

**OFFICE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (OHD)**

**Climate Change Desk (CCD)**

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences:

E-Bulletin 2023 | Vol. No. 12

January - August 2023

# A truly free choice

*What needs  
to be done  
for all to have  
access to  
integral human  
development?*



World Day of  
Migrants and  
Refugees  
24-IX-2023



"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"

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### A Note on Labour Migration Christine Nathan, President ICMC

Labour Migration is not a new phenomenon. Slave labour was brought to the Americas in 1600 and indentured labourers were taken from India to the Caribbean, Mauritius, Fiji and other tropical countries by the British to work on sugar cane farms. Many healthy and young Indians were taken to Africa to work on railway construction. Young Melanesian from the Pacific countries became victims of blackbirding and ended up as slave labour in Australia. Blackbirding is a term given to the trade of kidnapping or tricking Pacific Islanders on board ships so that they could be carried away to work in Australia. While many were forced like the slaves in Americas, others like the Indian indenture labourers were tricked into offers of employment and money and lured into ships that took them far away from home.



Is the new wave of migration in the current times any different to the past? One may argue that workers are still migrating, they are still looking for better and decent work in other places. Many workers still end up working in slave like conditions. Passports are taken away; they are denied decent wages and decent work conditions. Families of the migrant live in poor and squalid conditions. Women migrant workers face harassment and some are subject to physical abuse by their employers particularly those who end up working as domestic workers.

Many countries have absence of any proper labour laws. Migrant workers are denied right to join unions and carry out collective bargaining which are fundamental rights of workers as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). ILO reports that,

**Much of the international migration occurring today is propelled by the search of decent work. The ILO estimated in 2017 that there are 164 million migrant workers worldwide, which accounted for 70 per cent of all migrants of working age. The centrality of work to migration flows, particularly in the context of Asia-Pacific, is clear.**

**There are 10 million international migrants in the ASEAN of whom almost half were women. Over 80 million workers from the Asia and Pacific Region work as migrant labour in other countries. The Arab States have the highest proportion of migrant workers to all workers (40.8 per cent), and host 13.9 per cent of migrant workers worldwide, most of them from South-East and South Asia. There are other key migration corridors in the region, including to Korea and Japan. Migrant workers from the Pacific Island Countries find jobs in seasonal worker programmes in Australia and New Zealand.**

**Labour migration in the region occurs primarily under temporary migration regimes and for elementary occupations and medium skilled work. However, Asia is also an important source region for skilled workers (in particular China and India). In 2021, over a quarter of migrant inflows to OECD countries came from Asia and the Pacific (OECD,2022).**

**Migration corridors and sectors of employment are highly gendered. Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines have typically had large outflows of women migrants engaged in domestic work. Women have more labour market options in South-East Asia, where they find jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, hospitality and to a lesser extent in construction. Flows to the construction industry in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are dominated by men migrant workers. This is similarly true for the fishing sector in East and South-East Asia; as well as the seasonal worker flows from the Pacific Islands to New Zealand and Australia. Irregular or undocumented migration occurs in parallel with regular migration.<sup>1</sup>**

While migrant workers provide huge resources as remittances to the home country and while they create the economic wealth for the destination countries; there is an absence of protection for these workers and their families. The effective protection of workers in labour migration poses many challenges and it is shaped by powerful socio-economic and political factors. There are many gaps remaining in the implementation of laws and policies in countries of migrant sending as well as migrant destination countries.

The ILO and the United Nations (UN) have adopted many programmes and policies to protect and promote the interest of all workers including migrant workers regard less of their status as documented or undocumented. The UN sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of the international commitments and also the commitments by the Governments most of who have adopted the SDGs.

Together with the international organisations and the sending and destination countries, it is their responsibility to provide protection of these workers, provide them decent wages and work conditions and provide them with a healthy and safe workplace.

In 2008 ILO adopted the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

It states that,

**Convinced that the International Labour Organization has a key role to play in helping to promote and achieve progress and social justice in a constantly changing environment:**

**– based on the mandate contained in the ILO Constitution, including the Declaration of Philadelphia (1944), which continues to be fully relevant in the twenty-first century and should inspire the policy of its Members and which, among other aims, purposes and principles:**

- affirms that labour is not a commodity and that poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere;
- recognizes that the ILO has the solemn obligation to further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve the objectives of full employment and the raising of standards of living, a minimum living wage and the extension of social security measures to provide a basic income to all in need, along with all the other objectives set out in the Declaration of Philadelphia;
- provides the ILO with the responsibility to examine and consider all international economic and financial policies in the light of the fundamental objective of social justice;



An ILO meeting was held in December 2022 attended by the Governments, Employers and the Unions (workers) from the Arab and the Asia and the Pacific Regions. The trade union representative leading the Workers Group, Felix Anthony, President of the International Trade Union Confederation- Asia and the Pacific Region (ITUC AP) argued and he was successful in adopting The Singapore Statement which called on the Governments for enhancing labour migration policies. Asked for priorities for national action to include: strengthening governance frameworks and respect for freedom of association to protect the rights of migrant workers, including improved accommodation, protection of wages and extension of social protection and, where appropriate, through enhanced bilateral labour migration agreement.

A report by the EU and the ILO reflects on the number of deaths of Nepalese workers in the Gulf countries says that,

**The countries of destination where most death occurs (2009-2015). The vast majority of all deaths occurred in GCC countries and Malaysia, at 97 per cent (4,211 deaths of 4,322). These countries also receive the bulk of labour migrants from Nepal, at almost 98 per cent of all labour permits issued.<sup>3</sup>**

Despite all this, in the end it falls on the workers themselves to provide for their protection. Unions working together with the community including the churches can influence the Governments to adopt appropriate labour laws. The laws that provide for workers to join unions and have the right to collective bargaining. Most of the migrant workers in both Asia and the Pacific and the Arab region do not have this right. Except of Philippines no Government in the region has ratified and adopted ILO standards: Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)



