

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0642

Lunedì 26.11.2001

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'O.N.U SUI RIFUGIATI

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'O.N.U., S.E. Mons. Renato Raffaele Martino, ha pronunciato alla Terza Commissione dell'Assemblea Generale "on Item 114 - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions" il 20 novembre 2001:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. R. RAFFAELE MARTINO

Mr. Chairman,

The discussion of questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons centers around two important documents: *The Report of the High Commissioner* and the Report of the Secretary General entitled *Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa*. Along with these two reports which have been specifically provided for this discussion, delegations have before them reports concerned with human rights issues: the *Note of the Secretary General on Internally displaced persons* and the *Report on the Protection of migrants*. These documents provide a broad overview of the work of the United Nations regarding these people who are or have been separated from their homes and family. My Delegation thanks all those who have prepared this information for us.

Of course, for this discussion, the Holy See will address the more than twenty-two million persons who are the direct concern of the UNHCR.

Mr. Chairman,

In recent weeks, our attention is so strongly drawn to Afghanistan, although the refugee crisis involving millions of Afghans has been going on for over twenty years. The latest reports from the office of the High Commissioner tell us that more than 3.5 million Afghan refugees have sought refuge in Pakistan and Iran. Those same reports indicate the difficulty in establishing a firm and accurate count, and also tell of the tragedy that continues to

unfold as nations come to the aid of these people forced from their homes and country.

During a statement made on 11 November, His Holiness Pope John Paul II once again called attention to their situation: "As we thank God for all that the fields produced this year, we must not forget those brothers and sisters in different parts of the world who are deprived of essential goods, such as food, water, a home and health care. At this time of great international concern, I am thinking especially of the peoples of Afghanistan, who must urgently receive necessary aid. This is a world emergency, which, however, does not allow us to forget that in other parts of the world there continue to be conditions of great and compelling need." (*Pope John Paul II, Message before the Angelus, Sunday, 11 November, St. Peter's Square*).

What can be done to alleviate or solve the world's refugee problem? In the short-term, the answer must lie in protecting refugees by providing security and humanitarian assistance. This protection must deliver practical relief to those in need of food, water, clothing, shelter, and basic health care. Without such provisions, any plans for the care of refugees become meaningless or even counter-productive.

In this light, my Delegation welcomes the introduction of the basic concept of the *Note on International Protection*, emphasizing the fact that protection is a dynamic and action-oriented function, rather than an abstract concept.

The concrete understanding of the requirements for protection will lead also to a better understanding of how to address the reasons why people are forced from their homes, or why people feel they must abandon their homes.

The defense and promotion of human dignity of refugees and of those in the concern of the UNHCR, are an important part of the mission of the Programme. Their rights must be protected. These rights include the right to life as well as the rights to marriage, family, migration, asylum and religious freedom. The protection of the fundamental rights of all people is the key to changing the situation of refugees and displaced persons.

Mr. Chairman,

Today the fastest growing group of "people on the move" are displaced persons who do not cross borders, but are adrift inside their own country. These are people trapped by war or persecution within state boundaries and need help as much as or possibly more than refugees. But the world has been slow to acknowledge their painful plight. It is the good fortune of refugees, if such language can be used, to be classified precisely as a refugee in that the label provides some legal protection and in some cases even political value. Refugees have a legal claim to assistance merely because they have crossed a border. UNHCR, while having no explicit mandate to care for internally displaced persons, has in the past, along with other concerned parties, helped to care for these individuals when and where possible. The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to commend such activity on the part of UNHCR and others and to encourage expanded consideration of the plight of these human beings who have the right to humanitarian assistance even though their homeland is a sovereign territory and this assistance is against the wishes of their government.

It should be abundantly clear that the recognition of human dignity and the protection of human rights imply that short-term aid to refugees and internally displaced persons is necessary but not sufficient. The building of more just and peaceful societies, the lack of which is the main cause of population displacements, must become the goal. As on other occasions, the Holy See expresses its commitment to participate in this common task.

My Delegation would like to pay tribute to those states that have been courageous enough to welcome refugees and did not remain indifferent in the face of this global problem. The generosity exhibited calls for recognition and needs to be applauded. That solidarity with a suffering portion of humanity has not been without sacrifice. In some instances, refugees outnumber the local population, presenting obvious difficulties. The local economy, and in particular when there are local subsistence farmers, has in some instances suffered due to the influx of refugee population. In such cases, UNHCR and states are encouraged to provide compensation to locals in an appropriate manner so as to encourage the openness of still more states.

In these difficult times, the world has come to recognize the importance of peace, freedom and order. Unfortunately, we have not yet learned to ensure that these goods become an everyday reality. Yet rather than submit to a world of conflict, tyranny and persecution, the Christian message is one of hope in mankind's God-given ability to improve our lot and obtain better results.

Mr. Chairman,

Pope John Paul II, addressing the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the 50th Anniversary of the creation of the Office, last year, said: "The dawn of a new millennium calls all responsible men and women to fresh efforts to implement the great humanitarian ideal which is at the heart of the UNHCR's mission: the protection of refugees and the defense and promotion of their dignity. The Holy See fully shares the UNHCR's concerns in this respect, and

will continue to do all it can to ensure that refugees and displaced persons are not forgotten in the midst of the profound transformations affecting international life."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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