



Opening Remarks of Archbishop Bernardito Auza
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National Forum on Migration and Peace
Marriott Hotel Château Champlain, Montreal, November 23, 2016

Excellencies, Distinguished Panelists, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It would be difficult to find a theme more relevant in the world today than migration and peace. Violence forces people out of their homes, displaces them from their communities, renders them refugees, and pushes them to migrate. Peace allows human beings to flourish and their development possible.

While migration has always been with us, it is becoming an unprecedented phenomenon in our days. Statistics and the impact of these migratory movements are well known to you, so I will not impose upon our limited time together to repeat these numbers.

I wish, however, to underline the worrying fact that more than half of the world's refugees, forced migrants and internally displaced persons have been forced to abandon their homes and properties and, indeed, to flee their countries, because of conflicts and violence. It is even worse when we consider that, during their journey, forced migrants and refugees face the dangers of trafficking, starvation and many forms of abuse, and upon arriving at their destination, rather than finding a safe haven, in many places they find mistrust, suspicion, discrimination, extreme nationalism, racism and a lack of clear policies regulating their acceptance.

Peace is another name for development and, as Blessed Paul VI affirmed in 1967, development is the new name of peace. Almost fifty years after, this connection is fully recognized and enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted on 25 September 2015 by all the Nations of the world a few minutes after the visit of Pope Francis to the United Nations. The Preamble underlines that "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable

development.” Because of the priceless value of peace for human flourishing, Sustainable Development Goal 16 aims to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

Persons of religion must fight the scourge of violence in our time and at all times. We must collectively reaffirm our common resolve to combat the scourge of violent extremism, terrorism, intolerance, hatred of religious believers and religiously-inspired hatred. Pope Francis has ceaselessly underlined in words and actions certain principles with which interfaith harmony and a culture of peace could be achieved.

First among such principles is the total and unconditional rejection of violence, most especially violence done in the name of faith or religion. No one can ever consider himself or herself a true believer while planning and carrying out acts of violence. Following the example of Pope Francis, we condemn the abuse of religion as a justification for violence. All believers must say no to hatred, to revenge and to violence, particularly that violence and hatred in the name of a religion or of God himself.

One of the key themes of the Summit for Refugees and Migrants, which was held at the United Nations in New York on September 19, was the search for durable solutions and more effective ways of sharing responsibility in the face of large movements of refugees and migrants. For the Holy See and the Catholic Church, the most durable solution is to act on the root causes that force millions of people to flee or migrate. Sad to say, the primary cause of today’s refugee and migrant crisis is man-made: namely, wars and conflicts. We must, therefore, put an end to conflicts if we have to stop forced migrations.

The Holy See thus pleads for a common commitment on the part of individual governments and the international community to bring to an end all fighting, hatred and violence, and to pursue peace and reconciliation. As Pope Francis affirmed in his Address to the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015, “War is the negation of all rights... If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples.”

Moreover, in the last few years religious persecution has become increasingly a cause of displacement. Although other groups are heavily targeted, many reports confirm that Christians are by far the most persecuted faith group; in fact, a type of “religious-ethnic cleansing,” which Pope Francis calls “a form of genocide,” is occurring. Some of those persecuted, even in asylum countries, are facing harassment in refugee settings. We must not abandon them.

Finally, we must also pay attention to the plight of those migrants fleeing from situations of extreme poverty and environmental degradation. While these are not recognized by international conventions as refugees and thus do not enjoy any particular legal protection, they nevertheless suffer greatly and are most vulnerable to human trafficking and various forms of human slavery.

I am confident that this Forum will strengthen our resolve to do all we can for refugees and migrants, and from it we shall draw best practices and lessons learned to improve further our service in favor of approximately sixty-five million of our brothers and sisters who are forced or constrained to migrate.

Thank you for the invitation and I wish all a fruitful dialogue.