by Holy See Observer in Geneva at Second Formal Consultations Towards a Global Compact on Refugees,” March 20, 2018. Our statement also seeks to add unique U.S. and Catholic perspectives to the “NGO Reaction to the First Draft of the Global Compact on Refugees,” March 2018, that included ICMC and JRS as signatories. Another important Catholic statement is the following: “CRS, U.S. Liaison Office of ICMC, JRS-USA Statement for the Second Formal Consultation of the Global Compact on Refugees,” March 21, 2018.

³ Pope Francis, Address to the International Forum on “Migration and Peace,” February 21, 2017.

and a deep understanding of the local context.” For the next draft of the Global Compact on Refugees, the Holy See has urged that the strong links between UNHCR and faith-based groups be highlighted. We would add that the importance of the unifying role of faith-based groups needs to be further described and affirmed, as well.

Catholic organizations actively collaborate to weave together networks of service and advocacy organizations, galvanize local people to join in improving refugees’ situations, and work with civil society partners, the U.S. government and UNHCR to create policies and programs that improve refugees’ lives. We, along with our local Catholic partners, work in partnership with UNHCR and the U.S. government to provide services and protections to those fleeing, with special reach to those most at risk.

2. Welcome, protect, promote and integrate all refugees. As Catholic organizations of faith, we urge that the next draft underscore the necessity for and ability of the international community to successfully address the current global refugee crisis. We join the Holy See in urging that the next draft of the Global Compact on Refugees continue to promote a theme of hope, illustrating the courage and fortitude of refugees, while commending regions, nations, and communities that call us all to our better selves with generous and admirable responses. We urge the United States and all nations to be exemplary host nations and to model through action what it means to share responsibility with those nations that already host large numbers of migrating people.

Through the Vatican’s Migration & Refugee Section of the Dicastery on Integral Human Development, the Church has gleaned through the best practices of our Catholic organizations and those throughout the world and developed Twenty Action Points.⁴ These points help to guide us in fulfilling the duty we all share regarding refugees, whether as a host nation or as a supporter of host nations, or as a nation of third country resettlement. These action points are organized under four action verbs which Pope Francis himself is promoting: to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate migrants and refugees.⁵

3. Focus on solutions for those most at risk: separated and unaccompanied children, women at risk, victims of human trafficking, and those unsafe in refugee host countries. Every day, Catholic organizations from this working group support and seek durable solutions in the best interest of children alone in the world whose parents have died or from whom they have been separated through war and flight. We build community-based protections for widows and single women targeted by gender-based violence. We provide alternatives to dangerous migration for youth, and shelters and rehabilitation for trafficking victims. We support those integrating into the host community and help make voluntary repatriation safer. And we help process and resettle the most at-risk refugees for resettlement. Motivated and encouraged by this firsthand experience and the Twenty Points, we call upon nations to enhance safe and legal channels for migrants and refugees, encouraging them and all actors involved to expand the number and range of alternative legal pathways for safe and voluntary migration and resettlement.

As Catholic organizations, we urge the United States and other nations to focus particularly on protecting and securing durable solutions for unaccompanied children and those at risk of becoming unaccompanied. Lack of sufficient food and shelter puts families at risk of illness and death that can leave children on their own to seek refuge. Sometimes family separation is caused by violence against the family. Other times families are broken apart and children left alone when the status of some family members is taken away or when family members are detained and deported. In some instances, parents are separated from their

⁴ “Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Points,” Migrants & Refugee Section, Dicastery on Integral Human Development, Vatican, 2017.

⁵ “Let’s welcome, protect, promote and integrate refugees as Pope Francis is asking us,” Migration & Refugee Section, Dicastery of Integral Human Development, Vatican, January 18, 2018, video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDlXrIY96ak>

children at international borders as a method to deter the family's search for protection. We must seek solutions to all of these situations. Solutions must include access to a quality education, life-sustaining employment, family unity, and safety and well-being for all children and families.

We are deeply concerned about the use of detention for refugees and for migrants in general. It is especially problematic when used to deter migration of asylum seekers, children, and families who are forcibly displaced. The Global Compact on Refugees should urge countries to halt detention of children and asylum seekers, and offer community-based alternatives to detention.

In addition, refugees and other vulnerable migrants are increasingly under the "double risk" of being not only persecuted in their home countries but also subsequently trafficked when fleeing internationally. From our experience working with the U.S. government, members of the U.S. Catholic Working Group on Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration know that anti-trafficking collaborations work. Collaboration between government and civil society must be further prioritized to stop human trafficking, rehabilitate victims, and provide durable solutions through integration or resettlement, so that those seeking a new life do not become victims of modern slavery.

Finally, we speak from our deep experience as Catholic organizations partnering with the U.S. government to screen refugees overseas for resettlement. The experience also includes collaboration with the U.S. government and local communities to welcome refugees to the United States for over 35 years, as the largest domestic resettlement network in the world. Many at risk refugees are neither able to safely return home, nor are they able to safely remain in a host country. The only safe course for them is resettlement to a third country. It is vital that the Global Compact on Refugees clearly identifies the important, distinct, and urgent protection role of resettlement among the durable solutions. Resettlement is one of the strongest tools in the protection toolbox. The Global Compact on Refugees should also identify resettlement as a strategic and diplomatic action the international community can take to protect refugees, support allies, and stabilize sensitive regions of the world.

4. Address root causes of forced migration. Working with the U.S. government, UN agencies, and the local Catholic (arch)dioceses and their civil society partners around the world, our Catholic agencies provide humanitarian assistance and help to seek durable solutions for the displaced. While necessary and life-saving, this humanitarian work will never be a permanent solution to the refugee crises around the world. As Catholics, we believe in the right to migrate when necessary, but we also believe in the right to remain, the right not to have to migrate, and the right to thrive in your home country.⁶ This proposition requires peace and stability at its core, and we therefore must elevate the need to seek political solutions and development outcomes in origin countries. We join the Holy See to urge that the Global Compact on Refugees includes a strong commitment to address the root causes of forced migration, including situations of conflict and violence, climate change, and persecution.

Conclusion. We respectfully submit these recommendations to further strengthen the Global Compact on Refugees. We urge all nations to commit to multilateral cooperation in addressing and protecting large movements of migrants and refugees in a humane manner, while at the same time working to end conflict, persecution, and other drivers of forced migration where they exist.

⁶ The Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, *Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope* (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003), nos. 34–36.