



**Statement of Msgr. Giorgio Bertin,  
Catholic bishop of Djibouti and Somalia, member of ICMC,**  
at the

Regional Conference on "Refugee Protection and International Migration in the Gulf of Aden" Sana'a,  
Yemen, 19- 20 May 2008

## **Protection and care for all**

I was very pleased in reading the document attached to the invitation letter I have received in order to take part in this meeting. Particularly where it states "*at the Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2007 the mixed migration in the Gulf of Aden was cited as a prominent example of the need to uphold the rights and protect the welfare of all people, whatever their reasons for moving, since all are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in the course of their journey and after arrival*".

I have been living for more than thirty years in the Horn of Africa, mainly in Somalia and Djibouti. These last 18 years have been particularly dramatic for what concerned the "mixed migration" through the Gulf of Aden. In this mixed migration are included economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked persons, unaccompanied children, marginalized groups, etc.

All this people leave their country of origin for reasons of great poverty, corruption in the government structures, lack of work, persecutions, conflicts and political instability (particularly in Central-Southern Somalia and South Eastern Ethiopia). Most are victims of poverty, disrespect of human rights, of false hopes and of certain aspects of today's globalized world which is not able or willing to satisfy the hopes it raises. They leave their home in search of better economic and human opportunities. They often feel that, in front of their daily difficult life, it is better to undertake the risk: as someone said "desperate people do desperate things".

The long term solution to this ever growing movement of people is of course to ameliorate the conditions of life in the countries of origin. In order to achieve this a more important and concerted international commitment is absolutely necessary. In particular a strategy must be developed to address the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable. We will not achieve much by simply protecting the borders of our countries.

While keeping in mind and working effectively for the long term solution, we have to face the present reality. Since this movement of people is "mixed" and while we must guarantee protection to "refugees and asylum seekers", it is important to remember that all migrants, regardless of their race, faith, gender or status, deserve attention and protection. If risk, violence, trafficking and smuggling do not distinguish between refugees and other migrants, why should we distinguish among the victims of this migration by reserving aid only to some of them?

We have to develop international standards on the reception and care of vulnerable migrants and norms of protection and humanitarian services to help all migrants who are victims of ignorance, poverty, violence and trauma after a very dangerous traveling by road and crossing of the sea. Upon their arrival all these "mixed migrants" are in need **firstly** of immediate reception services (*first aid*), **secondly** of an evaluation and initial recovery (*psycho-social evaluation and needs assessment*) and **thirdly** of referral to specialized entities for support and further recovery. All this includes recovery assistance or protection upon arrival, food, adequate medical attention, psychosocial care, counseling, opportunity of regularization, utilizing legal migration channels, etc. To do that, the capacity of local authorities and NGOs are to be improved.

Finally I would like to draw your attention on the 10<sup>th</sup> point of the "**10-Point plan of action for refugee protection and mixed migration**" when speaking of "information strategy" it is clearly stated: "*such information campaigns will likely not curb irregular movements entirely but, if combined with the other action points and supported by longer term measures to tackle the root causes of such movements, they may have a positive impact*".