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Press Conference for the presentation of the Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 106 th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (27 September 2020)

Intervention of Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.I.

Intervention of Fr. Fabio Baggio, C.S.

Intervention of Dr. Amaya Valcárcel

Intervention of Fr. Joseph Cassar, S.J.

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference took place, streamed live from the “John Paul II” Hall of the Holy See Press Office, to present the Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which will be held on Sunday 27 September 2020 on the theme: “Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee. Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating internally displaced persons”. During the press conference, the first video of the campaign for the preparation for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees was presented. The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., under-secretary of the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Fr. Fabio Baggio, C.S., under-secretary of the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the same Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Dr. Amaya Valcárcel, international Advocacy Coordinator for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), International Office in Rome; and Fr. Joseph Cassar, S.J., director of the JRS in Iraq, in live connection from Erbil.

The following are the interventions:

Intervento del Card. Michael Czerny, S.J.

Caring for the Most Vulnerable People

The 2020 World Day of Migrants and Refugees will be celebrated on Sunday 27 September. The tradition goes back to 1915 during the massive upheaval caused by World War I (1914-1918). Let us also recall, in these days of coronavirus, that soon the context was also Spanish Flu (1918-1919).

Thus the 106th such occasion is when Pope Francis provides his seventh message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Three of his messages to date have centred on our displaced brothers and sisters themselves. Following "*Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World*" (2014) and "*Child Migrants, the Vulnerable and the Voiceless*" (2017), this year's "*Forced like Jesus Christ to flee*" (2020) focuses on the pastoral care of internally displaced people (IDPs), who around the world currently number about 50.8 million, 45.7 million as a result of conflict and violence, and 5.1 million as a result of disasters.[1]

The other four messages are more like mirrors to reflect on our response as Christians so that the "*Church without frontiers* [will be a] *Mother to all*" (2015). Fundamentally, let us be agents of mercy, says "*Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy*" (2016). Let everyone - Christians and all believers, citizens and groups and authorities - act in a complete, an integral manner by "*Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees*" (2018). And what about our own hearts and spirit? Declaring that "It is not just about migrants" (2019), Pope Francis moves in six steps from dark corners like our fear to a bright vision of building the City of God and the human city, too, our common home.

These messages, embedded in more than a century of tradition, enrich the magisterium of Pope Francis regarding the most vulnerable people in each society: the discarded, the forgotten, the set aside. In this case, the internally displaced – abandoning their home and familiar surroundings, they live uprooted within their own nation State, among compatriots who may dislike and resent them; citizens "on paper", they don't fit in although they have much to offer; their needs require attention and are our responsibility, but everyone else has other priorities.

Now Fr Fabio will explain how, over the coming half year, "*Like Jesus Christ forced to flee*" will be elaborated in six steps regarding "a drama that is often unseen, which the world crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated".

[1] <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

Intervention of Fr. Fabio Baggio, C.S.

The Message of the 106th World Migrant and Refugee Day has the title "Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee" and the subtitle "Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating internally displaced persons". Pope Francis thus expressed his particular concern about the tragedy of internally displaced persons.

The Message starts from the experience of Jesus Christ displaced and refugee together with his parents, an icon often used in the universal magisterium to reaffirm the importance of the Christological reason of Christian welcome.

The Holy Father's reflection then continues with a new structure regarding the four verbs with which Pope Francis wanted to summarise the pastoral care of migration: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating. This articulation is structured in six pairs of verbs bound by a causal relationship: to know in order to understand, to be close in order to serve, to listen in order to reconcile, to share in order to grow, to involve in order to promote and to collaborate in order to build.

Referring to the experience of the disciples of Emmaus (cf. *Lk 24:15-16*), the Holy Father introduces the first pair - to know in order to understand - , making it clear that internal displacement is not numbers, but people. Only by knowing their stories will we be able to understand their situation and their needs.

Following the example of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk 24:15-16*), Pope Francis invites us to be close to serve, overcoming the fears and prejudices that distance us from the internally displaced persons and prevent us from "being close" to each of them.

Looking to the example of God the Father, who responds to the cry of humanity by giving his Son for the salvation of the world (cf. *Jn 3: 16-17*), the Holy Father invites all to adopt an attitude of humble listening. This listening is necessary to achieve true reconciliation, capable of healing the conflicts that have caused the forced migration of so many internally displaced persons.

Regarding the pair "to share in order to grow", Pope Francis recalls the example of the first Christian community (cf. *Acts 4:32*), which made all its resources communal. The world's resources are the heritage of all human beings and we must learn to share them more equitably, so that no one - refugee or displaced person, migrant or refugee - remains excluded.

The episode of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn 4:1-30*) inspires the Holy Father to explain the fifth pair of verbs: "to involve so as to promote". True human promotion passes through empowerment and the direct involvement of displaced persons in their redemption.

To collaborate in building up the Kingdom of God is a commitment common to all Christians, and we must do so "in perfect union of thought and feeling" (*1 Cor 1:10*), as Saint Paul recommended to the community of Corinth. For action in favour of internally displaced persons it is also necessary to work together to build a better future for all.

