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**Looking, Weighing and Acting
Together on Migration within and from Africa**

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Introduction

Allow me to make a general introductory preamble stating that migration realities in Africa -as in all parts of the world- largely vary from one sub-region to another and even from one country to another. The economic, political, socio-cultural and geographic elements largely determine the understanding of migratory situations and any analysis should therefore deal with the diversity that stems from these aspects.

I also wanted to highlight a few indicators as to the importance of the subject we will be discussing over the course of the coming days. It is worth recalling that there are nearly 200 million international migrants in the world today – 20 million of whom are of African origin. Above and beyond these 200 million, millions of people, including Africans, have been uprooted in their own countries, displaced without having crossed international borders. It is reported that the number of people internally displaced *by conflict alone* reached 26 million worldwide in 2007, nearly half of whom are in Africa.

Conflict, however, is by no means the only factor causing people to move: the effects of changing demographics, the current global economic crises; reduced development assistance; skyrocketing food prices and climate change will inevitably lead to continuing – if not greater – internal and international migratory movements in the coming decennia. The question is to what extent these movements affect the fundamental social fabrics of our societies. The East African author Sobonfu Somé wrote « En Afrique on dit que si une personne est malade, tout le monde est malade » It also means that if somebody has left the community, the absence is felt by all of the community and by the community as a whole.

This presentation will cover some of the principal images of migration in and out of Africa today, followed by policy dimensions of pastoral concerns, and conclude with an invitation, suggesting some possibilities for Church action, including four specific areas for collaborative action among the African Bishops and ICMC in the near-term.

I. Images of migration in and out of Africa

Migration today and tomorrow is an unavoidable reality. For individuals, communities and governments alike, migration has become a necessity, and though often forgotten, it remains the fundamental expression of hope for new life opportunities and perspectives. Indeed, for many people, moving away from home has allowed them to get an education, find steady employment, support their families and/or enjoy greater economic possibilities than might have been feasible at home.

1. Nonetheless, what we see in the movement of people today, in and from Africa is ***a dramatic increase in suffering in all phases of migration***: from the moment a decision to migrate is being considered by an individual and his or her family, through every phase of the travel and long after arrival in the country of destination. This suffering can be seen in terms of exceptional vulnerability: we see the frustration of those who feel they have no other option than to leave home; the hopes and false expectations borne of inaccurate information; the misery of those who have become victims of human trafficking and forms of modern slavery, and the terror of those whose lives are put at risk on the high seas and over treacherous desert and land crossings. We see suffering from the effects of increasingly common processes of exclusion, exploitation and expulsion, and in the struggle of refugees and migrants to survive and self-organize in highly uncertain, precarious and irregular situations within Europe and North America, where barriers are increasingly being constructed to reduce and control migration flows. Finally, we see suffering and vulnerability in the way in which migration is impacting families in Africa and around the globe.
2. While conflict and crisis drive international as well as internal migration, Africa hosted nearly one of every two persons in the world ***internally displaced*** by armed conflicts and violence: about 13 million, at the end of 2007. This number included nearly one half of the global total of newly displaced persons that year. As is typically the case worldwide, most of the displacement within Africa was caused by conflicts that were internal rather than international in nature, arising from action by government and allied groups and/or rebel groups fighting them.

Sudan hosts the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world: 5.8 million—nearly 1/4th of the global total, with the Democratic Republic of Congo fourth and Uganda fifth (each with between 1.3 and 1.4 million.) The DRC and Somalia are among the countries most affected worldwide by *new* internal displacement. In the DRC, for example, internal displacement has worsened since the middle of last year, principally in the eastern provinces, despite returns in some parts of the country. Other examples of conflict-induced displacement include ongoing violence in Chad and the Central African Republic, where 300,000 people have been displaced by conflict (2/3 internally), and in and between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

3. We know that many individuals are motivated to migrate, not for reasons of conflict, but rather for ***economic survival or opportunities***. Often times this migration is internal, with people moving out of rural areas and towards urban centres within the country. Some—but not all—of these “urban migrants” may then proceed, as a further step, to migrate out of the country and even outside of the African continent.

