



OPEN LETTER

We, the conference participants, are writing to express our thoughts about migrants and refugees. This follows our deliberations about human migration processes in the contemporary world at a recent international conference on ***“Rebuilding Lives at the Borders: Challenges in dealing with migrants and refugees”*** held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 4 to 6 December 2018.

We primarily acknowledge that human migration is as old as human history. However, discourses on human migration have recently been brought to fore because of politicisation of migration processes and outcomes. A demonstrable point is that institutional frameworks are failing to accommodate the various migration and refugee situations should be clear to all. Unilateralism at the international arena may additionally erode the capabilities of the current international institutional framework to guarantee protection and humanely serve people on the move. Mean-spirited mischaracterisation, spurious comments and wrong assertions about migrants and refugees have recently aroused several reactions and feelings in many countries. Therefore, we think it is essential to clearly lay out some objective facts about contemporary human migration, correct some misinformation and share a much more considered perspective about people on the move.

We note that human migration process is varied, migration experiences different, migration phenomenon complex and our understanding of the human migration limited. Despite this, existing evidence unequivocally points to the intertwined nature of man-made and natural forces behind human migrations. The protagonist in the process of human mobility is a migrant or refugee forced by circumstances to move from their home to another place. It is our common view that economic factors are pronounced frequently and there is less focus on cultural, religious, political and natural factors. We observe that these factors are intricately connected. In some instances, state security considerations are overriding humanitarian interventions. Most of the current narratives fail to express the subjective reasons for human mobility. Hence, archaic values and expressions are propagated without due regard to their effects and impacts. Given this, our message to the various stakeholders as follow.

We recognise and honour the resilience, autonomy, diversity and enduring spirit of migrants and refugees, especially in the face of pervasive and persistent world adversity. We empathise and understand that people on the move contribute immensely and variously to human progress and human fraternity. Whilst there is currency that migrants and refugees are an absolute basket case dependent on charity, we attest that many toil to eke out a living even in adverse, inhuman and degrading conditions. We value the various ways the presence of people on the move enrich human lives, especially through interactions that deepen the understanding of humanity.



We note the important role that civil society play in providing tangible services and defending the rights of migrants and refugees. We suggest that the civil society should focus more on understanding human migration within countries and deliberately emphasise on movements around boarders areas as well as non-urban areas. We encourage the civil society to pay particular attention to the movements of youths, children, women, persons living with disabilities and lesbians, gay, transgender and intersex people. We challenge the civil society to advocate for multilateralism and strengthening of the international architecture on human mobility.

Our message to the church is to double its current efforts on promoting human dignity and human worthy paying special attention to people on the move. The church should strengthen and create new partnerships that mobilise individuals, families and communities for the greater good of migrants and refugees. In a context of resource constraints, we think the church has to rethink and commit greater resources on pastoral services at boarder areas and provide a much more nuanced direction on human movement in general. Religious groups have to facilitate dialogue, creating innovative and prophetic interventions and articulate the church's position and understanding of human mobility within the various ever changing and evolving contexts.

Our message to governments is that it is the responsibility of governments to desist from using migration for electioneering purposes and political gain, but rather to promote human dignity, including that of migrants using applicable human rights statutes. Governments should strengthen programmes combating xenophobia, discrimination and human trafficking. Actions that promote humane treatment of persons that regularly move around boarder areas, respecting their cultural rights are essential. Governments should enhance activities that facilitate a conducive environment for migration across countries, especially providing guarantees for the movement of refugees. We encourage governments to evaluate and reformulate current domestic policies on migration considering the changing global context. We encourage governments to strengthen the international architecture for human mobility within the spirit of multilateralism. We emphasise the importance of governments to focus on building bridges and not walls.

It is our hope that the many stakeholders we have addressed will consider our message. We believe our message broadly affirms the importance of integration as an important option to migrants and refugees. Our message is important in promoting durable solutions, livelihoods, reducing inequalities and ultimately universal fraternity. It is an important duty for all of us to create a world where human lives are not deliberately and unnecessarily broken, and when and or where such would have happened, to help rebuild these.

Johannesburg, 06th December 2018.