In his Message the Holy Father wanted to offer us several points for reflection to help us contextualise his recommendations in the crisis scenario in which we find ourselves due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pope Francis invites us to understand our precariousness in these days as a constant condition in the lives of displaced people. He encourages us to let ourselves be inspired by the doctors and nurses who in recent months have taken risks to save us. The Holy Father recommends that we take advantage of the silence of our streets to listen better to the cry of the most vulnerable and of our planet. He encourages us to share more, reminding us that no one saves himself. Pope Francis reminds us that only with the contribution of all, even the smallest, is it possible to overcome the crisis. The Holy Father reiterates that today we cannot afford to be selfish, because we are facing a common challenge, which acknowledges no difference.

I would like to conclude this contribution with an extract from the beautiful final prayer that the Holy Father, looking at the icon of the Holy Family in exile, wanted to give us:

Father, you entrusted to Saint Joseph what you held most precious: the child Jesus and his Mother, in order to protect them from the dangers and threats of the wicked. [...]

Grant to those who welcome them some of the tender love of this just and wise father, who loved Jesus as a true son and sustained Mary at every step of the way.

Intervention of Dr. Amaya Valcárcel

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation present in 56 countries. Its mission is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of forced migrants, including internally displaced persons (IDPs). It works with internally displaced populations in 14 countries. We accompany IDPs through programmes, and

advocate for national laws and policies that protect the rights of IDPs and promote lasting solutions. Of the 80.1 million forcibly displaced people in the world, 50.8 million are internally displaced, that is, forced to flee their homes but remain in their own countries.

IDPs face similar challenges as refugees: human rights violations, loneliness and isolation, and difficulties in accessing food, shelter or education. While national authorities have the primary responsibility for their protection, IDPs often have difficulty accessing the most basic services and human rights, and risk being unnoticed and totally forgotten.

For a church organisation such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, it is key that the Holy Father invites us through his annual message to know better and understand the aspirations and fears of IDPs.

The JRS works in various contexts of internal displacement, providing different responses according to the needs of the displaced population:

The war in Syria

More than 6.5 million people have fled their homes in the interior of Syria since the war began, now in its tenth year since March.

JRS Syria was established in 2008 to assist the growing number of Iraqi refugees. When civil war broke out in 2011, JRS Syria began to serve internally displaced persons in Syria, offering them health care, education, child protection, livelihood training and emergency assistance in areas where there was hardly any humanitarian presence. In Aleppo alone, JRS provided an average of 18,000 meals per day.

Today, the accumulation of grief is coupled with great poverty and Covid-19. Eighty percent of Syrians live below the poverty line. Political justifications aside, are international sanctions not having an impact on the poorest people? This is the situation that all Syrians are experiencing, but for the internally displaced persons life is even more difficult. They have to pay the rent, and often they have no running water or electricity.

During the pandemic, our outpatient clinic is still functioning but the education we offer to Syrian children is through Facebook and Whatsapp groups. We are distributing hygiene kits and food baskets to vulnerable families. A few days ago, our colleagues in the city of Homs told us that they are beginning to see the marks of malnutrition in the eyes of many displaced people, both children and adults. Our teams in Syria are already alerting us to the hunger situation in the population.

Ethno-political conflict in Myanmar

In Myanmar today there are more than 450,000 IDPs due to ethnic conflict. More recently, between January and April 2020, there were 86 clashes between the Myanmar army and armed ethnic groups, especially in Rakhine and Chin States, causing the displacement of some 16,000 people. Many organisations and the Catholic Church called for a ceasefire during this time of pandemic.

At the present time, internally displaced persons are at greater risk of contracting the virus as they live in overcrowded situations with limited access to water and where health care is very precarious. In Kachin State, where the JRS is present and where 100,000 IDPs live, some 3,700 have returned to their home villages or other temporary locations for fear of infection in IDP camps. But this movement is not without risk, as anti-personnel mines are present throughout the territory.

The government and the armed groups should guarantee a safe zone for those who have to search for food outside the camp, and so that they can have access to at least the most basic needs. Leaders should also listen to the voice of the most marginalised in society, including IDPs, and give them a greater say in building sustainable solutions with them.

The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and the conflict in Colombia

Within Venezuela, it is difficult to know how many IDPs there are due to lack of information. The country is experiencing a social, political and economic crisis since 2014, which has caused the departure of almost 15 percent of its population, resulting in the largest exodus in recent Latin American history: more than 4.9 million people as of March 2020. There we work in a network with the local church supporting access to food, housing and help for internally displaced people to stay in school despite limited access to basic commodities. We are also helping Venezuelans in neighbouring countries, including Colombia.