### Note From the Editorial Team:

We thank Ms. Christine Nathan for writing the editorial column for this issue. The focus of the newsletter is the issue of migration and the celebration of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) 2023, to be held on 24th September 2023. To enthuse and prepare the various episcopal commissions for WDMR 23, a webinar was held on 19th August 2023. We are grateful to His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect for the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican, for his inspiring video message and to His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo, President of FABC, for his words of encouragement on WDMR 23. The messages by both the cardinals and the talks by two distinguished speakers at the webinar have been incorporated into the newsletter. Sr. Rekha Chenattu, the Superior-General of the Religious of Assumption, methodically expounded on the theme of 'Biblical and Theological Approaches to the Issue of Migrants and Refugees' and Bishop Narciso Abellana MSC, the Chairman of the Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, Philippines, shared valuable insights on 'Pastoral Approaches to the Issue of Migrants and Refugees'. Sr. Meena Godad, FDCC, Project Regional Coordinator for South Asia, has shared updates from the Catholic Sisters project initiated by the Vatican Dicastery, while Fr. Jaison Vadassery, the Executive Secretary of the Migrants Commission, CCBI, highlights the various issues and challenges concerning migrants and refugees and the response of the church in India. Ms Deepika Singh has concisely summarized the various activities conducted by FABC-OHD/CCD and the upcoming events.



<sup>1</sup> ILO home, Regions and countries, Labour migration in Asia and the Pacific 2023

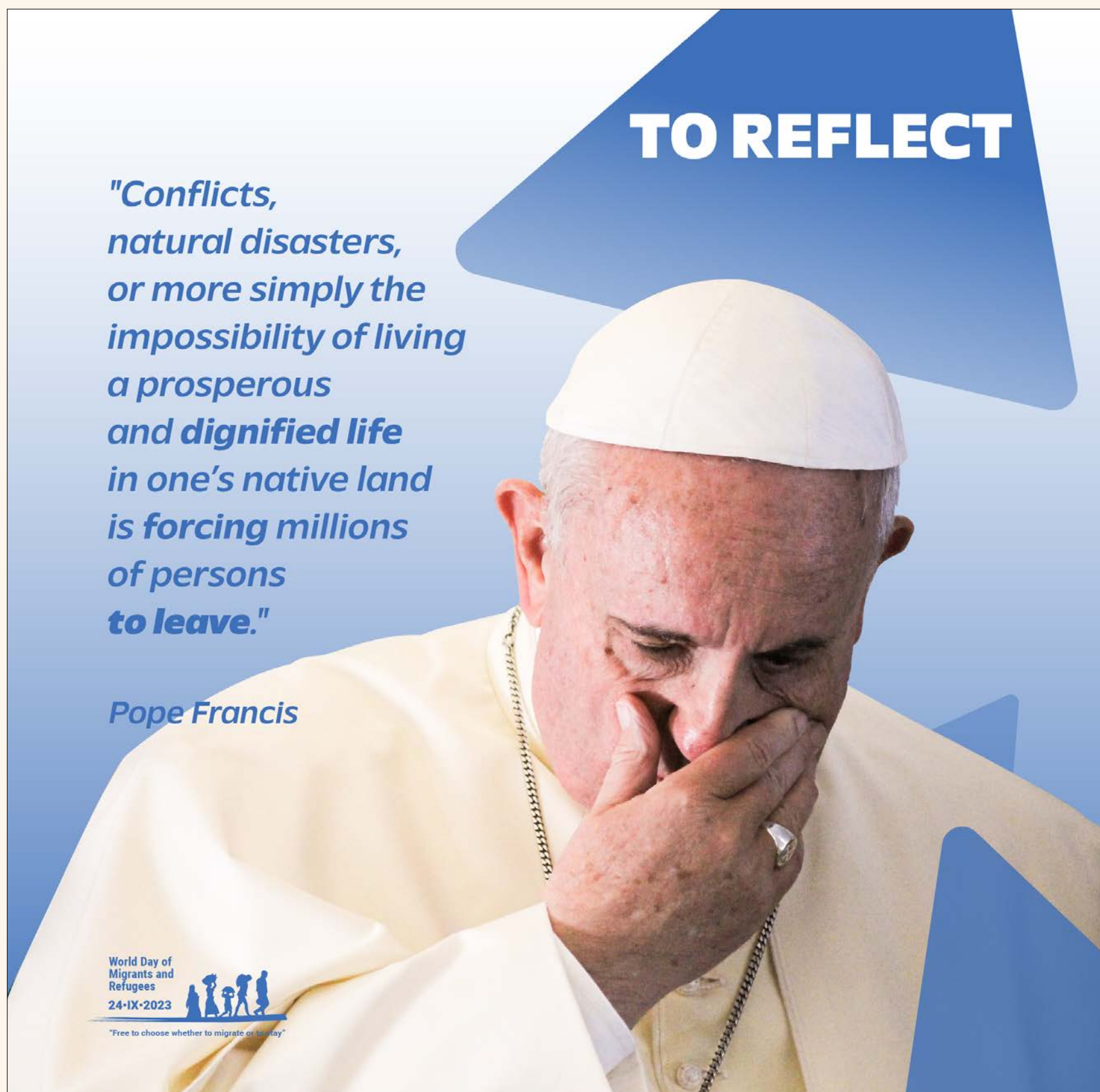
<sup>2</sup> From the Caribbean to Queensland: re-examining Australia's 'blackbirding' past and its roots in the global slave trade By Emma Christopher, UNNSW, Sydney 2021

<sup>3</sup> Report, 2016, ILO, Geneva WHEN THE SAFETY OF NEPALI MIGRANT WORKERS FAILS A review of data on the numbers and causes of the death of Nepali migrant worker



MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
FOR THE 109<sup>th</sup> WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2023  
(24 September 2023)

“Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay”



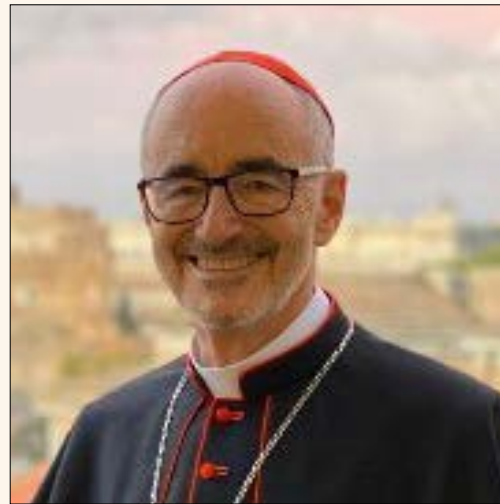
➤ Click to view the message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 109<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and refugees 2023

