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Press Conference to present the Holy Father Francis' Message for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (26 September 2021)

At 11.30 this morning, streamed live from the "John Paul II" Hall of the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the Holy Father Francis' Message for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, to be held on 26 September 2021 on the theme "Towards an ever wider 'we'". During the press conference the first hitherto unseen video of the Holy Father for the campaign to prepare for the Day will be screened.

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; the Reverend Fr. Fabio Baggio, C.S., under-secretary of the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; the Reverend Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., under-secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Bishop Paul McAleenan, auxiliary of Westminster (by live link), and Ms. Sarah Teather, director of the Jesuit Refugee Service UK (by live link).

The following are their interventions:

Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J.

In *Fratelli tutti*, the Holy Father clearly expressed his concern about the future after the health crisis. What if selfish individualism and isolationism become even more entrenched, leaving the vulnerable and terribly marginalised even further behind?

As he says, we can come out of the pandemic better or worse. We can learn to be better brothers and sisters, or we can sink deeper into obsessive concern just for ourselves, "our own".

This self-absorption is what made the first two passers-by different from the Good Samaritan. Each had 'good excuses' for averting his eyes from the half-dead victim.

The Samaritan reached across the typical gap of *us* versus *them*. Nothing to gain, maybe to lose, but out of compassion for another who is a victim of mugging, as in the story, or of today's terrifying pandemic.

The Pope also uses the expression "we are all in the same boat" regarding the covid-19 emergency. We are all suffering in different ways. What happens when the survivors in a lifeboat must all help to row to shore? What if some take more than their share of the rations, leaving others too weak to row? The risk is that everyone will perish, the well-fed and the starving alike. Widening the Good Samaritan attitude – overcoming selfishness and caring for all – is essential to survival.

In *Fratelli tutti* the Holy Father presents a third perspective on a future where there will no longer be "others", but only "us". Let us rebuild the human family in all its beauty by recognising the other as richness, as laden with those talents that make others uniquely different from me: "the arrival of different people, coming from a different vital and cultural context, becomes a gift". Only the acceptance of this "gift" makes it possible to build "an ever greater us" that ultimately reaches all of humanity.

The Good Samaritan story is central in *Fratelli tutti* and guides the Church and all humanity "Towards an ever wider *we*" in our one common home.

Intervention by the Reverend Fr. Fabio Baggio, C.S.

The 107th World Migrant and Refugee Day will be celebrated on 26 September next. Once again this year, the Holy Father has decided to publish his traditional message dedicated to this celebration well in advance, so as to allow sufficient time to prepare for the event.

The title chosen for this year's message is "Towards an ever wider 'we'". As Pope Francis himself explains, it is a call to ensure that "after all this, we will think no longer in terms of 'them' and 'those', but only 'us'". (*Fratelli tutti*, 35). And this universal "we" must become a reality first and foremost within the Church, which is called to create communion in diversity.

The Message is composed of six main points, all related to the "we" we are called to build. The first point concerns the dimension of the we, which must aspire to be as great as humanity, in full correspondence with God's creative and salvific plan. The second point is an application of the "we" to the Church, called to be one home and one family for every baptised person. The third point is a reference to the "outbound Church", so dear to the Holy Father, called to go out to meet "to heal wounds and seek out the straying ... ready to widen her tent to embrace everyone". The fourth point concerns the future of our societies, which will only be coloured by harmony and peace if we learn to live together. The fifth point takes up another theme dear to Pope Francis: the Common Home, for the care of which it is necessary to ensure an us that takes its responsibilities seriously. The last point is an invitation to dream together, as one humanity, as fellow travellers, who have realised that having a common goal gives much more meaning to the journey.

In order to promote adequate preparation for the celebration of this day, the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has prepared a communication campaign through which the six points proposed by the Message will be elaborated. In the coming months, multimedia aids, information material and reflections by theologians and experts will be offered to help advance the Message of the Holy Father.

Intervention by the Reverend Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A.

"The present time shows that this "we" willed by God is broken and fragmented, wounded and disfigured". T

In the economic sphere it is not difficult to see this disfigured “we”, and the pandemic has made it more evident: finance, whose original vocation is inclusion, bringing together those who have capital with those who want to develop projects and lack means, has in most cases become pure speculation. One thinks of the speculative operations on foodstuffs, which risk leaving entire countries without access to food because of price increases. And the poorest are forced to migrate. Think of the growing inequalities - economic, technological, and in terms of access to healthcare. As long as the prevailing logic remains "what is best for me" and not "what is my part in something that will be best for us all and for our common home", it will not be possible to heal a sick economy.

Yet, there are signs of hope. Many are trying to 'achieve a more sustainable, balanced, inclusive development'.