We see, for example, large numbers of migrants making their way north from and through Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal, among other countries, in search of work that either is no longer available at home or that might be better paid abroad. Further south, alarming, yet unconfirmed numbers of people are moving from Zimbabwe into neighbouring countries as a result of serious shortages of food and other basic commodities at home, including fuel and electricity. With a recessionary period that has already lasted seven years, an inflation rate that the BBC recently reported as the world’s highest at over 165,000%, and an 80% unemployment rate, current estimates suggest that anywhere from several hundred thousand to as many as three

million people have crossed into Botswana, South Africa and other countries in the region. Moreover, recent events in South Africa, where serious riots and horrific anti-immigrant violence have broken out in the capital as a result of the way in which a portion of the South African public perceives immigrants at a time of national economic uncertainty, further suggest the extent to which economic factors and conflict migration can be – and indeed are – interrelated.

4. On the other hand, while many migrants and refugees find themselves forced to leave home, many others are, in fact, *returning home*. The recent peace accord in the Cote d'Ivoire, opening the possibility for the 700,000 internally displaced to return home, is but one example of this form of migration. Also notably positive, almost half of the nearly 2 million people internally displaced over the two decades of conflict in northern Uganda have been able to return home or to transit sites nearer their homes since the signing of a "cessation of hostilities agreement" in August 2006. Though there are significant obstacles remaining, this suggests great progress, particularly considering that, in 2003, the UN head of emergency relief referred to Uganda displacement as "the biggest forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today".

Return migration can also be problematic, however, particularly when considering the serious challenges that arise regarding both land property and integration issues, and the dynamics of reintegrating younger generations born in camp sites. This has been demonstrated in many situations, including when the Burundi people were sent back home after a long period of nearly 30 years in camps and, as recently as 2007, at one border reception centre in Zimbabwe, where 120,000 people - the majority of them young men in their early twenties - were returned from South Africa. It is worth noting that, in many cases, affected individuals often choose not to return to their home countries, rather continuing their flight in other areas of Africa as was seen, e.g., when in 1996 camps for Rwandese citizens were closed in the Goma region.

5. **Human trafficking and smuggling** figures as a prevalent and particularly worrisome forms of modern migration. Within Africa, some of the principal victims of these crimes are children between the ages of 12 and 16, many of whom are recruited as soldiers or sold into prostitution or forced labour. A recent study by UNICEF found that human trafficking takes place in all 53 African nations – a third reportedly having women and children trafficked to Europe and a quarter to the Middle East and Arab States to work as prostitutes. Within Africa itself, girls as young as eight have reportedly been sold as brides for their "purity" playing on fears of HIV infection, and children in many West African countries are often sold as slave labourers to work on tea, cotton and cocoa plantation. Moreover, as many migrants desperately follow hopes of greater economic opportunities and/or survival in Europe and the Middle East, thousands of migrants are falling victim to violence and manipulation of smugglers, as we have seen ever so clearly along the Gulf of Aden, where men, women and children are being stabbed, shot, starved or thirsted to near death, raped injected with drugs, doused with chemicals, abandoned *en route*, or thrown overboard to drown.

Migration separates millions of families for long periods of time, if not forever. The ancestral values of family and the education of children are largely affected when spouses, parents and children live separated because of basic economic need or because they are blocked from family reunification. Today, immigration laws and economic forces tend to focus mainly on self-defence or on profit mechanisms, rather than on the social value of facilitating and encouraging family unity, thereby putting many families at risk through what are, intentionally or not, quite concerted efforts to de-unify them.

Migration and migration policies are marked by enormous and widening contradictions. To name just a few:

- The broad consensus that demographic trends of low birth / late death in countries of destination call for far greater admission of immigrants on the one hand, and powerful, restrictionist reactions on the other;
- The mutual need of employers and immigrants for millions of workers and jobs on the one hand, and persistent anti-immigrant rhetoric and enforcement on the other;
- Calls for greater *integration* which are equally as loud as demands for more *expulsions*;
- And utilitarian approaches that set *labour* migrants against *refugees*; that prefer *highly* skilled migrants over those *lesser* skilled; and *temporary* over *long-term/permanent* immigration statuses.

Today, migration is both a concern for millions of individuals, and a major challenge affecting the fundamental fabrics of African and global societies. It is obvious that migration is affecting the traditional cohesion in the African society, and when we recall the words of the Nigerian poet Achebe Chinua: “We’d rather have more parents than more money”, one understands that the present road is moving away from this fundamental preference for a cohesive society.