VIDEO





**WEBINAR ON WDMR 23**  
**Video message delivered by**  
**HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MICHAEL CZERNY**  
**Prefect, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican**



**H**is Eminence initiated his address with a warm greeting, expressing anticipation for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2023. He extended his greetings to the Asia-level FABC webinar participants, with the aim of fostering meaningful dialogue among the Episcopal Commissions and their networking partners as they prepare for this significant event within the Asian Church. In alignment with Pope Francis's message, the webinar's theme is "Free to Choose Whether to Migrate or to Stay." This theme signifies the Church's commitment to becoming increasingly synodal, aiming to closely accompany migrants and refugees on their journeys. The Church strives to place migrant individuals and their families at the forefront, endeavoring to understand the root causes of their anxieties and suffering, which force them to seek refuge, in the hope of ultimately ending their displacement and providing solutions and security. His Eminence elaborated further on the current global challenges and crises facing migrants, drawing connections to scriptural experiences in the Old and New Testaments while emphasizing the mission of the Dicastery for Promoting

Integral Human Development has extended an invitation to the participants of the FABC webinar, urging them to contemplate the two-fold responsibilities of safeguarding the right to stay and advancing the right to return. This involves a collective commitment to eliminating the underlying causes of forced migration, which should commence with the following considerations:


- a) Exploring the actions we can take to address these issues, and
- b) Recognizing and discontinuing actions or practices that contribute to the problem.

In essence, it calls for a shared commitment that encompasses both proactive efforts and the cessation of detrimental practices.

We must exert every effort to put an end to the arms race, economic exploitation, the plundering of resources from other nations, and the destruction of our planet, which we all share. Some of the recommended actions include practicing transparent, honest, forward-thinking, and inclusive politics that serves the well-being of all, particularly the most vulnerable.

A pivotal question raised is whether our local churches can contribute to the practice of ethical politics by shedding light on the hopes of departed migrants for peace and development in their home countries. This should be done in a non-confrontational yet clear manner, offering constructive recommendations for potential solutions. The right to remain in one's homeland is seen as a shared responsibility among all states, as it pertains to a common good that transcends national borders.

In conclusion, His Eminence expressed gratitude to FABC for their dedicated service and left a thought-provoking question for reflection: How can each of your local churches and FABC collectively work towards ensuring that migration becomes just one of several options rather than the sole choice for individuals?

 [Link to the Message by His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican](#)





**WEBINAR ON WDMR 23**  
**His Eminence Cardinal Charles Muang Bo, SDB**  
**President of FABC**



Dear Friends,

I warmly welcome you to this very important and contemporary global crisis of denying the thousands of refugees and migrants their right to choose. Pope Francis has emerged as the tireless prophet of the dignity of these people, termed as those in the "existential peripheries. Thousand are adrift at this very moment, tossed by merciless seas, often ending up in watery graves. The risky journey and the deaths have become a regular heart break. Your deliberations are not based on some social NGO deliberations. The story of the Bible starts with the migration. The long and arduous journey of the Israelites graphically depicted in the Book of Exodus is a grim reminder that migration continues and God never abandons those in the margins. As he said to Moses, " "I hear the cry of the suffering people"(EX 3:7). Reflecting on the migrants and their condition also brings the story of Jesus and the holy family fleeing violence of Herod.

Thousands are fleeing today from the modern Herods, thousands are fleeing from man-made and natural disasters, thousands are fleeing from the suffocating poverty caused by unjust policies. Jesus showed the way of accompanying those journeying with despair. The great walk with two disciples on the way to Emmaus is a story of synodal journey. The synodal journey always start with the challenge, as Jesus challenged the disciples quoting various scriptures. When the disciples realize it is the Lord who accompanied them, they were totally overcome with the grace of God accompanying them. That is the task. In acknowledging the presence of Jesus in the migrant stories, we acknowledge our faith journey of God's own accompaniment in our lives.

It is through this faith experience we go out to accompany our brothers and sisters fleeing wars and ecological disasters, affirming their right to humanity, their right to seek safety and dignity. Every migrant story is a story of the Way of the Cross of a human being in search of dignity. May the church, inspired by the great example of Pope Francis, reach out to provide opportunities and service to the migrants.

I commend the organisers for organising this very urgent issue.

God bless you.





**RIGHT TO MIGRATE OR TO STAY:  
THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO THE ISSUE OF  
THE MIGRANTS AND THE REFUGEES**



**Sr. (Dr.) Rekha Chennattu RA,  
Professor of Biblical Studies, Superior General-Religious of the Assumption**

The paper placed a spotlight on the migratory aspect throughout the entire history of salvation, tracing it from the Old Testament to its culmination in the New Testament. A significant point emphasized was that, unlike the present-day situation, there has consistently been an element of "welcoming, accepting, and integrating" by the host society in the past.

The profound theological reflection ultimately arrived at a powerful and guiding message: the entirety of the Jesus story serves as a call for the Church to function as a "MIRROR OF THE KINGDOM" in the present moment.

➤ **LINK:** to view full text of the paper, **RIGHT TO MIGRATE OR TO STAY: THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO THE ISSUE OF THE MIGRANTS AND THE REFUGEES**, Paper Presented by, Sr. (Dr.) Rekha Chennattu RA, Professor of Biblical Studies, Superior General-Religious of the Assumption



**TO REFLECT**

*"The development of the economically poorer countries depends on the capacity for sharing that we can manage to generate among all countries."*

**Pope Francis**

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"

**TO PRAY**

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."*

**(Mt 25:35-36)**

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"

**TO PRAY**

*"An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you...'"*

**(Mt 2:13)**

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"

**TO PRAY**

*"When you make a decision, it shall succeed for you, and upon your ways the light shall shine."*

**Job 22, 28**

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"



## RIGHT TO MIGRATE OR TO STAY: PASTORAL APPROACHES TO THE ISSUE OF THE MIGRANTS AND THE REFUGEES



### Bishop Narciso V. Abellana, MSC Chairman, CBCP, Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples (ECMI)

Bishop Narciso V. Abellana presented insightful reflections and shared the experiences of the Church's pastoral approach in the Philippines. He focused on three key areas:

1. Reaching out to migrants
2. Providing services to the families of migrants who are left behind
3. Establishing connections with government departments responsible for migrant affairs

Migrants often find themselves in vulnerable situations, subject to abuse and exploitation in various countries. Pastoral care is extended through various means, including legal assistance, addressing issues related to employment such as wages and working conditions, addressing cases of abuse and harassment, and helping migrants whose passports have been confiscated. Additionally, some migrants are forced into illegal channels, often leading to their arrest.

