



Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent  
Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations at Geneva at the  
Fifty-seventh Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's  
Program  
Geneva, 4 October 2006

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of the Holy See adds its appreciation for yours, and for the UNHCR High Commissioner's, able and committed leadership of the Executive Committee and in the cause of refugees and forcibly uprooted people.

1. The hundreds of victims whose lives have been lost in recent weeks and months in their desperate search for a more secure and decent existence is a red light of alarm that in our globalised world the international community is failing to uphold its goals of solidarity and protection. Around the world, through seas and deserts, people struggle to escape from war, from violation of their human rights, from famine. Motives and flows are mixed, a major challenge to the responsibility to protect, in our case responsibility to protect in general. While different mechanisms and institutional arrangements are in place to address different kinds of movement of people, clearly all of these people need protection. The valid distinction between migrants, asylum seekers and refugees has been blurred. A certain reluctance and fatigue to preserve such distinction in a fair way seem to prevail, thus weakening the protection role of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the related 1967 Protocol as well as the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the OAU Convention. It seems reasonable, both in south-south and south-north population flows, that in the determination of admission the UNHCR should complement the often political approach of States and guarantee the quality of the process through its presence or the implementation of its specific guidelines about

selection. In this way, asylum seekers, who are a small proportion in these movements, will not be exposed to *refoulement*.

2. The wider awareness of the responsibility to protect should encourage an added effort to alleviate the plight of asylum seekers who on subsistent living and in a virtual state of limbo are scattered in various regions like, for example, the recent flows of Iraqis throughout the Middle East. They are particularly vulnerable. Conflicts prevent them from returning and in the country of temporary residence their status is not well recognized; it is almost that of stateless persons. Political necessity conditions the interpretation of the refugee convention even though reality on the ground, often effectively witnessed to by civil society organizations, would demand recognition of these individuals and families as entitled to Convention protection and assistance. It has become obvious in the current discussions that more resources are called for to meet all protection requirements and to address not just populations in a state of limbo, but also the 5.7 million of the world some 9 million refugees in protracted refugee situations, the more than four million Palestinian refugees, and the estimated 24 million internally displaced people (IDP). If international solidarity would add to its budget on aid to refugees a small proportion of the increase in arms expenses – from 1996 to 2005 military expenditure increased by 34 percent to US \$ 1.118 billions in current dollars – then a major step forward would be taken toward an adequate response to the pains of uprooted humanity.<sup>1</sup>

3. Funds are a necessary but not sufficient requirement. The political will is needed to make the responsibility to protect comprehensive enough to embrace the prevention of forced displacement tragedies. The way of dialogue and of respect of human rights should replace that of conflict. Refugee camps, official and unofficial, would no longer stain the map of the world. In the meantime the task on hand is the dissolution of these camps through the classical strategies of voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. It seems to this Delegation that for some present complex situations the option of resettlement should be revisited.

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<sup>1</sup> . SIPRI Yearbook 2006 : Armaments, Disarmaments, and International Security. Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 259 – 386.

A larger number of countries can welcome a larger number of refugees anxious to start a new life in freedom and self-reliance. It is not only an ethical obligation but also a practical advantage since several developed receiving countries face scarcity of manpower for their economy and for a sustainable demography. In the preparation of refugees for resettlement non-governmental as well as faith-based organizations can collaborate and provide competent help. In fact, as expression of civil society NGOs can be good partners for their closeness to the reality on the ground, their experience and their capacity to create a favorable public opinion for newcomers. But an effective partnership has to take into account the security of also their personnel and, in the least developed countries especially, that their overhead cannot be supplied by local resources.

Mr. Chairman,

4. The initiatives undertaken to make UNHCR more effective and flexible, the “cluster approach”, the reorganization of the budget, deserve support and they show its commitment and sensibility to the human face behind all statistics. Society at large should also renew its sense of responsibility to protect. First of all, education can transmit the values of solidarity and hospitality. Training to enforcement and border officials will enable them to recognize asylum seekers. Labour unions, employers, schools and faith communities can prepare their constituencies to an increasingly frequent encounter with people in need and to welcome them to build a common future. With the human person and his / her dignity at the center of concern, the responsibility to protect will continue finding the creative capacity to respond in a humane and fair way to today’s new developments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.