And yet, there are important indicators that offer great hope for the future. Namely, international and regional discussions seem to be dedicating new energy and focus towards – at the very least - *considering* the realities of migration today. New attempts to balance the positive aspects of international migration are emerging, and we believe that part of the work of ICMC, as a Church actor, is to try to help translate the new energy and focus that is seen at international and regional levels into genuine change for the universal common good, including for migrants.

II. Policy dimensions of pastoral concerns: responses, attitudes and roadblocks

What is at stake today?

Societal challenges including pastoral concerns

There are, of course, enormous societal, pastoral and psycho-social challenges in migration, including among others:

- protection of the fundamental right to life, and the dignity of the human being;
- the values of labour, and of welcoming the stranger;
- reinforcing the spiritual needs of a changing in- and out-flow of Catholics;
- prevention or remediation of family separation, scattering and breakdown, in all phases of migration;
- providing aid and protection for the most vulnerable, including high numbers of female-headed households, widows and orphans, whose number among displaced populations is typically a multiple of the national average;
- promoting the common good and solidarity amidst change, including negative aspects of the brain drain phenomenon; the challenges of reintegrating returnees; and
- reframing migration as a *choice* not a necessity: reinforcing the right to not migrate, (which implies a reinvigorated right to development) *along with* the right to safe, legal migration.

Unequivocally, there are policy dimensions to these concerns: how do countries, regions and the international community respond to these challenges, if at all, in their policy frameworks? And how does the Church in Africa, in collaboration with its appointed committees and commissions such as the ICMC, work together to better promote human dignity and universal common good within the migration policies?

Public policies: towards a bend in the river

1. At a global level, the UN continues to promote the international right to development—actively supported by the Holy See and a number of international Catholic organizations—and there are clear signs that awareness and appreciation of the important connection between development and migration is growing. In 2006, for example, the UN created an entirely new process to examine that link vis-a-vis the *Global Forum on Migration and Development*. An annual, primarily intergovernmental, conference convening the world's migration leaders at ministerial level, the Global Forum has, for the first time ever, succeeded in raising the issue of migration for serious discussion at the international level, defying skeptics by engaging some 155 countries at its first session in Brussels last year. Though the Forum has no decision-making power *per se*, it engages States, international organizations and civil society in examining the effects of migration on development, the effect of development on migration, related policy options and concrete measures and programs.
2. On a regional level, the relationship of Afro-European policies is also particularly relevant, given current migratory trends that lead many African migrants to Europe. To date, public migration policies at both international and regional levels is gradually shifting from those that are purely restrictive in nature, to ones that are instead better defined economic responses to today's socio-economic and demographic realities. However, one could raise the question if these new definitions serve the protection of the persons and their human dignity or rather aim at responding to the economic needs only.

3. Last year the Council of Europe adopted a framework of recommendations for its member States on *co-development*, with an explicit focus on improving north-south cooperation on development, including comprehensive approaches and structures to engage immigrants and their host countries in development partnerships with and for the benefit of people and communities in their countries of origin. ICMC was an active contributor in the drafting of that framework, conscious both of the opportunities for genuine co-development and the risks and abuses of certain co-development schemes – including host countries potentially concerned only about their own development and financing interests.
4. The Council of Europe’s engagement with Afro-European migration issues has proven itself to go beyond only co-development, however, touching also anti-trafficking, return directives and, most recently, initiatives in favour of protecting migrant victims of violence or trauma. It may be worth noting that, just last month, the 47 member States of the Council of Europe approved an ICMC proposal to develop a regional set of standards for humanitarian response to migrants who have been injured or traumatized crossing dangerous borders, including along Afro-European migratory routes.

Similarly, measurable, if modest and slow, progress on more reality-based approaches can be seen at the level of the European Union. I mention three such examples:

- One proposal, last October, was a new “Blue Card” legal immigration status to admit skilled migrants, initially for temporary two-year periods and then for longer, even permanent terms, with rights including family reunification.
- Another was a EU plan to create new “job centers”, beginning in **Mali** and followed by **Mauritania** and **Senegal**, to help to facilitate, and in truth, better manage, labour migration from Africa to Europe, largely for seasonal work in agriculture and construction.
- A third is funding that the European Union has provided to the UNHCR to examine the ability of refugees in mixed migratory movements to access asylum processes and protection, beginning with a regional conference two weeks ago in Yemen and another in western Africa later this year.

