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ICMC Secretariat  
1, rue de Varembe  
P.O. Box 96  
CH-1211 Geneva 20  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 919 10 20  
Fax: +41 22 919 10 48  
Email: [info@icmc.net](mailto:info@icmc.net)  
[www.icmc.net](http://www.icmc.net)

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*Opening Address*  
*High-level Roundtable on the Long-Term Care Sector*  
*UNI Global Union Europa*  
*Brussels, 29 March 2023*  
*by Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo*  
*Secretary General, International Catholic Migration Commission*  
*Member of Coordinating Committee*  
*The Future of Work: Labour after Laudato Si'*

I wish to thank the leadership and the membership of UNI Global Union Europa for their invitation to participate in this high-level dialogue focusing on a topic of great need and urgent importance to the safety of so many Europeans and significant numbers of the human family in all parts of the world. The reflections that I will share with you today have been shaped by my faith affiliation, my service as a member of the clergy in the Catholic Church, my professional studies in the fields of theology and of social work, and my long-term engagement in the global humanitarian activities inspired by the Catholic Church, which, following the example of Jesus Himself, always prioritize the “little ones”, both those in need of care and those who provide it through the work of their hands, their minds, and their hearts.

*Teaching and Tradition of the Catholic Church in response to Workers, with particular focus on Pope Francis’ contribution to such doctrine*

During much of its more than two-thousand-year-old history, the Catholic Church has striven to recognize, respect, and promote the role of work and workers in the world. Similar Teachings and action also can be found in other major faith traditions. More “modern” Popes, from nineteenth-century Pope Leo XIII to twentieth- and twenty-first-century pontiffs, including, most recently, St. Paul VI, St.

John Paul II, the late Benedict XVI, and our present Pope Francis, have raised their voices to condemn abuses of work, to recognize the rights of workers to self-organize and to engage in collective bargaining, and to affirm the centrality of work for integral human development.

Time limitations in this morning's agenda force me to limit my focus to Pope Francis, who, in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, affirms the crucial importance of work, not only for the common good of humanity, but also for the health and wellbeing of our entire universe: *"Today, we are confronted with a complex global crisis which is both social and environmental."*<sup>1</sup> He maintains that work is far more than a commercial exchange; it is first and foremost *"a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development, and personal fulfilment ... we are created with a vocation to work."*<sup>2</sup> In both this Encyclical and in his message to the 108<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference, Pope Francis cites what some social movements and labour unions have called the triple "Ts" (*tierra, techo, trabajo* – land, roof and work): *"The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone ... In this matter, the criterion of justice par excellence is the application of the principle of 'the universal destination of goods of the earth', where the 'right of everyone to their use' is 'the fundamental principle of the entire ethical-social order'."*<sup>3</sup>

It was such teaching of Pope Francis that inspired young people from all parts of the world to gather in Assisi, the home of St. Francis, who proudly called himself the *Poverello* (the little poor man), as they committed themselves to spending *"our lives so that the economy of today and tomorrow becomes an economy of the Gospel, and therefore [inter alia]:*

- *an economy of peace and not of war,*
- *an economy that cares for creation and does not misuse it,*
- *an economy at the service of the human person, the family and life, respectful of every woman, man, and child, the elderly, and especially those most frail and vulnerable,*
- *an economy where care replaces rejection and indifference,*

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), #139, Vatican City.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, #128.

<sup>3</sup> *Laudato Si'*, #93 and Pope Francis Message to the participants in the 108<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference, June 2019.

- *an economy that recognizes and protects secure and dignified work for everyone ...*<sup>4</sup>

For the past several years, inspired by Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* Encyclical and further animated by the International Labour Organization's Agenda to "advance social justice and promote decent work", in conjunction with its Centenary Celebration, some 30 Catholic-inspired organizations have been engaged in:

### ***The Future for Work – Labour after Laudato Si' Project***

This initiative included several years of institutional relationship-building and subsequently undertook seven research tracks, including such foci as "Work, Ecology, and the Environmental Crisis", "Work, Social Justice, and Peace", "Labour, Demography and Migration", "Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and the Future of Decent Work", "The Future of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship", "Promotion of Employment", and "Humanity at Work". We also identified and collected good practices, strengthened networking and exchange among our respective organizations, and built greater capacity to advocate for dignified and decent work with just compensation.

These efforts were approached in close consultation and collaboration with the tri-partite activities of the International Labour Organization and with relevant offices at the Vatican, including the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, with the official representation of the Holy See to the United Nations, and Catholic hierarchy at national and local levels. We benefited, during our various reflections and events, from participation by your own organization, UNI Global Union, as well as by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Regional Trade Union Confederations, and groups of business owners, academia, scientific research centres, and leadership representatives of other faith traditions.

During the first phase of the project, an unexpected challenge occurred – namely, the global COVID-19 pandemic. In many parts of the world, it became

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<sup>4</sup> *Young People Pact for the Economy with Pope Francis*, 24 September 2022, <https://francescoeconomy.org/pope-francis-pact-for-the-economy-with-young-people/>

increasingly and painfully clear that the pandemic caused more serious and debilitating physical, emotional, social, and economic impact on the poorest and most vulnerable populations. In April 2020, Pope Francis himself called upon the various departments of the Vatican and their respective networks to offer their fullest support and solidarity to those most affected at local church and community levels. Our Future of Work project was engaged in offering information and advice to the Vatican's COVID-19 Commission related to the impact of the pandemic on the world of work and workers. During such consultations, this Initiative identified three population sectors that bore, perhaps, the heaviest impact: informal workers; migrants, refugees, and displaced persons; and women and girls.

