



Restoring Dignity, Inspiring Change.

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Opening Remarks by Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo, Secretary General
International Catholic Migration Commission
At workshop: “Building the Future through
Community Sponsorships of Refugees”
26-27 September 2022

In many ways, Pope Francis provided the foundation for this Workshop when he chose the theme of the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees which was just observed yesterday. He urged us to “Build the Future with Migrants and Refugees”.

As one who has been engaged in serving refugees and migrants for more than 40 years – at local, national, and global levels, I received that theme as music to my ears and to the “ears” of the organization I am now privileged to serve: the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). I personally have witnessed the solidarity and many gifts that are brought by refugees when they are welcomed by host communities in various parts of the world. ICMC has been gifted with more than 70 years of facilitating permanent resettlement for those refugees who cannot return, safely and voluntarily, to their countries of origin or be integrated into their countries of first asylum. We “technocrats” often toss around the term “durable solutions” very easily – namely, safe return, integration into asylum country, and third-country resettlement. But we must be attentive to the uncertainty, the longing, yes, even the despair experienced by many of today’s refugees who remain seven, ten, and more years without a durable solution.

Over the years, ICMC has been very grateful to benefit from the excellent model of community sponsorship of refugees developed by the people (including the religious structures and faith-based organizations) and by government of Canada. We even benefitted from financial support by Canada to deploy legal experts to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to identify refugees with vulnerabilities and in need of permanent resettlement, either through community sponsorship or through more traditional government resettlement programs.

I would like to thank the Canadians for their forward thinking and action in this field and am particularly grateful to the Embassies of Canada to the Holy See and to Italy for inviting ICMC to serve as a co-sponsor of this workshop that can and will help to fulfill the invitation of Pope Francis to “build the future with migrants and refugees”. Sincere thanks, as well, to the representatives of the four countries invited to give testimony of their experience with community sponsorship models, from both governmental and non-governmental perspectives, to the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for its constant encouragement and guidance and for its hospitality, and, most of all, to the refugees who join us for these two days to share their experiences and challenges with being welcomed to new homes.