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Protecting people first, not borders

Statement of the International Catholic Migration Commission - ICMC

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Mr. Chair,

It is so important for this Council and the whole international community to look directly at protection gaps that affect migrants in transit, including refugees.

We need to strengthen *protection*, not borders and barriers. Protection of people first.

This week, the right of refugees to seek international protection has actually become an item of negotiation among States! International law and the whole human rights framework, including at regional level, say that the right to seek asylum, the principle of non-*refoulement*, and the prohibition of collective expulsion, are all non-negotiable.

Far from being a response to the current migration chaos, such measures fail both to protect borders and protect people. Building walls, throwing money across them to keep people out: these will never be able to block people and their children fleeing from war. Evidence shows that they only increase dangerous journeys, drownings, suffering and trauma—and great business for human traffickers and smugglers!

Together with rights, and mercy, we need to consider this evidence of policy failure, everywhere.

We need to make different choices. Today's challenge calls for a solution-sharing approach. States, agencies and civil society: together.

Not just *responsibility*-sharing, but solution-sharing.

Global, not just regional. Embracing both proven and innovative ways to provide protection to asylum-seekers and other vulnerable migrants.

We have done it together before: in the 80's and 90's the orderly departure and resettlement programmes, including the Comprehensive Plan of Action, safely moved over 2.5 million Indochinese refugees. To update that today, States should add other legal pathways, like humanitarian, labour and student visas, private sponsorship, family reunification, and medical evacuation.

Our partner, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, jointly with other faith based organizations and the Italian government, is doing precisely this kind of thing: opening humanitarian channels for 1,000 refugees to settle in Italy this year.

We must also be clear: such admissions cannot be a substitute for asylum, nor an excuse for closing borders, since the essence of refugee status is the autonomous right to flee conflicts and persecution to seek protection abroad. For refugees, children and others in need, many with further rights to specific protection, the multi-actor *Praesidium* project that Italy pioneered is a successful example of systematic protection for spontaneous arrivals.

Orderly departure. Safe migration. “Protection first”: to people in transit and arriving spontaneously. These are the choices we need to make.

Thank you.