

ADDRESS TO THE ST THOMAS MORE FORUM CANBERRA, 17 APRIL 2019

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must first thank the organisers for inviting me to deliver the keynote address at this 2019 St Thomas More Forum. It is such a pleasure to be here with you tonight, not least because during my family's year-long stay in Canberra, over a decade ago, our children had the privilege of attending the very fine school attached to this parish. I remember back then, thinking how appropriate it was, that the Patron Saint of politicians, statesmen and lawyers, was so well positioned to keep an eye on those, just over the lake, who are charged with guiding the future of our country.

Of course, Thomas More was much more than a statesman, lawyer and politician. We should not forget that this most accomplished of men is also the patron saint of marriage and family: his life a shining example of love, generosity and loyalty to those within his care.

And this seems all the more fitting for my subject tonight, which is migration. A little over a year ago, I was elected President of the International Catholic Migration Commission by its Governing Council, which comprises representatives of Episcopal Conferences engaged in response to migration and refugee movements in every region of the world. In my work as a UN official and adviser I had numerous opportunities to interact with ICMC over many years: meeting its workers in the field; occasionally collaborating on specific projects; watching and appreciating its unique approach to advocating for the rights and dignity of the world's migrants and refugees.

But nothing quite prepared me for what I have learned over the past 12 months about this unique organization, created in response to the massive displacement of the second world war.

I hope you don't mind me pausing for a few minutes to share this short video – which captures the mission and achievements of ICMC in a way that would be difficult for me to match with mere words.

[VIDEO: <http://bit.ly/ICMC-history>]

ICMC's mission has never been more urgent than it is today. I am not alone in my conviction that we have entered a period of great stress and uncertainty. The faith in multilateral cooperation and multilateral institutions that sustained us so well over the past half century is crumbling before our eyes. Commitment to fundamental principles of human rights and justice that we thought set in stone has eroded across the board. Countries that have long been leaders in our epic battles for equality, rights and non-discrimination have fallen silent, or worse.

And *migration* has become the flashpoint in this rapidly changing political and social reality. Increasingly, migration is the lens through which governments and communities are interpreting and responding to the world.

Some of you may have heard of Lampedusa, a tiny island in the southern Mediterranean that belongs to Italy but lies much closer to North Africa. Over the past 20 years, it is estimated that around 400,000 migrants making their way by sea to the European mainland have landed on Lampedusa. At least 15,000 have died on the way. One incident, in October 2013, attracted international attention: a boat overloaded with migrants sank within sight of the island. More than 360 men, women and children drowned. It later transpired that many of those onboard had been victims of extreme exploitation, subject to torture and extortion by criminal gangs who prey on migrants desperate to escape poverty, violence and political oppression.

This tragedy was all the more poignant because, just few months earlier, Pope Francis had chosen Lampedusa as the site of his first pastoral visit outside of Rome. He celebrated Mass at a makeshift migrant shelter, using Liturgical objects including a chalice and lectern that had been fashioned out of wood salvaged from flimsy boats shipwrecked on Lampedusa's coast. The Holy Father's homily was simple and direct. He prayed for the forgiveness of those "*who are complacent and closed amid comforts which have deadened their hearts*". He spoke of the moral culpability of individual officials who make decisions that impact on migrants lives and deaths. Most memorably, he called out "the globalization of indifference", lamenting that "*we have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business!*"

Almost six years on, the Holy Father's message is as relevant as ever - and perhaps even more urgent. While migration has always exacted a heavy toll on individuals, communities and nations, there has been a sharp and recent increase in both the scale of movement and the suffering that migrants are being compelled to endure.

Today, there are more people living outside their country of birth than at any other time in human history. The number of refugees and internally displaced is edging up towards the unimaginable figures that were recorded after the last world war.

And international migration is becoming increasingly expensive and hazardous. Countries that migrants *most* aspire to because of the promise of freedom, safety and opportunity, are making entry – both legal and irregular - harder than ever. This forces migrants, including refugees who have a legal right to seek asylum, into the arms of those who are able to help them circumvent ever-increasing controls.

Countries have reacted to the challenge of migration in very different ways. Some, often neighbouring States that can least afford it, have done more than could reasonably be seen as their fair share. For example, in just over 12 months, Bangladesh absorbed almost a million distressed and highly vulnerable refugees fleeing sectarian violence in Myanmar. Late last year, I visited Jordan, where, at one point, refugees from Syria made up around 10% of its population. I also travelled to Lebanon, where the figure is, incredibly, at least three times higher. I came away from that trip with the

knowledge that the international community owes a great debt to those who have opened their borders, and their hearts, in such a way.

Elsewhere, things have been very different. Within Europe, migration has become a highly contentious political issue, threatening, in a very real sense, the broader European project of political, economic and social union. Here in Australia, geography has kept the number of 'unauthorized arrivals' comparatively low. But the reaction to those who make it across the vast, hostile ocean has been consistently fierce and, many would argue, largely indifferent to human suffering.

One thing is clear: migration is not going to go away. History teaches us that the urge to move in an effort to better one's life is an essential part of the human condition. And economics teaches us that our global economy would grind to a shuddering halt without migrant workers.

But accepting the inevitability of migration does not mean that we should also accept the inevitability of hardship and suffering that Pope Francis has so eloquently railed against. Current migration regimes, in all parts of the world, including Australia, are deeply unfair. They put individuals, families and communities at great risk. They disempower - and too often criminalise - migrants; they rob workers and reward exploitation; they deprive millions of women, men and children of the most basic rights including the right to be recognised as a person before the law and the right not to be discriminated against. And, as the Holy Father has pointed out, they have encouraged the malign growth of an indifference to human suffering, a 'deadening' of our collective human heart.

How can we embrace the Holy Father's message to confront and reject the globalization of indifference? Perhaps the most important step we can all take is to gaze outward, instead of inward. To be open to learning about what is happening: not just in relation to the migrants, but also the bigger picture about why people are moving, who is benefiting and who is losing out.

We can also look to the Church's teachings in deciding, as individuals and as communities, how to think and how to respond. For example, the sanctity of the family is not an abstract principle. Rather, it is a core Christian value that helps us determine what we consider right and wrong in the conduct of those who act on our behalf. The Church's teachings around family, around compassion and support for the most vulnerable should guide us in challenging policies and actions that undermine these values.

Ultimately, the true antidote to indifference lies in solidarity, in a recognition that, as Pope Francis has said: "*none of us have to feel there is no room for them on this earth*". There is no perfect solution, but perfection should never be the enemy of the good. We must fix our eyes on a future that is achievable in our lifetime: a future where peace and justice, love and compassion, overcome our indifference, our fears and divisions. A future where we recognize each other as brothers and sisters, united in one human family.

I end with a meditation that has become known as the Romero prayer. I introduced this meditation to an early meeting of the ICMC Governing Committee because it seemed to capture, almost perfectly,

the possibilities and limitations of our role. But perhaps it has wider resonance, for all of us who are seeking to make a small contribution to our precious, fragile world:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Thank you.