

Global Compact on Refugees
First Thematic Discussion
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Back to the Future: Responsibilities we Share, Solutions we Know

Statement by the International Catholic Migration Commission

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Mr. President, colleagues and partners,

With more than 20,000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants fleeing from war, violence and economic collapse arriving to Italy in just one week recently this month, tens of thousands in similar flight through the Americas—so many of them unaccompanied children—and millions moving or in temporary refuge in the Middle East and Turkey, in Kenya, Uganda, Iran, Pakistan and elsewhere, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) welcomes this convening today.

We welcome, and with urgency embrace the clear place and role of faith-based organizations and NGOs to build with governments and agencies a Compact that is *worth agreeing to*: a Compact that changes things concretely for the better for refugees, other migrants and societies.

And together we *are* enough to do much better.

The three touchstones that the New York Declaration lays out for the Compact: comprehensive, responsibility-sharing and action, can be gathered up in one word: *solutions*. So can all of the essential actors, including but never limited to governments. Though we have different competences, and capacities, we are in this together, everywhere.

In fact, we together have a long history of practical solutions and partnering. “Responsibility-sharing” used to be called *cooperation*. And we—so many, many of us—have been good at cooperation, good at practical solutions; much better than we seem to remember!

Multiple solutions, with multiple actors. As today’s agenda encourages, even as we look at case studies and “pilot programmes” today, let’s also look at what we were able to come together on and achieve in other moments of great challenge.

- The menu of multi-actor **cooperation and solutions of the two conferences on Indochinese Refugees**, right down the hall here in 1979 and 1989, including the ***Comprehensive Plan of Action***. Boat people, enormous suffering and chaos, and a challenge that needed a comprehensive framework of response: sound familiar? Looking at the challenge of *our* time, ICMC’s President Peter Sutherland wrote: “*Putting together comprehensive responses like these is very much ‘back to the future.’ Back to the positive commitment made a generation ago, when Europe and the rest of the world stepped up to the humanitarian emergency of that day: the Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, in many ways so similar to today, after neighbouring countries*

in Southeast Asia agreed to temporarily admit the boat people, other countries did their part by accepting a percentage for resettlement through safe, orderly processes: ultimately about 800,000. This was a truly global operation. [...] These refugees then revived their lives - and often the communities they joined. They worked and built businesses, paid taxes, and became part of the social, cultural, and political vibrancy of their new countries. “

Another million family members and workers moved in **orderly departure programmes** during the same period. ICMC was one of several large international NGOs partnering directly with governments, UNHCR*, IOM* and others in those programmes. With orderly departure, orderly arrival, organized reception, organized integration, practical mechanisms like these—with human security first—makes national security stronger. We believe that this is exactly what government leaders and people are looking for.

To end the suffering, to stop the chaos, let's do that again. This inspiration and set of practical mechanisms of cooperation belong in the Compact. We propose and are willing to help convene an international workshop to look directly at what was so effective in the Indochinese programme, modeled on the smaller event that UNHCR organized last year on the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian refugee crisis of 1956.

- **Another mechanism of great value was the *Presidium project*** (often called the “Lampedusa model”), which only a few years ago, brought the Italian government, UNHCR, IOM, the Italian Red Cross and Save the Children in a multi-actor, competence-based partnership to respond to the diversity of boat people arriving on Lampedusa and elsewhere in Southern Europe, with particular attention to refugee and asylum seekers, children, and victims of human trafficking. That's the way to do it.

In this direction, we were happy last December to see UNHCR update and again promote its excellent **10 Point Plan of Action for Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration**. From its visionary launch in 2006, that plan has been relevant, respectful and practical regarding the diversity both of people on the move and upon arrival as well as the actors who respond to them. Wisely, point 1 is all about... *cooperation*. Points 3, 4, 5 and 6 are about responding always needs-first—with respect for life and other rights that all human beings have, regardless of any immigration status—but then with careful differentiation and referral to ensure protection of further rights, e.g., of refugees, children and victims of torture or trafficking. The wisdom and practical cooperation highlighted in the 10 Point Plan and Presidium project belong in the Compact.