For the moment, there is but a very small legal door open in Europe for long-term economic and survival migration for anyone other than skilled migrants. Even the door for conflict/crisis migration (i.e., asylum processes and refugee resettlement), and family reunification is being reduced significantly. In fact, many national European leaders have suggested further hardening migration policies as a form of national protectionism, including the continued reduction of channels to access to asylum, proposals to dramatically reduce the number of admissions for family reunification, demands to prohibit any one EU member State from regularizing large groups of irregular migrants, and even annual quotas for their expulsion. Unfortunately, strengthening such migration controls is also one of the principal objectives of the new “Mediterranean Union” that has recently been proposed for countries bordering the sea between Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, and many recent bi- and multi-lateral negotiations between European and African States have yielded agreements including the provision of substantial funding or other incentives to African partner governments willing to participate in border, control, patrols and enforcement.

Broadly speaking, these aspects suggest a fundamental willingness to further develop migration-related policies on international and regional Afro-European levels and yet, it is clear that this willingness tends largely towards purely economic needs, with little emphasis on guaranteeing the dignity of migrants. Moreover, the interest seems to lie largely in South-North migratory movement, with little policy attention given to the equally important South-South migration. Given these gaps, it is clear that there must be a greater investment in those processes which will consider the broader demographics of migratory trends, enhance capacity to protect human dignity, those which will genuinely accompany the migrant person on his voyage through geographies and into new lives.

III. Four distinct areas to raise the voice of the Church in Africa and to increase the regional/international collaboration among African bishops Conferences and ICMC

It is clear to us that many national, regional and international actors, including in Africa, recognize, welcome and even expect a special—even leading—role of the Church in migration matters.

Moreover, as was underlined to us by a representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in our recent visit with IMBISA, it is also clear that few, if any actors, are addressing migration in Africa at pan-African or regional levels. One result is that outside of crisis situations (and even in those cases often late and untested) there is a dearth of reliable information concerning migrants. This is even more the case for the kind of migration and migrants of foremost concern to the Church: those who are most vulnerable, most desperate, most exploited, and typically... most hidden.

With that in mind may we suggest four distinct areas for Church voice and regional and international action by the Bishops Conferences and the various mandated commissions in African countries:

1. **The Church might well *organize a process to look broadly and systematically at migration in Africa.*** The value of such an initiative was widely (if informally) endorsed in our meetings with IMBISA and other national and international leaders in Zimbabwe in February. Of course for the Church, such a process would look not only sociologically at the movements of people, but pastorally at identifying critical factors, characteristics and needs within the migration where the various structures of the Church, from the Episcopal Conferences and parishes to regional and international structures, could play a greater part in offering assistance and protection to people on the move, as well as in promoting long-term solutions for those and others who may otherwise feel compelled to migrate.
2. **The people of Africa, would benefit from a clear Church voice raised on migration by all the African Bishops Conferences collectively and by all national Episcopal conferences individually.** This voice would need to regularly focus on pastoral issues but would also need to address leaders and civil society of industrialized countries to which people from Africa migrate, imploring them to better respond to migrant victims of violence and trauma, to reduce refoulement and expulsions of irregular migrants, and to improve protection of migrant rights, including ratification of the UN Convention on Migrant Workers.
3. **The Church of Africa could promote the *development of a formal legal status of “economic migrants” within Africa and the African Union.***

The African bishops might build and/or convene a pan-African process to discuss a regional convention for an actual legal *status*—not just rights—for so-called “economic migrants” in Africa, with a clear, if secondary objective of exerting influence or even one day expanding at the international level.

There are a number of precedents for such a ground-breaking initiative by Africa in the area of migration, including the OAU Refugee Convention and the ongoing process of the African Union on draft of new *Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons In Africa,*” developed in consultation with the UNHCR and other UN entities, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs, and currently in the comment stage among AU member states. Moreover, one of the best global precedents for the widening of a convention may be none other than the 1951 Refugee Convention, whose original application only to persons affected by events occurring before 1951, was expanded well beyond that limit sixteen years later.

