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Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the  
**69<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**  
*Geneva, 2 October 2018*

Madam President,

The Delegation of the Holy See would like to express its pressing concern over the increasingly difficult challenges presented by the protracted refugee crises in different parts of the world. In 2017 an unprecedented 68.5 million individuals worldwide were forcibly displaced. Among them, nearly 25.4 million are refugees.<sup>1</sup>

Such statistics constitute an alarming indicator of the violence, persecution and conflict that bedevil our age. At the same time, the generosity and solidarity of those countries that welcome and host displaced persons give eloquent witness to the bonds that unite our human family. These refugee brothers and sisters are not numbers to be distributed and allocated, but persons with a name, a story, and legitimate aspirations for human development.

Yet, many of the problems faced by refugees remain without an adequate response. Resettlement quotas are being reduced while asylum procedures are being complicated, rendering them more difficult to execute and thus causing grief and despair to many. For the affected individuals, unaccompanied minors, and families, the full enjoyment of their basic rights remains an elusive goal. Such situations are a challenge to the flourishing of human dignity, which is the basis of all human rights, and to the goal of integral human development.

Madam President, the Delegation of the Holy See would like to highlight the following three points:

- 1) More than half of refugees are under the age of 18.<sup>2</sup> If we truly wish to leave no one behind, it is essential that adequate resources be invested in the education of refugee children. In this regard, the lack of funding is a source of grave concern. To provide resources and funds for education is to invest in the future of humanity.

It is important to enact policies that allow refugee children to access quality education from the early stages of their displacement in order to protect them from human trafficking, forced labor and other forms of exploitation or, worse yet, from slavery. Schools indeed provide significant protection where the safety of children can be monitored and fostered. Refugee children deserve the right to be children. As Pope Francis observed: "this will enable them not only to cultivate and realize their potential, but also better equip them to encounter others and to foster a spirit of dialogue rather than rejection or confrontation."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, *Global Trends Force Displacement in 2017* (2018)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the 51<sup>st</sup> World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2018

Moreover, it is imperative that Best Interest Determinations be provided for all child refugees, but, in particular, unaccompanied children, both during the status determination process and when discerning appropriate durable solutions for such children.

2) The consultations related to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) demonstrated that the international community is aware of the need for a more concerted and equitable approach, driven by international cooperation and solidarity. The participation by numerous Delegations and civil society representatives was a clear indicator of the wish not only to support the standard approach of the international community – focused on protection, assistance and the search for durable solutions – but also to seek such solutions together as a universal family.

Notwithstanding the encouraging developments brought forward by the GCR, we should also be realistic and resolute about its implementation, keeping in mind that the rights of refugees, as laid out in various international instruments, often continue to be violated. In this regard, my Delegation wishes to highlight the contributions that religious leaders and faith-based organizations can offer during the implementation phase of the GCR.

3) The Holy See wishes to reiterate its concern over the fact that natural disasters and environmental degradation are increasingly interacting with forced displacement, affecting for the most part the poorest and most vulnerable. Today we are called upon to acknowledge that a “true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”.<sup>4</sup>

Madam President,

Finally, this Delegation wishes to recall that it is incumbent upon all of us to address the root causes of forced displacement. This requires courage and political will, bringing to an end conflicts which breed hatred and violence, and striving for peace, reconciliation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Forced displacement is not just a matter of “bad luck”; more often than not, it is the result of political decisions. Ultimately, the most comprehensive and sound way to achieve durable solutions, and to realize the dream of every refugee, is to ensure the rights of all to live in their countries of origin, and to thrive in dignity, peace, and security.

I thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, §49