- Finally, and in many ways, most exciting: **at community level, local authorities, faith-based and other groups of ordinary citizens have been stepping forward spontaneously** with their own solutions to welcome refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants. Their own hearts and houses, their own time and resources. To welcome, comfort, befriend and integrate in the most natural and effective way: people to people. Adding to—not reducing—traditional and essential refugee resettlement and asylum process, with **community-based, private sponsorship**, sometimes connected to **humanitarian corridors**. ICMC and our network of members in Canada, in German, Italy and other parts of Europe and the US know how practical, promising, real and resource-filled are those words “community-based”, and “private sponsorship”.

We also know the *joy* in it! In fact, the joy is part of the reason that citizens who have stepped up in these solutions more and more actively insist on them in local and national politics, as we have so often been reminded in Germany, Spain and, just a few days ago, by Canada in the Global Forum on Migration and Development. Ending suffering and stopping chaos is good politics as well as essential humanitarian response. As Peter Sutherland put it, *“these responses are practical and*

positive, in the immediate and long-term, for governments and societies - together with the refugees themselves. We further believe that more of these solutions are possible than what we've seen so far." This wildly underestimated community-level energy and solution-building belongs very much in the Compact.

Let's put these multiple solutions, and multiple actors, together again now, in a Compact worth agreeing to:

- **to respond** to refugees, asylum seekers and others who leave their countries to survive, and are in vulnerable situations;
- **to comply** with obligations under international law that governments wrote for themselves after war had turned millions of Europeans into refugees;
- **to end** trauma and trafficking that skyrocket when dangerous migration is the only way to seek safety;
- **to say** "no more deaths!" crossing waters and borders;
- **to bring** order to chaos, defueling exploitation, xenophobia, and social violence;
- **to step up together** to challenges we have seen and solved before.

Thank you.

* IOM = International Organization for Migration; UNHCR = the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

About ICMC

The International Catholic Migration Commission is a Catholic Church-inspired, international non-governmental organization which protects and serves uprooted people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking, and migrants, regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or nationality.

Founded in 1951 by Pope Pius XII, ICMC facilitates a network of national Catholic Bishops Conferences and other Catholic-inspired institutions worldwide. Headquartered in Geneva, ICMC has staff and programs in more than 50 countries, affiliated offices in Brussels, Washington DC and Boston, and operational offices in Greece, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey.

In Syria, ICMC provides lifesaving assistance to internally displaced Syrians, as well as vulnerable Iraqis. In Jordan, ICMC delivers humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities. In Greece, ICMC works with the UNHCR to provide help to incoming refugees and migrants and to support the Greek government in its asylum reform. With funding from the US State Department, ICMC runs the Resettlement Support Center for Turkey and the Middle East, processing the application of refugees referred by UNHCR for resettlement to the US. ICMC also works with UNHCR on a separate program to deploy resettlement experts worldwide. In 2016, ICMC deployed 210 experts to 63 UNHCR offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America.

ICMC Europe convenes a broad range of stakeholders to promote welcome and integration to refugees across the continent. In March 2016, ICMC Europe published "*Building a Resettlement Network of European Cities and Regions - Experiences of the SHARE Network 2012-2015*", a detailed summary of best practices, policy recommendations, resources and tools developed by ICMC Europe and SHARE Network members. The SHARE Network includes 1,200 local and regional resettlement and integration actors in over 27 European countries, including municipalities, NGOs, public services, churches and private sector actors.

Since 2011, ICMC has served as international coordinator of civil society activities in the Global Forum on Migration and Development since 2011, and in similar functions towards the UN High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2013 and the UN High-level Summit on Refugees and Migrants in 2016. ICMC initiated and is co-convenor of the civil society Action Committee, which brings together 24 leading refugee protection and migrant rights NGOs from around the world for joint follow-up to the 2016 Summit's *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*.