

IX Meeting of Border Bishops on Human Mobility of the Episcopal Conferences of
North America, Central America and the Caribbean.

"Free to choose whether to emigrate or to stay":
Addressing the causes and the journeys of vulnerable people on the Move

Dear brothers and sisters,

As bishops of North America, Central America and the Caribbean and facing the reality of migration, which is marked by the pain caused by being "discarded" and the globalization of indifference, we address you. In the midst of this urgent and troubling situation, the forced migration that affects so many people in our region, we wish to express our deep solidarity and compassion towards all those who are forced to leave their homes in search of safety and a better life. Forced migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, driven by a variety of factors such as poverty, violence, lack of economic opportunity, political instability and more recently by the effects of climate change.

As pastors of the Church, we recognize that all persons who are forced to leave their homes, carry with them a unique and painful story. Behind every person who forcibly migrates there are broken dreams, separated families and lives marked by suffering. This situation reminds us that, as pastors, we are called to defend the dignity and rights of all human beings, regardless of their origin or immigration status.

We are pained to see how so many people are victims of trafficking, abuse and discrimination on their journeys to a better future and how borders that should be places of encounter and fraternity are symbols of death and exclusion. We are outraged to see that various actors, including authorities, security forces, organized crime, and even small businessmen and entrepreneurs, take undue advantage of migrants.

The forced nature of many of today's migratory flows obliges us to consider carefully the causes of contemporary migration, already mentioned above. In his Message for the 109th Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis seeks to promote renewed reflection on a right not yet codified, the right not to migrate. From our territories, we join the Holy Father's initiative because we recognize that Integral Human Development is the way to ensure a dignified life for all people, especially the vulnerable. We must reaffirm that the right to remain in the place of origin is prior, deeper and more fundamental than the right to emigrate.

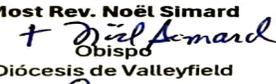
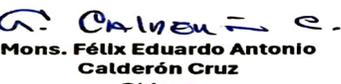
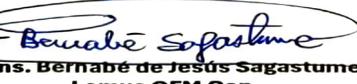
Every citizen has the right to be part of a life with dignity and to have access to sustainable development and to participate in the common good. It is essential to promote regional and global cooperation to address the root causes of forced migration and to work together in the search for sustainable solutions so that each person is free to migrate or to stay.

As we conclude our meeting, we call on our faith communities to be welcoming and in solidarity with the migrants who arrive at our doors. It is necessary to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your home".

Likewise, remember His promise of welcome in heaven: "Come, blessed of my Father, and take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. (cf. Mt 25:34-35).

Let us pray for all migrants and refugees, that they may find comfort in the midst of their difficulties and be able to build a dignified and fulfilled life, that the light of hope may illuminate their path, that they may find understanding and solidarity. Let us invoke Mary, our Mother of Guadalupe, to accompany and protect migrants at every step of their journey.

In front of the tomb of St. Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Bishop and Martyr, in the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Salvador, August 24, 2023.

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