Families left behind frequently face challenges, and their dynamics can become dysfunctional. Instances of abuse may occur within these families, leading to children being alienated from their parents. In some cases, when one spouse migrates, the family members left behind may misuse the migrant's hard-earned money, treating them like a mere ATM without considering the difficulties they face abroad.

Pastoral care includes income generation activities, creating support systems, offering family counselling sessions, and raising awareness through various programs. Efforts are made to collaborate with government departments responsible for migrant affairs, both within the Philippines and with other countries. Chaplains are sent to provide support and care to migrants.

Bishop Abellana concluded by emphasizing the need for the Church to recognize that it is far from being an ideal institution. He stressed the importance of bearing witness to their faith by establishing global networks and collaborating at all levels to make their communities and the Church more welcoming to migrants, as well as to provide support for the families left behind.



TO REFLECT

*"The land originally belonged to God and has been entrusted to man, and therefore no one may claim exclusive possession, thereby creating situations of inequality."*

Pope Francis

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-10-2023  
"From the chosen peoples to migrants and refugees"

For many, migrating is today the only choice

*What can we do to make migration one of the alternatives and not the only choice?*

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-10-2023  
"From the chosen peoples to migrants and refugees"

TO ACT

Senegal

Caritas' agro-ecological development program in Senegal promotes local development processes through sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural techniques as a possible alternative route to poverty and migration.

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-10-2023  
"From the chosen peoples to migrants and refugees"

TO ACT

Burundi, RDC, Ruanda

The Pax Christi Great Lakes network launched the 'Empowering new generations on active nonviolence and entrepreneurship' program, to educate youth about the culture of peace, empower them to become nonviolent change makers and enrich them with opportunities to earn a living.

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-10-2023  
"From the chosen peoples to migrants and refugees"



## UPDATES FROM CATHOLIC SISTERS PROJECT(ASIA) DICASTERY, VATICAN, ROME



**Sr. Meena Godad, FDCC**  
Catholic Sisters Project, Vatican Dicastery, Rome, Coordinator: South East Asia

### AT STAKE! THE 'RIGHTS' OF THE MIGRANTS!

The word **'freedom'** denotes the power or right to act, speak, or think as one desire. It is also the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved. The word 'choice' is an act of choosing between two or more possibilities. The theme for the world migrant's day 2023 – **'The freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay'**, talks about freedom and choice.

To make this theme a reality could be a strenuous job, as we all know that the people especially those living at the margins have neither freedom nor choice but, to risk their lives for survival. The decision to migrate should always be free, yet in many cases in our day, it is not so. The Mother Church is ever creative and finds its way through various structures available, to bring home all its children and especially the most in need.

Among various initiatives taken by the Church, the initiative of Our Holy Father, Pope Francis of initiating the 'Catholic Sisters project' in the year 2022, through the Dicastery for promoting integral human development was much appreciated by the religious congregations. In Asia the project was launched in collaboration with FABC: OHD/CCD. **"Enhancing the engagement of Catholic Sisters in the Migrant Ministry"** was the objective of the "Catholic Sisters project" and as we went through the exercise of sharing and listening, we felt positive energy gushing forth. It was indeed an invitation to build bridges and to develop networks across the geographical distances, languages and cultures in order, to be in communion with one another thus, building a global community together.

We have built the network at the Asian level and over 250 sisters belonging to various religious congregations have become part of this network. We believe that together we can make our dream of our migrant's freedom a reality.

Let us collaborate in this great mission and extend a helping hand as invited by the Holy Gospel Matthew: 25:35-40, *"For, I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Now enter into the home My Father."*



**Philippines,  
Papua New Guinea,  
Solomon Island**

**TO ACT**

The **Community Development Program from ANCOP Australia** offers housing, sustainable livelihood, health assistance and education for poor and climate affected communities so that a child and his family can live in dignity.

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
*"The freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay"*

**Mexico**

**TO ACT**

In the Mother Asunta Institute of Tijuana, the Scalabrinian Missionaries offer humanitarian, juridical, spiritual assistance, but also orientation to work and formation activities, to single women and minor children, refugees or migrants, in transit or waiting for asylum.

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
*"The freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay"*

The right to not have to migrate

How can we help our migrant brothers and sisters in the meantime?

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
*"The freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay"*

TO REFLECT

*"Migration involves a twofold right: the right not to migrate and the right to migrate... the world has not yet realized that migration is a human right".*

Pope Francis

World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
24-IX-2023  
*"The freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay"*





## TOWARDS MISSION WITH THE MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



**Fr. Jaison Vadassery**

**Executive Secretary, Commission for Migrants, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI)**

### Changing Pattern of Migration

Migration is also one of the major social issues in India. As per recent reports, the number of women migrating in India is increasing at a faster pace than men. Marriage continues to play an important role in the migration of women; however, now other economic factors like employment, business, and education is also playing an important role in migration. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), India is the top source of international migrants. It terms India as a migration superpower. Migration from India occurs due to social, economic and political reasons.

### Plight of Migrants

1. There has been an increase in violence against migrants coming to a state from different parts of the country.
2. Lack of job opportunities for the locals has led to growing resentment against the migrants who are dubbed 'outsiders'.

### Challenges of Migration:

#### Context

- ✓ Rising migration due to natural disasters, ethnic violence or employment
- ✓ There is a rise in violence against migrants accelerated by social media
- ✓ India has a large rural-to-rural migration. A major part of this is female migration after marriage. The number of rural-to-urban migrants is about 14 crores, but unofficial figures put it much higher. Even the 2017 Economic survey shows that the migrant population in the country is 139 million.
- ✓ The increasing intensity of natural disasters like floods, drought, cyclones, etc. and distress migration due to the rural agrarian crisis has also increased the number of migrants in India.
- ✓ In cases of distress migration and migration into urban slums, the migrants become more vulnerable due to a lack of negotiating power with the potential employers, lack of social capital, or lack of political organization and clout.

