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Intervention of the Under-Secretary for the Multilateral Sector of the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State at the 72nd Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner's Programme for Refugees (Geneva, 5 October)

The following is the Statement given by Dr. Francesca Di Giovanni, under-secretary for the Multilateral Sector of the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State, Head of the Delegation of the Holy See, at the 72nd Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner's Programme for Refugees:

Intervention of Dr. Francesca Di Giovanni

**Statement by Dr. Francesca Di Giovanni,
Undersecretary for the Multilateral Sector, Section for Relations with States,
Head of Delegation of the Holy See to the 72nd Executive Committee
of the United Nations High Commissioner's Programme for Refugees**

Geneva, 5 October 2021

Mr. Chairperson,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies and distinguished Delegates,

While the world remains focused on recovery from the all-encompassing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must assess and learn from its impact on the forcibly displaced. The current system, which has been entirely overwhelmed, struggles to respond adequately. Indeed, we have seen that displacement, within and across borders, is quickly becoming one of the most pressing challenges of our times.

In its Preamble, the 1951 Refugee Convention solemnly declares its aim "*to assure refugees the widest possible exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms.*"¹ Regrettably, in many regions of the world, millions of refugees are unable to enjoy these rights. Moreover, as States attempt to provide both immediate and durable

solutions, host-countries do not receive adequate support. In this regard, a number of Countries have even increased the burden of host-communities through an unsustainable strategy of externalization, avoiding direct responsibility for large, mixed flows of migrants and refugees through agreements that stop them, often indefinitely, at strategic points along their journey.

The fact that millions of our fellow brothers and sisters remain in limbo, is a crisis in solidarity. It should challenge our conscience as a family of nations to seek strategies that engage with all Countries as equal partners. This remains the goal of the Global Compact for Refugees, which will only succeed if it garners the necessary political will.

Mr. Chairperson,

Along these lines, the Holy See urges all States to adopt concrete, meaningful actions, especially in response to the increasing number of grave humanitarian crises. This includes the efficient, judicious and generous concession of humanitarian visas; the launch of individual and community sponsorship programs; opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable; and ensuring family reunification.² However, to be effective, we must also address the causes of conflict and instability, so that people can remain in peace and security in their Countries of origin.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Holy See has been following with great attention the developments of the situation in Afghanistan and is grateful to all those that have welcomed refugees in a true spirit of fraternity. We also wish to reaffirm Pope Francis' appeal that: "...all Afghans, whether at home, in transit, or in host countries, live with dignity, in peace and fraternity with their neighbors."³ The reinforcement of local, national and international capacity to offer protection and safe reception conditions continues to be essential.

The response of Countries in close proximity to such crises, including crises in other regions of the world, are only as strong as the unity and effectiveness of the international community in extending financial and technical support to first responders and to local populations that are struggling to continue on with daily life. In this regard, we insist that, in certain situations, "*humanitarian crises are aggravated by economic sanctions, which, more often than not, affect mainly the more vulnerable segments of the population... While understanding the reasons for imposing sanctions, the Holy See does not view them as effective, and hopes that they will be relaxed.*"⁴

Mr. Chairperson,

The increased impact of climate change and natural disasters on forced displacement requires deeper reflection, conversion and action. The climate crisis has a "human face". It is already a harsh reality, particularly for those who are the most poor, vulnerable, and marginalized. We should not fail to see the suffering that accompanies each story. We must strive "*to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening ... into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.*"⁵

Lastly, the Holy See reiterates the need to protect the right to health of everyone, including refugees and migrants, and especially of women and children who are at particular risk in humanitarian situations. The Committee cannot allow ideology to determine access to healthcare or make it conditional on the acceptance of concepts of health that do not share international consensus or that violate human dignity and ignore religious beliefs.

Instead, access to healthcare must be ensured through non-discriminatory, comprehensive laws and policies that are centered on the good of every human person, and founded on the right to life for all, from conception to natural death.

Mr. Chairperson,

When confronted with intense divisions among Countries and many sectors of society, an increased awareness of our fraternity becomes essential. As a family of nations, we all share the responsibility to look after our brothers and sisters, especially those in vulnerable situations, including those whose lives and freedom have been threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political persecution.⁶ Without such fraternity, it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace.

Thank you.

1 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951.

2 Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti* N. 130

3 Pope Francis, words after the Angelus, 5 September 2021

4 Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 8 February 2021.

5 Pope Francis, Preface to the Pastoral Orientation on Climate Displacement

6 Cf. Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, Article 33.
