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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Intervention of the Cardinal Secretary of State at the Plenary Assembly of the International Catholic Commission for Migration

The following is Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin's address this morning at the inauguration of the Plenary Assembly of the International Catholic Commission for Migration, taking place in Rome from 6 to 8 March:

Intervention of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to greet you and to offer a few thoughts. This is a crucial moment in which the International Catholic Commission for Migration is called to provide for the Church and the world, as well as for itself, effective answers to new questions and to consider the most appropriate contemporary way for it to carry out its commitment in situations of migration.

Everyone here knows that the ICMC was established by Pope Pius XII following the upheavals caused by the Second World War. He wanted an international Catholic body of information, coordination and representation for migration, in order to cope with the massive displacement of refugees.

Since its beginnings, the Episcopates of the nations most affected by the phenomenon of migration were involved, through their representatives, in the drawing up of its statute, which was formally approved by the Holy Father with a letter dated 12 April 1951, and signed by the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, Mgr Giovanni Battista Montini. The Commission's main purpose was to promote the application of Christian principles on migration and on policies concerning populations, and to seek the adoption of such principles by international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, particularly in favour of the protection of the rights of families.

In the long years of its activity as a Catholic organization at the international level, the ICMC, faithful to the purpose for which it was established, has distinguished itself for its concrete action and for the professional competence of its staff, establishing relationships with various organizations and institutions at different levels. This is shown by the respect that the ICMC has earned in the international community, through cooperating, in keeping with its Catholic identity, with international agencies and other governmental and non-governmental institutions at various levels and in different countries. In this regard, I particularly wish to emphasize the ability, acquired by the ICMC in the course of its activity, to establish dialogue between different subjects: governments and civil society; humanitarian and security agencies; Catholic organizations and those belonging to other Christian denominations or those that do not identify with any religious affiliation, but intend to work for the good of migrants. For years, then, the ICMC has coordinated, on behalf of the various host governments, the whole process of participation, at a global level, of civil society organizations in the meetings of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, including the successful organisation of the *Civil Society Days*.

It is also worth remembering that the ICMC has published research and guidelines on migration in conjunction with important international institutions (the EU and the Council of Europe, IOM, UNHCR) and civil society.

I hope that it will be possible to carry forward and extend this definite and expert experience of dialogue in order to create and sustain that network of solidarity, which alone can respond to today's pressing needs and, together, guarantee the implementation of those agreements which are so greatly needed at the international level.

As to its scope and aims, the ICMC is now working in close contact with the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Even though this cooperation began a little more than a year ago, it has already yielded positive results and has made available to the Section the wealth of learning and experience acquired by the ICMC.

In the same way, on account of its constant activity with international organizations, the ICMC works in close contact with the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State and with the Permanent Missions of the Holy See. Especially in this year, and in the past two years, you have been specifically committed to offering, in collaboration with the Permanent Missions in New York and Geneva, your valuable contribution to the preparation of the *Global Compact* on safe, orderly and peaceful Migration, and the *Global Compact* on Refugees.

We truly hope that these two documents, currently in the stages of negotiation and consultation respectively, will genuinely respond to the need for better protection and safeguarding of human rights, when faced with the reticence, re-evaluations and indecision of various States, and that they will lead, at an international level, to a real and fair cooperation and sharing of the responsibilities and burdens associated with the reception of migrants.

In these days you will have the opportunity to review the path you have travelled and consider how the ICMC can continue the work for which it was founded, a work that we have already seen honoured by a fruitful commitment, which now asks you to be open to new horizons of service to migrants and refugees. As Pope Francis always reminds us, they are not numbers: they are people, women, men, children, who have a face, who often suffer and are discarded. A human face in which we recognize that of Christ, whom we want to serve especially in the smallest and those in need.

One of the purposes for which the ICMC was created is to support migrant families, who often emigrate in search of safety and a dignified life, especially for their children. Many of these, however, reach their point of arrival having experienced violence and abuse on the journey, only to then face new experiences of misery and previously unthinkable difficulties. The closeness of the Christian community and the tangible and specialized help of organizations such as yours can help to keep these families together and so prevent children from seeking the answer to their frustrations in alternative networks.