There, the long-running conflict between the Colombian government and guerrilla groups has left more than 5.5 million people displaced. Colombia is also home to 1.8 million Venezuelans who have fled the situation in their country. We began working in Colombia in 1995, offering services to IDPs, and today many are already chronically displaced within the country, having experienced two, three or even four displacements due to the presence of armed actors and criminal gangs in the cities. We pursue a strategy that combines the promotion of political and economic integration, social empowerment and reconciliation, all with a view to promoting lasting solutions.

The Covid-19 disproportionately affects internally displaced persons as it is reflected in the loss of income, restrictions on movement, reduced access to markets and land and the general increase in the cost of living.

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, probably one of the world's most forgotten conflicts, there are now 5.5 million internally displaced persons. The violence that has plagued the country since the early 1990s is largely caused by access to mineral resources such as coltan or gold. In 2019 alone, there were 1.6 million new displacements, especially in the rich areas of Kivu in the east of the country.

Chronic instability and the cyclical nature of displacement have left IDPs extremely vulnerable and unable to achieve sustainable solutions. IDPs should be included in national plans to combat Covid-19, including access to information, testing and treatment. Governments and local communities must ensure that IDPs are not left behind in responses to Covid-19, including the strengthening of health systems.

Our hope is that the resolution of the political crisis in the country can also lead to a reduction in conflict, violence and displacement.

Pope Francis' message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2020

When we ask IDPs what messages they want us to express to the world they always ask us to make their situation visible so that humanitarian aid is activated and the injustices and arbitrariness they experience as a result of their isolation are known and resolved. The social and economic crisis produced by COVID-19 may result in greater invisibility and restricted access to displaced populations.

Pope Francis is the best advocate for the displaced and refugees. Through his annual message, all of us can learn more about the reality of IDPs.

We unite with his message and his call for a global ceasefire, made last April, as we believe that peace is the only solution to end the forced displacement of people.

We are deeply grateful to the Holy Father for once again putting people on the periphery of our world at the centre.

Intervention of Fr. Joseph Cassar, S.J.

From my standpoint, I welcome Pope Francis's focus on internally displaced persons or IDPs for this year's message to commemorate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in September. This is because it brings IDPs, whose numbers are in the tens of millions, to the forefront of pastoral consciousness.

The work of Jesuit Refugee Service in Iraq puts me in regular contact with internally displaced persons who are in their sixth year of displacement. One word that I repeatedly hear from IDPs is "forgotten." Roughly six million people were displaced in Iraq after the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL, or IS) took hold of large parts of Iraq—and Syria—in 2014. Almost six years later, there continue to be close to 1,400,000 IDPs in Iraq. [1] That would be a sizeable city, by any standard. Yet, the fact that internally displaced persons are displaced, and are displaced in their own country, also means that they tend to be overlooked.

The Duhok governorate of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq hosts just under 320,000 IDPs. The vast majority are Ezidi (also Yazidi/Yezidi) survivors of the August 2014 genocide in the Sinjar district of the Ninewa governorate of Iraq. Levels of trauma are high. Some 50% of IDPs continue to live one of seventeen IDP camps in the governorate. Among those who live out-of-camp, thousands of families live in informal camp-like settlements, or in unfinished buildings—at any rate, in critical shelter that exacerbates problems that people have to deal with day after day.

Protracted displacement, coupled with limited prospects of return in the short-to-medium term, takes its toll on the lives of people. Among the young especially, the sense of "no future" contributes to an increased incidence of suicide.

Another very important aspect of the mission of JRS is among recently returned populations in the Nineveh Plains of Iraq, mainly though not exclusively Christians. Although returnees are not counted among the displaced, the impact of displacement on the lives of hundreds of thousands of recently returned persons is hard to overstate. More than two-and-a-half years after the first big wave of returns to the Nineveh Plains, that harsh experience is still very alive in their memory, and its after-effects can be felt in their day to day lives. This is particularly true of the most vulnerable, for whom return is experienced almost as another instance of displacement.

Among the displaced, the recently returned, host communities, and all people of good will, the desire for peace could not be stronger. In Iraq, displacement has been going on for at least forty years. The causes are numerous and there are no easy solutions. I have met many individuals and families who have been displaced five, seven, nine times in the past three to four decades.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq and the mitigation measures imposed by public health and security authorities have had ramifications on almost all aspects of public and family life and disrupted the economy. [2] At the outset of 2020, it was estimated that 4.1 million persons were in need of humanitarian assistance in Iraq. This figure is set to rise sharply since already vulnerable households will increasingly be unable to meet even their most basic needs and are already resorting to negative coping strategies that will deplete their existing scarce

resources and push them deeper into debt. Both IDPs and recent returnees, and the most vulnerable among them, account for a very substantial segment of this population.

Apart from the obvious financial response, now is the time for a massive investment in peace. Beyond valuable statistics, bringing the “forgotten” internally displaced persons to the forefront as people, is now more timely than ever.

[1] OM, Data Tracking Matrix, 29 April 2020.<http://iraqdtm.iom.int/MasterList#Displacement>

[2] OCHA, Iraq Inter-Cluster Coordination Group: COVID-19 Humanitarian Activities in the Global HRP, 7 May 2020.