#### Issues

In urban areas, migrants are forced to live in ghettos with no access to amenities like clean drinking water, electricity, safe houses, etc.

- They form groups in public places or markets waiting to be recruited as manual labourers.
- This makes them vulnerable to exploitation, which includes physical assaults, lack of a fair wage/ minimum wage, etc.
- Even though the cheap labour provided by them keeps the prices of commodities and services low, they are often portrayed as anti-social elements and face significant discrimination from other sections of society. The slums/ghettos where they are forced to live are routinely pictured as "crime infested" and they are harassed by law enforcement authorities.
- Because of the unstable nature of their jobs and residence, they are frequently declared illegal residents and are evicted or arrested.
- Social media has added to their misery. Migrants are often portrayed as criminals and this barrage of social media messages escalates into targeted violence against them. For example, a migrant allegedly raped a minor girl in Gujarat. Even though the accused was arrested the same day, there were attacks against migrant workers on a continuous basis. This was fuelled by incessant fear-mongering and the spread of hateful messages on social media.
- Similar fake messages also triggered a mass exodus of labourers from the northeast in Bangalore as well.
- An increase in extreme climate events also triggers mass migration. These migrants are at an added disadvantage because in most cases, they have lost their relevant documents and any capital/asset that could facilitate an easy translocation.
- Another factor that contributes to an upward trend in internal migration is rural distress.

### Migrants in India and COVID-19

India saw its biggest migration since Independence during the lockdown phase because of the COVID-19 disease with over 10 million people walking thousands of kilometers to rural areas. This also led to the labour force participation rate falling as low as 35.57 per cent in April from 42.9 percent in January 2020. Unemployment rates surged to 23.52 percent in April, with both rural and urban areas taking a hit.

**Reasons for Migration:** Lakhs of migrant workers were rendered jobless as urban areas were shut down due to the lockdown. Night shelters run by local authorities began overflowing, and supplies started dwindling. These migrants were left with no choice but to head towards their hometowns.

**Structural inadequacies like the** Inability to recognize the size and importance of these communities, inability to correctly count such migrants because of their shuttling between their villages and cities due to the informal conditions in which they live and work. These inadequacies have real costs, rendering governments ill-prepared to anticipate the responses of migrant communities at crucial moments. The government has announced relief measures for migrants and made arrangements for migrants to return to their native place. But that too was not done on time to save the lives of many. The Supreme Court of India, recognizing the problems faced by migrants stranded in different parts of the country, reviewed transportation and relief arrangements made by the government.

### Refugees in India

In the past, India's attitude toward refugees had remained accommodating. But now the refugee crisis in India is an issue of concern. Since gaining its independence, India has taken in many different refugee groups from its neighbours, including:

- Pakistani Partition refugees in 1947.
- Tibetan migrants who came in 1959.
- In the early 1960s, Chakma and Hajong were from modern-day Bangladesh.



- In 1965 and 1971, further Bangladeshi refugees.
- Tamils from Sri Lanka fled during the 1980s.
- The most recent refugees from Myanmar were Rohingya & Chin Refugees in 2021- 22.

### Causes of India's refugee crisis

Refugees frequently flee from severe persecution in their own countries in search of safety in places like India. Accommodating strategy India has taken in refugees since 1947 despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. This includes Afghans, Bangladeshis, Tibetans, and so on.

India's multi-religious, multicultural, and multi-ethnic nature fosters strong social ties with many foreigners. For instance, during the civil war, the Tamilian Bond led Sri Lankan Tamils to consider emigrating to India. Similarly, the affinity between Manipur and Myanmar is drawing migrants from Myanmar to India. Although they do not have a direct impact, they make it easier to go to India. The open border allowed a large number of people from Myanmar to enter India.

People who are requesting shelter are in a difficult position and perceive a sliver of hope in a welcoming and open nation. Given this, there should be a refugee intake, but not at the expense of the local population. Therefore, it is imperative that India establish a defined refugee policy.

### Church response

Church has been at the forefront of reaching out to the migrants when they struggled during the pandemic. Almost all the Dioceses and Religious Congregations supported them with the immediate need for food. In fact, the church organizations were proactive before the government announced some meagre help, that too with the interventions of the High Courts and Supreme Court. CCBI Commission for Migrants witnessed a lot of Bonded Labour and Human Trafficking issues, particularly in Delhi and the nearby states. In collaboration with the diocese and the Civil Society Organisations some of the victims were rescued.

There are Burmese Refugees numbering around 10000 of them in Delhi itself. The majority of them have only the Asylum seekers document. They are hoping against hope for Refugee Status to flee to another country as they do not perceive a good future for themselves in India. Organisations like JRS and BOSCOs cater to refugees who are identified by the UNHCR. There are others who are not included in their list. CCBI Commission for Migrants in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Migrants Commission and with other networks reaches out to the Burmese/ Chin Refugees. They are given Rations, Medicines, and Warm clothes now. There are around 250 Catholic Chin Refugees living in Vikaspuri and Sitapuri areas of Delhi. They do not have a proper job. Youths are unable to pursue studies and they are into depression.

There are refugees from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh living in India. There are a huge number of Nigerians and from other African countries are also in the suburbs of Delhi, Bangalore and other metropolitan cities who have come for studies, work etc.,

### Towards mission with the Migrants and Refugees

Looking at the huge presence of migrants in the Indian cities, we are disheartened to see their pathetic living conditions. It's pertinent to ask what it means for the urban church/parish to take seriously the ministry among the migrants. To what extent do the migrants deserve the attention of the urban church? It is our moral responsibility to take care of the flock that have come to the cities to eke out their living. This is what Pope Francis and the documents of the Church reminds us time and again.

