

Caritas Internationalis and the Jesuit Refugee Service response to the outcome document of the UN Summit on addressing large movements of migrants and refugees

Our organisations welcome the outcome document to be adopted on 19 September 2016 as an important step towards the global governance of migration and development. We have long called for a people-centred, human rights and dignity approach to internal and international migrants and refugees. We welcome the focus on respecting the rights of all migrants and a shared responsibility for refugee reception.

We are concerned however by the gap between such declarations and current policies and practices on the ground. We insist that the outcome of the summit must ensure real change to benefit migrants and refugees, ensuring their protection, safety and dignity.

This also means changing practices within the UN to ensure the needs of refugees and migrants are met according to the realities of such movement of people. We are looking for integrated and long-term needs of the individuals primarily living outside of camps. They need support to sustain their livelihoods, including social services, vocational training and employment. We seek specific steps to maximize efficiency in the UN, such as a delineation of roles between the UN as coordinator and civil society as implementers and transparency of funding practices.

This summit comes at a time when the approach by many governments to dealing with refugees and large scale migration is worrying. The principal priority must be meeting essential protection needs and ensuring full respect for international refugee and human rights law in any response taken. It must not be building walls, closing borders and violating human rights and refugee law.

Pope Francis says all those who seek refuge are welcome and should be looked after. Borders have been created by governments in order to provide countries with some level of control and management of migration patterns. This should not prevent anyone from crossing borders. It is our responsibility to welcome everyone in need without any exception and criminalisation.

On 19 September, the international community must send a strong signal that the human rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants are not up for debate. People fleeing conflict, persecution, natural disasters, failed development and the effects of climate change are entitled to the full enjoyment of their human rights.

In a time when the human rights of refugees and migrants are being eroded and violated at alarming rates, it is urgent that all UN member states come to New York and express a clear commitment to protect and safeguard those rights. These commitments should be swiftly implemented as policies.

In order to defend each person's right to live with dignity, it is crucial that they enjoy the right not to migrate. Addressing the root causes of forced migration and displacement is needed to make migration both safe and voluntary.

In this regard we underline our call to strongly engage for Peace in Syria, a conflict which is at the root of large scale movements.

We call for developed nations not to use overseas development aid to pay for the costs of refugees at home. In some countries this amounts to over 20 percent of their overseas development budget. We call on all countries to stop making such aid conditional on migration priorities of the donor country.

We challenge deportations and forced returns of people and the reformulation or reinterpretation of international refugee and humanitarian law to prevent people from seeking refuge or to facilitate their return. People are being deported to so called “safe countries”, such as South Sudan and Afghanistan. This list should not be expanded to include unsafe countries for political or other reasons.

Some countries are currently shouldering a disproportional part of the responsibility associated with large movements of refugees and migrants. We call on the international community to share the responsibility of providing protection to those fleeing from their homes.

Significantly, the Global Compact on refugees outlines both local solutions and legal pathways for admission in other countries. However, there is no longer a mention of shared responsibility, which we believe was an important element indicating the joint responsibility in addressing large flows of refugees.

It’s regrettable that a commitment to increase resettlement quota to 10 percent of all refugees was not included. It is crucial to ensure good reception conditions by avoiding camps and ensuring access on arrival to adequate and affordable services. These include reliable information, health, including psycho social support, accommodation. Reception conditions must also take into account the specific situation of vulnerable groups and guarantee their protection.

Migrant and refugee children should not be detained and must be treated in accordance with international law, especially the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We urge countries to address human trafficking and sexual exploitation, in particular of women and children, a crime against humanity.

A swift engagement in the outlining of the Global Compact on safe, regular and orderly migration with a clear process, timeline and indicators is needed. There is a need to give sufficient space in policy making and implementation to civil society, including faith based organisations.

The best remedy against racism and xenophobia is integration policies for migrants and refugees involving the host communities. These must give access to human rights independently of a migrant status.

Diversity must be recognised as an opportunity and not as a risk. Robust policies to counter racism are needed. All people should strengthen solidarity towards the “other”. We call on the international community to support the UN Secretary General’s initiative to launch a global campaign to counter xenophobia.

Caritas Internationalis and Jesuit Refugee Service member organisations work on human mobility and forced migration. They work in countries of origin, transit and destination. Their work includes the provision of shelter and education, healthcare, trauma counselling, housing, job training, integration with host communities, sustainable return of migrants, care for victims of human trafficking and engagement with policy makers.

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