The Covid Commission, commissioned by Pope Francis, for example, is working in this direction: “prepare the future”, Pope Francis asked us. Food, work, health for all are our priorities. And by everyone we mean *everyone*. How can we do this? By listening, by giving a voice to the voiceless, by bringing together those who have innovative ideas and those who make decisions, by being there, with the inspiration and realism that only the Gospel can give.

Another great sign of hope is linked to the “Economy of Francesco” process: thanks to a call by Pope Francis to change the current economy and give a soul to the economy of the future, more than 2000 young economists from 120 countries around the world are training and working together on projects to transform the economy. They meet online and work in their own regions. They want to bring back to the centre of the economy that scene from the life of Saint Francis, namely the embrace with the leper, which the rich of Assisi did not want to pay for, among the frescoes of the basilica: they did not want it to be known that there were lepers in Assisi. The discarded ones who come out of history. The young people of the Economy of Francis want the poor, the discarded, the excluded, migrants and refugees to be placed at the centre of the economy: together we can start again for a “we” that has the flavour of the Gospel.

If the elderly dream, the young can have visions: together, for an ever greater us.

Intervention by Bishop Paul McAleenan

We thank the Holy Father for his inspiration and leadership, and for today’s Message that encourages the Church in the United Kingdom as we engage with migrants and refugees.

To move ‘Towards an ever wider *we*’, our guiding principle should be the title of chapter 4 in *Fratelli Tutti*, ‘A heart open to the world’. This heart knows that migrants and refugees do not come to usurp our way of life; instead it rejoices in how they can enrich our society.

Pope Francis draws our attention to the interconnectedness of humanity: my decisions and actions here affect others who are far away. Three areas in particular directly affect the human family today. The decision of the United Kingdom to reduce its aid budget compounds the suffering of the world’s poorest. Nations engaging in the arms trade bring endless misery to those in places of conflict. Our contribution to the climate emergency results in droughts, disasters and displacement thousands of miles away. Understanding the reasons for migration must include the acknowledgement that we are not blameless.

When someone’s home is on fire we are obliged to give them shelter, protection and help to start again. To achieve this the Church in the United Kingdom is engaged on different fronts; it opposes policies which seek to divide migrants and refugees into groups, some preferred and others rejected; agencies and charities on the south coast of England and in northern France provide material and moral support to those in greatest danger; liturgies celebrate the contribution of migrants to the Church and society; technology is employed to reach and embrace the undocumented during the current pandemic.

The aim of the Church is to welcome, protect and promote all, knowing that human life and well-being are at risk, not national security.

National Governments may feel obliged to protect borders, to ensure that a country's riches and resources are preserved for its citizens alone. The Acts of the Apostles readings in Easter season insist that Christ's saving act was for all people regardless of origin, nation or language. The Church, led by the Spirit, proclaims that truth by helping the affected and afflicted and by promoting the equal dignity of migrants and refugees. With the Holy Father we encourage a widening of minds and hearts. Within the circle of our society, room should be made for everyone, including migrants and refugees who seek a home among us.

Intervention by Ms. Sarah Teather

Creating "an ever wider *we*" requires a common journey of all people. The Holy Father speaks powerfully of how far we have strayed from the road we travel together: "the *us* willed by God", he says "is broken and fragmented, wounded and disfigured."

I see this brokenness in the experiences of refugees we accompany and serve at the Jesuit Refugee Service UK. Faced with those who fled their homes and sought sanctuary, the asylum system builds walls of suspicion to stop them receiving the protection they need. It detains them and enforces destitution. Destitution makes many vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and they speak of the sense of losing themselves through years struggling at the margins.

The aggressive and closed politics that wounds them is itself wounded. A broken community – a community that deliberately casts vulnerable migrants to the peripheries – leads to broken lives.

Despite this, there is also hope. We see it as refugees struggle for and reclaim agency, forging community even as the asylum system interferes with human bonds forming. We witness many destitute asylum seekers volunteering to support others, for example. Barred from participating in society through paid work, they create new avenues to contribute their gifts and use time meaningfully. One woman in detention joined a group that prayed for people about to be removed. "We would pray for everyone, even the officers" she explained. Acting in solidarity with one another and others and giving good where none has been received, such refugees help to build a common future, a wider *we* that refuses to *other* but struggles together on a common journey towards justice.

Hope also arises from Christian communities energised and inspired by confidently welcoming people of other faiths and cultures. In our hosting project, religious congregations and families receive destitute homeless asylum seekers as guests into their own homes.

Hosts and guests speak movingly of this as an experience of meaningful encounter and surprising friendships, in which both benefit from the treasure of shared life. Together, they create a counter-culture to the hostile public policies that render people homeless and marginalised.

In small, concrete ways, we can all participate in this shared project to recompose a common human family. For there are treasures to be found when we strive together to break down walls that divide us. The dream of one human family is a dream worth realising.