It is a beautiful experience to witness the huge gathering of the labour migrants on Christmas Day every year in the Father Agnel's School ground at Gautam Nagar, New Delhi. The School ground will be overflowing with the domestic workers, rikshaw pullers and other labour migrants of the tribal area of our country on the Christmas Day. We could grasp their faith and gauge their sense of belongingness to the church while we celebrate Christmas with them there.

The life situation of refugees in India is also not different. They are struggling to make both ends meet. The Rohingyas, the Afghan refugees and recently the Burmese refugees are living in shanties and engaged in the lowest categories of the work for which most them not paid properly. It would be worth mentioning a group of vibrant catholic Burmese community in Vikaspuri in Delhi. Their strong faith and trust in God edifies ours faith as well.

Manipur is another state where locals have become homeless in their own land. It is heartrending to hear the sad and traumatising story persecuted Christians of Manipur. It is as an opportunity for the Church in India to be sensitive to the issues of the displaced people among us and show our solidarity as the people of God.

We are also witnesses of the different kinds of displacement in the recent months in Delhi and Haryana; for the developmental and archaeological purposes thousands of families are displaced. The Communal violence in Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh has displaced minorities from their own homes.

Pope Francis' inspiring messages and actions for the Migrants and Refugees, the services of the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, Vatican, and International Catholic Migration Commission are our support and encouragement at the service of the Displaced and exploited Migrants and refugees. Our Clergy, Religious and Laity still need information and knowledge on the issues of interstate and international migrants, the struggles of displaced people and refugees. Equipping the church with appropriate strategies and approaches for ministering to the migrants, refugees and internally displaced is essential. Equipping and mobilizing the urban parishes to minister effectively among various migrant groups is the need of the hour.





## PAST UPDATES ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

### A. REPORT – SRI LANKA VISIT

Ms. Deepika Singh, the Coordinator of FABC OHD/CCD, undertook a visit to Sri Lanka from March 3rd to March 7th, 2023. The primary objective of this visit was to take part in the Laudato Si Workshop, which was organized by the Human Rights Organization in Kandy, in partnership with FABC: OHD/CCD. Additionally, the visit aimed to facilitate networking with the Migrants Commissions in Sri Lanka.

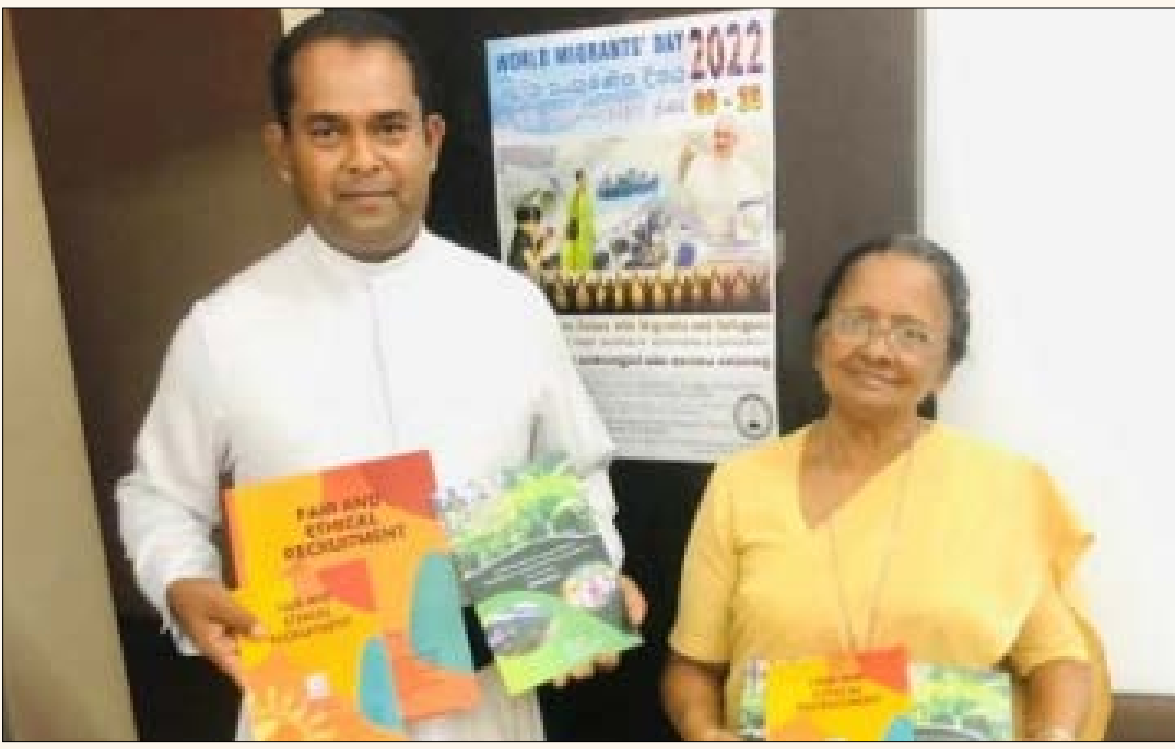
#### 1. LAUDATO SI TOT WORKSHOP:

A Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop centred on Laudato Si took place from March 3rd to March 5th at Fatima Retreat House in Lewella. A total of 34 participants, comprising 19 females, actively engaged in the workshop. The participants were prominent leaders from diverse backgrounds, including Human Rights Organizations, educators, researchers, parish councillor, trauma counsellors, as well as a few youth representatives from both Catholic and other faith communities, notably Buddhism. The workshop primarily focused on two key areas: enhancing awareness and fostering reflection on human rights and the teachings presented in Laudato Si. It also delved into the specific context of Sri Lanka, considering the legal framework for environmental protection in the country. The workshop featured four main speakers who contributed their insights. Various methods were employed to conduct the workshop effectively, including Power Point Presentations (PPTs), group discussions, nature walks, and outdoor/open sessions.

During the first part of the workshop focusing on Human Rights, Mr. Ruki Fernando served as the expert facilitator. Mr. Mahindra Namal, an Economics graduate teacher at Holy Family Convent Kalutara, played a pivotal role in the workshop's second part, offering an in-depth exploration of the Laudato Si document. The workshop took place at a location abundant in natural beauty, providing an ideal setting for a nature walk and outdoor exercise session. These activities complemented the workshop's educational components, group discussions, interactive classroom sessions, and various engaging exercises designed to connect participants with the richness of Mother Nature. In addition, the legal aspects of environmental protection were comprehensively addressed by the organization's legal team, consisting of Mr. Madawa Eriyagama, AAL, and Ms. Upeksha Pereira, AAL, from HRO. The participants exhibited keen interest and enthusiasm during the classroom sessions, actively engaging with the content.







**EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP:**

- The participants expressed their appreciation for the workshop, particularly highlighting the presentations on the Sinhalese translation of Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato Si' and its detailed teachings.
- They unanimously praised the workshop's content and noted that it was the first publicly organized workshop on Laudato Si', emphasizing the need for similar training to continue in the future.
- A request was made to the organizers to take further steps and approach higher authorities to establish official cells/units/desks dedicated to addressing these issues and promoting the Pope's teachings through Laudato Si'. Many participants suggested the formation of an official environmental desk/unit within the diocese.
- Gratitude was extended to HRO and FABC-OHD/CCD for organizing the workshop, with participants appreciating the presence of Ms. Deepika and expressing a desire for another follow-up session in the near future.

**2. CATHOLIC NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS, TOURISTS, PRISONERS, HEALTH CARE WORKERS & SEAFARERS (MIGRANTS COMMISSION)**

Sri Lanka holds a significant role as a labour migrant-sending country. The discrimination and injustice meted out to the Sri Lankan labour migrants globally is much known issue of concern to all, especially to the Sri Lankans - government, church and people. Therefore the Church in Sri Lanka formed this Commission with sole focus to address issues in the context of migration, and in particular the care of outmigration.

The Commission comprises a team of 35 members, each serving as district heads of various categories. The Commission's leadership includes Rt. Rev. Dr. Christian Noel Emmanuel, the Bishop of Trincomalee, serving as the Chairman; Rt. Rev. Dr. Anton Ranjith, the Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo, as the Vice Chairman; and Rev. Fr. Anton Sriyan as the Executive Secretary. The primary objective of the visit was to understand and capture the concerns, experience and good practices of the migrant's commission of Sri Lanka. The visit consisted of meetings and interactions with key stakeholders.

Migrants are vulnerable at many stages of their journey as they travel from their home countries to their destination. Many times, in this process migrants lose contact with their families, often fall ill, isolated, face detention, or become victims of trafficking; eventually requiring help and assistance. To deal with these crisis, well-trained Migrant Directors and Animators are provided by the Commission. Activities, programmes and involvements are focused on awareness of safe migration, counselling for departure or returnees, and other services. Training and other knowledge sharing modules have been circulated to the migrants.

Sri Lanka is known for its OUT MIGRATION as is seen as one of the leading South Asian countries for its labour migration and high number of women migrants. These women are mostly housemaids and caregivers in the Middle East where the countries do not have a strong migrant to safeguard the migrant. The Commission, through its collaborators and networking partners, is exploring means to reach out to them and ensure their safety and dignity. Several other good practices and success stories were shared during the visit.



(If you need a detailed report, kindly write to [ccdfabc@gmail.com](mailto:ccdfabc@gmail.com))





## B. POST-FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE WORKSHOP ON FABC 50 BANGKOK DOCUMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA

A conference on the post FABC 50 General Conference was organized by FABC- Office of Human Development and Climate Change Desk at Marian Shrine Centre, Bai Dau, Ba Ria Vung Tau Province, Vietnam.

The conference was entitled 'FABC 50 Bangkok Document and its Implications for Asia' and was held to spread awareness about the teachings of the Bangkok Document and initiate action as advocated by the document. 36 participants, comprising 7 bishops, 15 priests, 2 religious women and 12 lay people from 11 Asian countries, attended the conference.

The participants were mainly bishops in charge and the secretaries of the various Episcopal Commissions for Justice, Peace and Development and Migrants. A few justice and peace workers from the Asia-Pacific Justice and Peace Workers Network (APJPWN) were also invited, along with the networking partners, namely Talita Kum, The Laudato Si Movement and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Development, Vatican.

The conference began with a mass at the Chapel of the Tomb of the Martyrs in Ba Ria diocese. The country wise reports were an eye opener to all that highlighted the various social issues plaguing the Asian countries.

Migration, ecological concerns, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, rising religious extremism and the shrinking of democratic spaces were some of the prominent issues that emerged in the presentations and discussion.

The 'Vietnam Story' i.e. the faith journey of the church in Vietnam, was the main background in which the workshop was planned and conducted; therefore, the Vietnam Story was deeply inspiring.

The cordial relationship between the church and the state was demonstrated through the presentation. The participants were better able to comprehend the difficulties and tribulations faced by those who live on water after an exposure visit to "Long Son Floating Village." The Chairman of FABC-OHD/CCD, Bishop Emeritus Allwyn D'Silva highlighted the Bangkok Document and challenged the participants to prepare a plan of action to implement it in their respective countries.

The workshop concluded with brief evaluation/ feedback from participants. Besides efficiently planning and conducting the workshop on the top of all expressions was the hospitality and generosity of Bishop Emmanuel Nguyen Hong Son of Ba Ria diocese, which will be forever etched in the hearts of the participants.



(If you need a detailed report, kindly write to [ccdfabc@gmail.com](mailto:ccdfabc@gmail.com))