Moreover, while Migrants' progress is linked to economic contribution at the social and family level, within their

countries of origin themselves there is an aspect that the Church cannot overlook. It is that of family members who have remained in their homeland, often with children to support, where one of the spouses, or both, emigrates, thus leaving the other spouse, or elderly grandparents, responsible for the home, but left in poverty given that the remittance payments do not always arrive or are insufficient. Sometimes the spouse does not even return home. This is a delicate feature of migration, unfortunately widespread, which calls for greater attention and support.

Another aspect that presents itself to the ICMC at a global level is the refusal to welcome. Even though nations, especially the most economically advanced, undeniably owe a great deal of their development to migrants, and although the sometimes terrible experiences that lead to migration, or that are encountered on the journey, are widespread, migration is seen today only as an emergency, or a danger, even though it has become a characteristic element of our societies.

Pope Francis reminds us that "*a change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world.*"(Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2014).

One of the difficult tasks most urgently demanded today is precisely that of working to bring about this change of attitude, abandoning the dominant culture of waste and rejection. Providing information and raising awareness are ways in which your Commission can help the Catholic Church to dispel many unfounded prejudices and fears regarding the reception of foreigners. Without ignoring the many commitments that such welcome requires, you will also help promote a balanced and positive perception of migration.

This is an important contribution in preparation for the *Global Compact* on Migration, also in the period between the conclusion of the intergovernmental negotiations and the Marrakech Conference (10-11 December 2018), where it should be adopted. This delicate time calls for unhesitating guidance so that UN member states can share the appeal with awareness and determination.

In contrast to closed attitudes, however, we see the positive approach of many young people who consider migration to be a normal dimension of society, which has been made so interdependent by fast connections, by communications, and by the need for relationships on a global scale. These are dimensions in which we can certainly see the "signs of the times" that prompt solidarity on a global scale.

From your varied experiences in the field, then, comes another special contribution, a discrete and competent one, for creating alternative and safe paths of migration, especially where they are caused by violent events or disasters. I encourage you to continue this work, which based on your competence, capacity for dialogue and discretion, is one of the best ways to save lives: avoiding dangerous journeys and the use of traffickers; keeping families together; protecting minors in need; creating bonds of mutual trust between countries in this field, so as to prevent social concerns that also have political repercussions.

I am aware that although the elements just singled out are urgent, they are but a few of the larger concerns of your work. Now migration is on the agenda of every meeting I have with the governmental authorities who come to the Vatican, or whom I go to visit. I often receive their appreciation and gratitude for the contribution that the Catholic Church offers in their countries, also through the organizations inspired by its principles, to enable us to "welcome, protect, promote and integrate", as Pope Francis invites us, with a sense of responsibility and of humanity, these migrant and refugee brothers and sisters. In continuity with its origins, the ICMC is now called to renewal. This happens, naturally, when managerial frameworks change. In fact, during this Assembly, the members of the Steering Committee will change and a person will be chosen for the task of President, which, we should remember, is also a service. Furthermore, "strengthened in a spirit of prophetic solidarity" you will also discuss the need for a renewed vigorous commitment in favour of migrants, not only in external projects, but also internally. With this dimension of communion, also among yourselves, you are called to strengthen the structures and unity of those who work for the ICMC based upon principles, approaches and aims guided by the Church's Social Doctrine, so that the scope of your work does not remain merely humanitarian. In this way, the

people you help will appreciate the influence of “witness” that only a personal experience of faith can offer.

We hope that this unity and communion will involve all the members of the Commission in this ecclesial service and those who are committed to achieving its goals. In this regard, I trust that my brother Bishops will increasingly appreciate the service offered by the ICMC, and so promote it and help it to grow according to its features as an institution “of the Church” and “for the Church”.

Assuring you of a special remembrance in prayer for your work and that the International Catholic Commission for Migration will increasingly continue to be a concrete sign of fraternity in the world and in the Church, I would like to recall what Pope Francis said at the conclusion of the spiritual exercises on 23 February: “*the Church is not a cage for the Holy Spirit, [...] the Spirit also flies out and works outside. (...) works in non-believers, in “pagans”, in people of other religious beliefs: it is universal, it is the Spirit of God, who is for everyone*”. We bring to all people, through our concrete love, this free proclamation of the love of God, who welcomes, protects, knows how to value and makes you feel part of his family. May God, who knows how to reward every effort, every gesture of good will, help us to open ourselves without fear and reserve to the new appeals of the Spirit, for the good of our brothers and sisters. I hope, therefore, that your work will be good and fruitful!