4. **The Bishops might seize the moment and opportunity to build a strong, united African voice specifically within the new international debate on migration and development**, filling a conspicuous gap in the discussion with the Church’s special emphasis on:
- Human dignity
 - protection of family unity;
 - root causes of forced migration;
 - the right to stay home and legal avenues of migration as alternatives to forced migration, irregular migration, human trafficking and other dangerous forms of migration; and
 - genuine, targeted, sustainable development and co-development.

What can ICMC do to assist the Bishops Conferences of Africa in these matters?

What ICMC most immediately offers which we believe can be of great value to the Conferences and migrants of Africa today is the representation and amplification in policy discussions at the international level, particularly in Geneva (various UN bodies), Strasbourg (Council of Europe), Brussels (EU) and Washington, of the suffering and need for change that you see in your dioceses, countries; sub-regions and in the continent as a whole.

The list of policy issues and related ICMC engagement of this kind is long, yet some examples from the past two years include:

- interventions with UNHCR regarding expulsions from Morocco; access to asylum in Europe and North America; and externalization of European border enforcement;
- work with the EU to expand refugee resettlement; on the legal rights of “third country nationals;” on increasing legal avenues of migration, and on humane standards for return;
- leadership in the migration and development debate, both internationally, e.g., in the Global Forum, and inter-regionally, on the Council of Europe’s framework on co-development
- advocacy for migrant rights, including greater ratification of the UN Migrant Workers Convention, especially in Europe and by other destination States

One very specific example of how we aim to carry and defend situations of need you may be witnessing:

Last year, Bishop Giorgio Bertin of Djibouti, who is also Apostolic Administrator of Mogadishu, approached ICMC recognizing the important work that was being done on a number of issues, yet asking if we could “please also do something to help the boat people, whether they are refugees or not, because that is who I see coming through my country and suffering so terribly on the boats to Yemen”. Bishop Bertin described to us the movement of people from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and even from the Congo — many of whom had fallen into the hands of traffickers who cared little for their safety, and even less for their dignity. As many as 1 in 20 of the boat people either died or disappeared on the crossings; of the survivors, countless thousands were injured or traumatized along the way, including women and children.

Again, here was a convergence of pastoral concern and policy collaboration: a church that is local and international, recognizing the need—and its potential—to act at both levels.

Working, then, with Bishop Bertin and beginning last June:

- ICMC prepared a policy statement calling, first for better care and protection of all victims of violence and trauma crossing borders, regardless of their immigration status, and second, for the development of humanitarian standards in that regard.

- In Geneva, ICMC presented a series of statements at high-level meetings of member States of the UNHCR and IOM, receiving positive response each time. ICMC arranged meetings for Bishop Bertin to meet directly with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and with top officials of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as for Bishop Bertin to give a special presentation at a consultation of NGOs gathered from around the world.
- In Strasbourg, ICMC formally asked the Council of Europe to develop the standards; after several presentations and a meeting at which ICMC convened officials of the Federation of the Red Cross-Red Crescent, UNHCR and IOM together with representatives of the Council of Europe, the Council approved the ICMC proposal the first week of May.
- In Brussels, ICMC submitted a concept for the EU to financially support a field-based survey of services provided to boat people and other migrants crossing borders, a gaps analysis, and a recommendation of best practices that would contribute to the improvement of the humanitarian response in those settings. That concept received first-stage approval from the EU in May.
- Finally, in Yemen, Bishop Bertin was invited as one of a small number of civil society participants to an important conference hosted two weeks ago by the High Commissioner for Refugees, with EU funding, to address the challenges facing Africans migrating across the Gulf of Aden.

May I close then, with a summary of three specific suggestions of steps we may take together, the African bishops and ICMC, in the near-term:

1. Establish a platform of African members, which ICMC will be pleased to facilitate, including a meeting in Africa next year looking specifically at migration in and from Africa;

2. Increase the voice of the Church via increased communications and pastoral letters of African Bishops

3. Integrate ICMC as a useful link for the African bishops:

- *to the UN and other international organisations in Brussels, Geneva, Strasbourg and Washington*
- *to new international processes, especially regarding migration and development, and labour migrants*
- *to other ICMC members and regions.*

Thank you.