## C. WEBINAR ON WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS & REFUGEES 2023

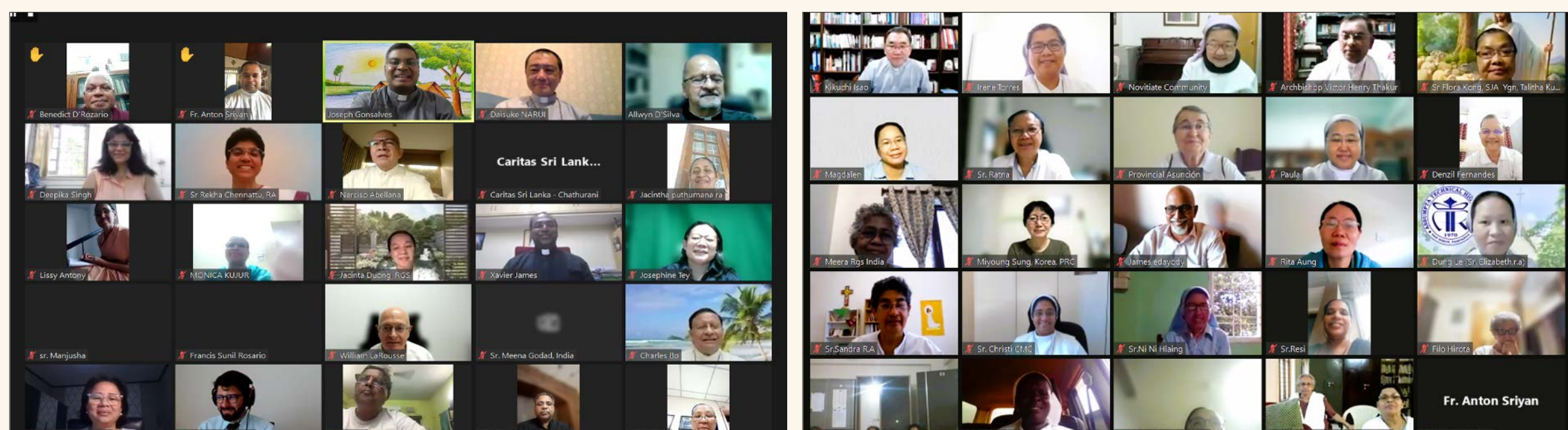
A webinar was conducted on Monday, August 21, 2023, as part of the preparations for WDMR 2023 with a specific focus on highlighting opportunities and services aimed at fostering a just world for everyone. The webinar was organized by FABC: OHD/CCD with participants that included the Asian Episcopal Commissions on Migrants from the Bishops Conferences of India and collaborating partners such as the Dicastery, Caritas Asia, Talita Kum, and others. A total of 93 participants registered for the webinar, representing a global audience. While the majority were from Asia, there were also attendees from countries such as France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the UK, Uganda, and others.

The event commenced with Fr. Joseph Gonsalves, Executive Secretary, offering a warm welcome and providing a brief introduction to the webinar. Bishop Daisuke Narui, SVD, from the Catholic Diocese of Niigata, Japan, and a Bishop Member of FABC: OHD/CCD, led the opening prayer.

The welcome address was delivered by His Eminence, Charles Cardinal Maung Bo, President of FABC. Subsequently, an enlightening video message was presented by His Eminence, Michael Cardinal Czerny, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development which initiated the focus of the webinar and raised important questions for reflection, primarily - what should FABC do to ensure that migration becomes the last resort for people in our countries?



Sr. Dr. Rekha Chennattu RA, Professor of Biblical Studies, Superior General-Religious of the Assumption, presented a paper on the theological and Biblical approaches to the issue of migrants and refugees. Bishop Narciso V. Abellana, MSC, Chairman, CBCP, Episcopal Commission on Migrants and Itinerant Peoples (ECMI), presented reflections and experiences of the pastoral approach of the Church in the Philippines towards the migrants' issues. Michele Robibaro from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, made the participants aware of the online resources available to conduct campaigns at various levels on WDMR 2023. Bishop Emeritus Allwyn D'silva moderated a session where in the participants share their plan of action for the upcoming WDMR and future projects. Archbishop Tarcisius Isao Kikuchi, Secretary General of the FABC, presented the concluding remarks and Ms. Deepika Singh gave the vote of thanks.



## MEETINGS / PROGRAMMES ATTENDED

- a. **FABC Synodal Task Force:** The Executive Secretary was appointed as a member of the Asian Synodal Task Force and was also part of the Drafting and Writing Team responsible for crafting the Asian Continental Synodal document. He actively participated in a preparatory meeting held at the Camillian Pastoral Care Centre in Bangkok, Thailand, spanning from January 30th to February 4th, 2023.
- b. **Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality:** The Executive Secretary played a crucial role as a member of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality. This assembly took place from February 23rd to February 27th, 2023, at the Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. Unfortunately, the Chairman was unable to attend due to prior commitments.
- c. **COP 28 Preparation Meeting:** The Executive Secretary joined an online meeting organized by the Vatican Secretariat to prepare for COP 28. This meeting, held on March 27th, 2023, from 8:30 pm to 10:30 pm IST, involved discussions among representatives from various Continental Episcopal Conferences. They shared their perspectives on the stance that the Holy See should adopt for COP 28, scheduled to take place in Dubai at the end of 2023.
- d. **COP 28 Follow-up Meeting:** Bishop Emeritus Allwyn D'Silva, the Chairman, participated in an online follow-up meeting on July 11th, 2023, from 8:30 pm to 10:30 pm IST. This meeting was part of the ongoing preparations for COP 28 in Dubai.

## FUTURE PROGRAMMES

- 1) FABC: OHD/CCD BULLETIN JANUARY -AUGUST 2023: OHD E Bulletin 2023 Vol, No. 12 for January-August 2023 (Working on it and will be circulated to the partners by the bigging of September.
- 2) An Asia Level Workshop on Laudato Si & Environmentally Sustainable living is being planned to be held towards the end of 2023.
- 3) Planning is also underway for organizing a Conference -Workshop on Anti-Desertification with specific focus on “Re Thinking Land Use” and Ecology Restoration tentatively in the beginning of 2024.
- 4) A Conference Workshop on Laudato Si & Religious for Religious in Asia is also in the Planning which tentatively will be held in the first half of 2024.



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**Fr Joseph Philip Gonsalves**

Executive Secretary FABC OHD/CCD  
St Pius College, Aarey Road, Goregaon (E),  
Mumbai 400 063, Maharashtra, INDIA

**Mob.** +91 9930192426

**Email:** [ccdfabc@gmail.com](mailto:ccdfabc@gmail.com), [josephgon@gmail.com](mailto:josephgon@gmail.com)

### STAFF

**Project Coordinator** - Ms Deepika Singh

**Email:** [ccdfabc@gmail.com](mailto:ccdfabc@gmail.com), [deepika62001@yahoo.co.in](mailto:deepika62001@yahoo.co.in)

**Accounts** - Ms Juliet Maben

**Email:** [ccdfabc@gmail.com](mailto:ccdfabc@gmail.com)

### EDITOR

Fr Joseph Gonsalves

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Bishop Allwyn D'Silva

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