# Celebrating 75 Years of the UN Refugee Convention: Faith Perspectives and Moral Commitments

**Date:** Thursday 12th November 2026
**Time:** 9:30 - 13:00
**Location:** Aula Magna, Casa La Salle - Via Aurelia 471 - Rome, Italy | In person only.
**Languages:** English, French and Spanish

**Co-organisers:** International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Caritas Internationalis, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), UNHCR

**Register Here:** Celebrating 75 Years of the Refugee Convention: Faith perspectives and moral commitments – Fill in form

## Background

At the time in which the 1951 Refugee Convention was signed, Pope Pius XII highlighted its relevance for Catholics and Christians alike, reminding people of faith through the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* that Jesus himself was a refugee in the land of Egypt, along with his family.

Today, we face challenging times marked by a mounting disregard for human rights, international humanitarian law, multilateral cooperation, including the obligations associated with international protection. Increasingly, the very principle of the inherent dignity of every human person is being openly questioned. This reality is evident not only in actions and rhetoric that openly contravene fundamental rights, but also in the growing withdrawal of political will and resources from international protection systems, resulting in the neglect of millions of refugees and other vulnerable people in need of safety and protection.

In this difficult context, Pope Leo XIV has consistently and courageously raised his voice in defense of the sacred human dignity of refugees and migrants. He urges the international community to keep the doors of solidarity open, uphold the protection of the most vulnerable, and to address the main causes of forced displacement by promoting peace and care for our common home.

The 1951 Refugee Convention is amongst the first human rights treaties adopted after WWII.[1] As such, it is a document which not only has a legal dimension but also a particularly strong ethical underpinning. High Commissioner Barham Salih summarized it well in an Op-ed in the Economist identifying a simple principle at the heart of the Convention: “when people are forced to flee persecution and violence, they should not be abandoned to their fate…”and where he recalled that refugee protection is also a moral commitment grounded in a simple truth: “Human dignity does not end at a border”. [2]

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[1] The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted in 1948, almost three years before the Refugee Convention. Many scholars consider it a human rights treaty while others take it as the first International Criminal Law Convention.
[2] By Invitation | The Refugee Convention at 75: To save the asylum system, reform it. OPED by Barham Salih, High Commissioner for Refugees, The Economist, 05/08/2026.

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention is rooted in values that have been shared and upheld by religious traditions for centuries. Among these are the right to seek protection when facing persecution; the inviolable dignity of every human person, which in turn safeguards the dignity of our societies; solidarity, the common good, and our shared humanity; special care for the most vulnerable. These are not merely legal principles, but moral and spiritual values that resonate across the world's major religious traditions.

The 12 November 2026 event in Rome will explore the relationship between refugee protection, religious traditions, and the shared values embodied in the 1951 Refugee Convention. It will do so not as a purely theoretical exercise, but in an effort to address one of the most urgent and painful questions of our time. As the international community marks the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, a moment where it faces increasingly often hostile and significant challenges, how can the faith-based moral commitment to protect refugees help preserve it as a binding and effective framework for protection?

During the event, ICMC, Caritas Internationalis, JRS, and UNHCR, together with refugee leaders, interreligious and ecumenical leaders and representatives from the private sector, will reflect on concrete ways in which faith communities and the broader global civil society can and must work together to keep alive the promise made in 1951: to ensure protection, uphold human dignity, and expand opportunities for the millions of refugees who continue to depend on these commitments today to rebuild their lives and shape their futures.

**Objectives**

- Understand current challenges to the Convention and its values and the significant obstacles facing implementation, in particular the toxic narratives that contribute towards fueling geopolitical instability, tensions and restrictive policies, as well as potential opportunities both internationally and regionally.
- Reaffirm and highlight the relevance and importance of upholding legal obligations, and the spirit and religious moral underpinnings, of the Convention, as well as the need to prevent further erosion of the Convention and associated rights.
- Introduce a call to renew commitment to the Convention and translate its enduring values into practical protection and solutions, as well as facilitate concrete collective thinking across stakeholders in attendance.

**Speakers Include:**

- Mr. Davide Bernocchi, Secretary General, International Catholic Migration Commission
- Ms. Francesca Bonelli, UNHCR Representative to Italy, Holy See, Malta, and San Marino
- Ms. Benitha Nzayanga Mugisha, Refugee Leader
- Br. Michael Schöpf, SJ, International Director, Jesuit Refugee Service
- Fr. Paolo Parise, CS, Migrant and Refugee Focal Point, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development
- Mr. Peter Prove, Director of International Affairs, World Council of Churches
- Dr. Nayla Tabbara, President, Adyan Foundation
- Dr. Victor Genina, Director of Integral Human Development, Caritas Internationalis
- Mr. Stéphane Jaquemet, Director, International Catholic Migration Commission Europe

**Agenda**

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| 9:30 - 9:40 | Introduction |
| 9:40 - 10:10 | Panel Discussion: The Convention |
| 10:10 - 10:40 | Panel Discussion: Faith Perspectives |
| 10:40 - 10:55 | Q&A |
| 10:55 - 11:15 | Coffee Break |
| 11:15 - 11:45 | Panel Discussion: Moral Commitments |
| 11:45 - 12:00 | Q&A |
| 12:00 - 12:20 | The Promise - Signature Ceremony |
| 12:20 - 12:30 | Conclusion |