



VATICAN - "Migration is an invitation to imagine a different future, which aims at the development of humankind in its totality."

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "Migration is a sign of the times, deeply affecting our societies. Its range and size have increased dramatically and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Its interconnection with the many economic, social, political, religious, cultural and security factors, that define our globalizing world, reinforces the feeling of vulnerability and enhances the questions concerning the traditional models of social cohesion. We seem to be simultaneously searching for improved models of accompaniment for immigrants while redesigning the society into which they are expected to integrate. In such a world marked by new signs of fear and lack of hospitality, the centrality of the human person and his dignity." These are some of the conclusions from the Sixth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees, which took place between the 9th and 12th November 2009 in the Vatican, attended by 320 delegates from all over the world. Its Final Document has been recently released.

Following the ample reflection carried out during the Congress, with the talks and testimonies from representatives of all different nations, it has been seen that "migration is a phenomenon of all times...fostered by demographic and economic imbalances, poor governance, conflict, lack of freedom, poverty and environmental disasters as well as by true hope and the growing awareness of the presence of new and better prospects in life." This also presents a multifaceted challenge: "it shows that issues of security and societal fear can easily lead to increased discrimination, xenophobia, racism and even to criminalization of the migrant." It can also bring with it phenomena like trafficking, smuggling, kidnappings, forced labor, and new forms of human slavery forcing especially women and children into prostitution and even illegal labor.

"While the media today report some improvement in our economies, migrants are still measuring with the full extent of the damage caused by the present crisis," which has resulted in layoffs which in turn translates into decreasing flows of remittances. "For the Church, the migration macro phenomenon is a priority pastoral issue," the document says, recalling that, "solidarity is the first step towards a sharing of religious values between local and migrant communities. This could lead to the evangelization or the revival of the faith of those who have been secularized among them. Migration is also an important ecumenical opportunity."

The Congress has also noted several positive signs of co-responsibility and communion among Churches of origin and host Churches, and mentioned that "the Church has repeatedly taken up an advocacy role in the defense of human rights and dignity," and "has developed concrete operational actions to respond to the many needs, wounds and vulnerabilities of those who have left their family behind and/or have arrived in precarious situations."

Among the "recommendations" in the Document, in efforts to encourage pastoral care of migrants and refugees in the Catholic Church, is the proposal to reinforce ecclesial structures, creating a network among Bishops of host, transit and countries of origin; offer better knowledge on this topic to pastoral workers (priests, religious, and laity); develop long-term strategies that go beyond merely immediate reactions of welcome and solidarity.

The Church must "open its arms to all migrants, whatever may be their age, creed or conviction. In transforming the Church into a meeting point especially for young migrants, the negative effect of secularization can be defeated thus contributing to transforming migration into an opportunity for evangelization, in full respect of everyone's choice." It also expresses the hope that the Church will increase "governments, civil society and local authorities in catering to migrants' needs and advocating for their dignity and rights," although she "needs to maintain its autonomy in its pastoral efforts and any agreements with civil institutions should not undermine its obligations affecting the nature of the Church." (SL) (Agenzia Fides 18/02/2010)

> LINKS

Complete text of the Final Document, in Italian : http://www.fides.org/ita/documents/VI_Congr_Migr_ita.doc:

Complete text of the Final Document, in Spanish: http://www.fides.org/spa/documents/VI_Congr_Migr_spa.doc:

Complete text of the Final Document, in English: http://www.fides.org/eng/documents/VI_Congr_Migr_ingl.doc:

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