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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE AL COMITATO ESECUTIVO DELL'ACNUR

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Si tiene a Ginevra, dal 30 settembre al 4 ottobre corrente, la 53a Sessione del Comitato Esecutivo del Programma dell'Alto Commissariato delle Nazioni Unite per i Rifugiati (ACNUR).

S.E. Mons. Diarmuid Martin, Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite e delle Istituzioni Specializzate, ha pronunciato, il 1° ottobre scorso, l'intervento che pubblichiamo di seguito:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. DIARMUID MARTIN

The institutions of asylum and international protection are among of the principal acquisitions of contemporary juridical culture. They have provided a veritable lifeline for millions of persons over the past years, in every continent. They must not be weakened.

As circumstances change, and as it becomes necessary to ensure that the mechanisms of protection are updated and remain relevant to evolving conditions, the significance of the basic institutions of asylum and international protection must remain not just intact, but rather be enhanced.

The Holy See recognizes the importance of the global consultations which have been taking place over the past years, culminating in the adoption of the Agenda for Protection. The aim of the Agenda for Protection, which is not in itself a legally binding document, is not to replace the fundamental international legal instruments concerning protection and asylum. It is to ensure that these are adequately applied in the changing situations of the day. The Agenda must become a starting point for an ongoing process of collaboration to enthusiastically ensure that the institution of protection truly responds to the changing needs and situations of our time, placing the concrete needs of refugee people at its centre.

The concept of cooperation is at the heart of the Agenda for Protection. The process of implementing the Agenda will inevitably involve the establishing of new partnerships of cooperation and burden sharing. Within this process, of course, the Executive Committee must maintain its particular role.

The Delegation of the Holy See would like to address two specific questions which require urgent attention for

the future:

1) The "asylum-migration" nexus must be addressed urgently and systematically. The globalization of the economy requires, and will inevitably lead to, a new understanding of the place of migration. At a time when there is a growing recognition of the fact that intelligent, more open and transparent migration policies can be in the interest of both developed and developing economies, there is often a lack of the corresponding political courage needed to address the question. Where balanced migration policies are not in place, the protection of the institution of asylum will inevitably be at risk, either through the abuse of asylum procedures – including by unscrupulous traffickers and smugglers of persons - or through unnecessarily restrictive interpretation of international norms by governments. The lack of intelligent immigration policies only increases the likelihood of the trafficking of persons, while vast resources are diverted to counteracting the movement of those who might in fact bring a useful contribution to the economic and social progress in the host country.

2) Another question which requires urgent attention is that of the protection of children. Refugee children, including adolescents under 18, constitute about 45% of all refugees. They are among the most vulnerable of the refugee population. The serious allegations regarding sexual exploitation of refugee children clearly point to the need of a continual review of the policies of UNHCR and all its partners in this area. We appreciate the first steps that have been taken in this regard, but much remains still to be done.

New norms and new codes of practice, however necessary, will not on their own provide an answer to this challenge. A fundamental cultural change is necessary. Sexual exploitation in emergency situations is not inevitable. Sexual violence is not an inevitable dimension of conflict. The community of nations affirms today with renewed vigour that the systematic use of sexual violence in armed conflict is a crime against humanity. It must affirm with equal clarity that sexual exploitation, of children or adults, by humanitarian operators remains equally unacceptable.

An overarching dimension of any United Nations presence today must be to witness to standards, in this case to the accepted international high standards of professional behaviour, as well as to international human rights and justice standards. This is especially appropriate when working with persons who have, in the past, been the victims of disregard for human dignity, human rights and the rule of law. In a situation in which the power relationship between the humanitarian operator and the refugee is so disproportionate, international humanitarian workers must be bound by nothing less than the highest standards of professional behaviour.

Refugees are not simply clients of humanitarian workers. They are people who have been offended in their dignity, often at an early age. The aim of international protection is to provide them the space within which to recover their sense of dignity and worth.

In working with refugee children, particular attention should be given to the family. Families in refugee situations must have access to the minimum financial and logistical support needed for them to function as families. Provision of the highest achievable standards of education should be a fundamental dimension of protection. Strengthening the capacity of families, while they are living in refugee circumstances, to carry out their educative and caring responsibilities will enable them to offer their children a natural environment of care and protection. It will also assist those families later to bring their contribution of building up a strong society on their return to normal life.

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