



**The Significance of the GCR (Global Compact on Refugees):
Toward a Better International Refugee Regime**

**Presentation by Mons. Robert J. Vitillo,
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of the German Bishops' Conference
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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, and Colleagues,

I am grateful to Archbishop Hesse for his kind invitation to join you today at this important gathering focused on the Implementation of the Global Compacts for Migration and on Refugees. Through its messages calling for dignified treatment of refugees (especially with regard to the search and rescue of migrants in the Central Mediterranean) and its wide range of actions that testify to the commitment to solidarity with migrants and refugees on the part of the Catholic Church in Germany and of the wider society in your country, the German Catholic Bishops' Conference encourages, engages and inspires us to follow Pope Francis' repeated calls to welcome, protect, promote and integrate people on the move in all parts of the world.

Historical Background

Being forced to flee from one's home country because of credible threats of persecution and death is both a tragic and profoundly human story – one that more than 25.9 million refugee children, women, and men in today's world have been subjected and for which they now desperately seek durable solutions.¹

The Preamble of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, clearly acknowledged that a satisfactory solution to such situations could not be considered without international cooperation². In a similar manner, the New York Declaration, issued at the conclusion of the Summit on Migrants and

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>, accessed on 19 June 2019.

² Preamble, Recital 4, (United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 189, No. 2545). See also A/RES/22/2312 article 2 (2) .

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Refugees held at UN Headquarters in September 2016, set the stage for the development and negotiations on both Global Compacts. In their final Declaration at the Summit, States insisted that “[t]hrough a comprehensive refugee response based on the principles of international cooperation and on burden- and responsibility-sharing, we are better able to protect and assist refugees and to support the host States and communities involved.”³

Even before the Global Compact on Refugees, or “GCR”, was drafted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, or “CRRF”, was launched. During a two-year period, this framework generated “... improved support for countries and communities hosting large numbers of refugees”, including “new initiatives to expand and safeguard access to education, livelihoods and national justice systems; and redoubled efforts for solutions ...”⁴ Indeed, these actions very much conformed with the vision of Pope Francis that both Global Compacts should “... be inspired by compassion, foresight, and courage ...”⁵

The GCR: Towards a “new regime”?

The GCR, however, points out the lived experience that an unduly heavy burden continues to be placed on certain countries hosting large numbers of refugees. Thus, the drafters set, as an aim of this international instrument, “... to provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden-sharing among all UN Member States.”⁶ In a similar way, Pope Francis frequently has urged: “They are human people...appealing for solidarity and assistance, who need urgent action...their condition cannot leave us indifferent.”⁷

In articulating its Guiding Principles, the GCR makes a bold claim to “... represent ... the political will of the international community as a whole for strengthened cooperation and solidarity with refugees and affected host countries”⁸ “ Four key objectives of the GCR were presented as follows:

- To ease the pressures on host countries;
- To enhance refugee self-reliance;
- To expand access to third-country solutions;
- To support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

³ New York Declaration, Annex I, paragraph 1.

⁴ *The Global Compact on Refugees: UNHCR Quick Guide*, <https://www.unhcr.org/5b6d574a7.pdf>, last accessed 24 June 2019.

⁵ Pope Francis, Message for the celebration of the 51st World Day of Peace January 2018.

⁶ Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Part II, Global compact on refugees, General Assembly Official Records, 73rd Session, Supplement no. 12, A/73/12 (Part II).

⁷ Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 24 May 2013, https://migrants-refugees.va/mr_article/address-holy-father-francis-participants-plenary-pontifical-council-pastoral-care-migrants-itinerant-people/, accessed on 23 June 2019.

⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>, last accessed 24 June 2019.

Throughout its 68-year history, my own organization, the International Catholic Migration Commission, or “ICMC” counts long experience, in collaborating with governments to facilitate the durable solution of resettlement to third countries for particularly vulnerable refugees. Thus, I feel obligated to call special attention to the GCR’s identification of resettlement and complementary pathways as key solutions for addressing global protection needs and providing concrete expressions of solidarity with countries hosting refugees.

Established in 2012 and led by ICMC Europe, the SHARE network provides a platform for mutual exchange and learning among local and regional actors interested in or considering resettlement, and it advocates for more and better resettlement in Europe. To date, some 3,000 stake-holders in 27 EU countries participate in this advocacy and capacity-building network, including municipalities and both religious-inspired and civil society organizations in Germany.

During 2018-2019, European municipalities are scheduled to welcome 50,000 resettled refugees from the Middle East and Africa. However, we all are aware that, in recent times, commitment to such resettlement efforts has been decreasing not only in Europe but in many other countries as well. Thus, ICMC appeals to States – both those countries, such as Germany and France, that traditionally have led the way in this field of action, and those, like Croatia, that are newly arriving on the resettlement scene - to redouble their commitment and to make multi-year pledges for resettlement.

Accountability

While the GCR is not binding and does not envision a special procedure for States to account for their implementation actions related to the Compact, it did establish a Global Refugee Forum, to be convened at Ministerial level and held every four years (beginning in 2019). The Forum will focus on challenges faced by refugees and host countries, broadening the range of actors providing support, and reviewing the collective progress made towards more predictable and equitable burden-and responsibility-sharing. Such accountability was very much promoted by civil society actors, including my own. Thus, Tamara Domicelj and Carolina Gottardo comment in their article,: “The first GRF must function as a ‘proof of concept’ for strengthened responsibility sharing and for a multi-actor partnership approach which places refugees at the centre – both of which are essential elements of the Compact’s successful implementation.”⁹

The Holy See and many other interested Catholic Church organizations and structures would have preferred more targeted and specific plans related for refugee-related responses, including, *inter alia*, stronger support for the local integration, expansion of the concept of

⁹“Implementing the Global Compacts: the Importance of a Whole-of-Society Approach, *Forced Migration Review*, March 2019, FMR 60, last accessed, 21 June 2019, <https://www.fmreview.org/education-displacement/domicelj-gottardo>

family to allow grandparents and others to benefit from family reunification schemes, promotion of alternatives to detention of refugee children, and the right to work for refugees and asylum seekers. Undoubtedly, the Catholic Church and others will continue to promote these and other measures as States formulate plans to implement the GCR on national and local levels.

Conclusion

I will conclude with another profound insight offered by Pope Francis, since these words strike me as having captured the “new regime” of refugee response that has been envisioned and promoted in the GCR: “In order to set free those who today are oppressed, rejected and enslaved, it is essential to promote open and sincere dialogue with government leaders, a dialogue that takes into account people’s actual experiences, sufferings and aspirations, in order to remind everyone once more of his or her responsibilities. The processes set in motion by the international community for a global agreement on refugees, and another for safe, orderly and regulated migration, represent a privileged forum for implementing such dialogue.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Plenary Council of the International Catholic Migration Commission, 8 March 2018, last accessed 24 June 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/march/documents/papa-francesco_20180308_icmc.html