



Europe: Refugees Are Our Brothers and Sisters



Casina Pio IV Summit 9-10 December 2016 – Pope Francis, in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, pleaded for a greater conversion of heart towards “the least of our brothers and sisters”, arguing that we need to do more to prevent humanitarian crises before they occur; and when they do occur, to ensure that our response is both adequate to the enormity of the challenge and timely according to the urgency of the need. Supplying tents and drinking water that arrive after everyone is dead of cold and dehydration is totally unacceptable.

The Pope asks us in his encyclical specifically to prioritise whichever approaches result in discernable changes to those excluded and marginalised needing our help the most.

This Summit has been called to bring immediate attention to the threat posed to global stability by the growing presence on our planet of over 125 million refugees.

These are persons — in need of urgent humanitarian assistance — who have been displaced from their own homelands through war, famine, the great number of natural disasters – many caused by human activities based on fossil fuels – that have increased in both number and magnitude in recent years, as well as other causes.

Three quarters of all humanitarian emergencies today result directly from war. Ending all war — and successfully preventing future ones — would do more to diminish the above mentioned humanitarian crises than any other single action we could possibly take, and at a single stroke we would eliminate the major cause of all mass refugee exoduses.

The causes of war are legion and not always just: national pride, greed for gain, anger, lust for power, laziness to do good, envy of neighbours. In summary, the root causes of war trace themselves to a human nature inclined to selfishness and egotism.

It therefore stands to reason that the solutions to these causes of war find themselves in nourishing the corresponding virtues: a visible love towards one’s enemies, greater manifestations of humility and temperance. Justice specifically, leaning upon international law, can help defuse tension by focussing awareness on the duties owed to humankind.

The remaining quarter of humanitarian emergencies stem from natural disasters, a large proportion of which derive from environmental crises such as famine, flooding, severe meteorological anomalies etc. Of these environmental crises, many have at their roots anthropic causes, such as the well-noted effects arising from mankind’s careless use of fossil fuels or the environmental consequences resulting from aggressive farming techniques or deforestation.

Environmental disasters always strike hardest at the poor. This is because the poor are inevitably the least-equipped to deal with such blows.

Clearly, the greatest duty of moral care for assisting such victims lies with those responsible for having originally generated the causes of environmental catastrophes in the first place.

It is worth underlining therefore that while many people do find themselves displaced due to ‘natural causes’ the vast majority are merely the innocent victims of the actions and decisions taken by others, and therefore of circumstances entirely avoidable.

With both the natural and the bellicose causes of humanitarian crises, one factor is sadly common to each: prevention is better than cure. It is for this reason that the COP21 Paris Agreement on climate change can rightly be heralded as a humanitarian triumph.

Jesus Christ made a revolutionary promise: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.” This is an injunction that has universal appeal. This Summit will seek new ways to make peace, ways appropriate to our own times with all the opportunities that are available to us to bring people together, ways that underline the human dignity of all refugees — in pitiable situations already exacerbated through social exclusion — and that assert them in their own identities.

Modern man has created wealth like in no other period of time. We therefore have an extra moral responsibility placed on our shoulders to use this potential to stop war and avoid its human consequences. No effort should be spared from encouraging all people of goodwill to participate in this endeavour.

This is not an optional priority that can be breezily delegated to our political leaders, NGOs or international philanthropists: each one of us must find a way to make his or her institutional and personal contribution, each according to his or her capabilities and abilities.

As a Mexican MP, Ana María Jiménez, once said at the Casina Pio IV, no one is so poor that they have nothing to give or nothing to share; no one is totally deprived of the ability to exercise charity...everyone can be a protagonist in contributing towards the common good. It is with this insight in mind that we call on everyone to contribute what he or she can to totally eliminate the scourge of war, climate change and exploitation from the face of the earth, for all time, starting from today.

There is nothing we could do that would do more to help those most in need of our help. It is what we would want others to do for us were we in that situation. Dwelling on this observation, no one can escape the Golden Rule to do unto others as would have them do unto us.

So what exactly should be done, in concrete terms? The forthcoming Summit will suggest and evaluate a number of proposals, both to reduce the risks of catastrophic feedback loops in the short term — and to maximise and entrench the benefits of reform in the long term:

First — stop the refugee surge at its source by ending the Syrian war immediately.

Second — don’t punish Britain for Brexit, with its dynamic of concern over unmanageable influxes of refugees and joblessness. It means thinking instead in terms of a higher, more creative and fruitful union, and also of a “healthy dis-union”. It implies granting greater independence and freedom to the countries of the European Union in general and, more in particular, regarding the refugee issue, policing national and EU borders to provide shelter to needy economic migrants “as they come”. Priority must be given to saving lives. It is crucial to establish robust refugee care systems, allowing them to seek asylum, addressing their requests fairly, resettling the most vulnerable and meeting basic needs such as education and health care.

Third, internationally recognised safe humanitarian corridors should also be established not only in the European Union member states, where present claims are already straining welfare state infrastructure beyond sustainability, but also in the less populous countries such as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, USA and the Middle East. The principle of non refoulement of refugees must be respected and, in any case, the possibilities of accessing the job market in the host country must be examined.

Four — offer an amnesty or other solution to the victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, in terms of forced labour, prostitution and the organ trade. Many undocumented persons, including minors, are tricked into being trafficked into the sex trade (especially women) or enslaved through false promises of a regularisation of legal status. Tragically, professional crime syndicates then either use the threat of expulsion to keep victims of prostitution and forced labour under control; or keep physical possession of the passport and/or other papers once it has been granted, trapping the victim in perpetual bondage. All countries should investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs who exploit refugees and migrants in any form, and consider above all the dignity and safety of those people.

Five — restore a sense of fairness and opportunity for the disaffected working class, unemployed youth and those whose livelihoods have been undermined by financial crises and the outsourcing of jobs. This

might involve projects pursuing ample social spending on health, education, training, apprenticeships, and family support, financed by closing tax havens (which are gutting public revenues and exacerbating economic injustice). It might also mean granting Greece debt relief, in the hope of ending the long-running Eurozone crisis.

Six, last but not least, focus resources, including additional aid, on economic development rather than war, in low-income countries. Uncontrolled migration from today's poor and conflict-ridden regions will eventually become overwhelming, regardless of migration policies, if climate change, extreme poverty, and lack of skills and education undermine the development potential of Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

All of this underscores the need to shift from a strategy of defence and war to one of sustainable and integral development, especially led by the developed countries. Walls and fences won't stop millions of migrants fleeing violence, extreme poverty, hunger, disease, droughts, floods, and other ills. Only global cooperation towards social justice can do that.

Finally, as the authorities closest to the general public, Mayors must be provided with the ability to meet the needs, accommodate and regularize all types of migrants or refugees. Mayors must raise their voices to promote bridges and not walls and their authority must be placed at the service of sustainable and integral development, justice and peace.