During its Statement to the 108<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference, the International Catholic Migration Commission highlighted ILO's "key role in advocating for ensuring a fairer and more equitable labour migration, which has long been one of the world's most successful anti-poverty strategies ... [since] together we can positively transform the lives of migrant workers, refugees and host communities." Moreover, we call[ed] on the ILO, during its Centenary year and long into the future, to prioritize attention on the positive impact of work by migrants and refugees on economic development across the range of high-, middle-, and low-income countries, and at global through local levels."

At a time when many formal commercial establishments were closed during COVID-19 lockdowns, people all over the world became increasingly dependent on the informal sector to supply and deliver food and hygiene items, as well as provide many other goods and services, including direct care of the most vulnerable, to address basic human needs. On other hand, as Pope Francis observed during his message to the 109<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference: *"Work goes beyond what is traditionally known as "formal employment" and the Decent Work Agenda must include all forms of work. The lack of social protection for workers in the informal economy and for their families makes them particularly vulnerable to "shocks"[or crises], since they cannot rely on the protection offered by social insurance or social assistance regimes aimed at poverty."* He further appealed, *"Women in the informal economy, including street vendors and domestic workers, feel the impact of Covid-19 from various standpoints, from isolation to extreme exposure to health risks ... Therefore, it is particularly necessary to ensure that social*

*assistance reaches the informal economy and pays special attention to the particular needs of women and girls.”<sup>5</sup>*

### ***Care is Work: Work is Care***

Throughout the process of common social discernment, which served as the foundational methodology for the “The Future of Work: Labour after *Laudato Si’* Project, we, the participant organizations, considered the profound changes taking place in our communities as we try to respond to the environmental challenges (climactic and more general issues), injustice, inequality, violence, demographic and migratory changes, and increased use of, and access to, new digital technologies. A common theme that strongly and consistently emerged as we strategically reviewed the findings of our research, reflection, networking, and advocacy efforts during the past few years, was: ***Care is Work: Work is Care.***

Thus, we concluded that care is a way of being, doing, and existing, which implies dignity, generosity, freedom, and responsibility. Care is a deeply spiritual human experience. It always is inspired by a concern for unity in the making, of becoming one both humanly and spiritually. Work, as a transforming activity, is therefore an essential component of care.

While saying this, I am keenly aware that the focus of your high-level discussion is on “Long-term Care”, which is indeed a key need in today’s society. However, our discernment forced us to stretch the limits we often place on such concepts as “work” and “care”. Once again, we turned to Pope Francis’ Message to the 109<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference: *“Work is care when it contributes to dignity. Care must be a dimension of each work. Work that does not care, that destroys creation, that endangers the survival of future generations, is not respectful of the dignity of workers and cannot be considered decent. On the contrary, work that takes care and contributes to the restoration of full human dignity, will contribute to a sustainable future for future generations.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis Message to the participants in the 109<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference, June 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

## *Future of Work – Phase 2:*

After concluding the first phase of our “Future of Work” Project, our partners have indicated their willingness and enthusiasm to undertake a second phase, the main objective of which will be: *Promoting the development of Transformative Global Communities (TGC) which will contribute to integral human development and to a future of work that enhances human dignity.*

In so doing, we will repeat our reliance on Common Social Discernment to:

- promote “work as care” in a transition toward more socially and environmentally sustainable societies;
- engage with many actors from business and workers’ organizations, as well as the Church communities and organizations that include the most vulnerable;
- share experience and social practices that can be replicated and expanded;
- propose a commonly agreed journey, including concrete steps to continuously assess existing and recurrent issues and threats in the world of work;
- transform existing organizations and practices aimed at making work more caring;
- facilitate increased global and regional advocacy in the world of work.

I conclude with what I consider to be a “Pope Francis Road Map” to achieve “a correct understanding of work ... [through] the development of a culture of solidarity, to combat the throwaway culture that is at the root of inequality and that afflicts the world.”<sup>7</sup> He also reveals some keys to success in this regard: “It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights ... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history ...”<sup>8</sup> He calls on institutionalized actors in the world of work ... to remain open to the dynamism of society and to promote the emergence of inclusion of less traditional and more marginalized actors, bearers of alternative and innovative impulses.”<sup>9</sup> He asks political leaders and those who work in governments “to always seek inspiration in that form of love that is political charity.”<sup>10</sup> “It is an ...

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, #116.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis Message to the participants in the 109<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

indispensable act of love to strive to organize and structure society so that one's neighbour will not find himself in poverty ... While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennobles his or her political activity."<sup>11</sup> He reminds businesspeople "...of their true vocation: to produce wealth in the service of all."<sup>12</sup> Finally, he appeals to "trade unionists and leaders of workers' associations not to allow themselves to be 'straightjacketed', to focus on the real situations of neighbourhoods and communities in which they operate, while, at the same time, to broaden economic policies and 'macro-relationships'."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Fratelli tutti*, #186.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis Message to the participants in the 109<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference, *op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*