



**Statement by Archbishop Gabriele Caccia
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
at the General Debate
of the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF)**

New York, 19-20 May 2022

Mr. President,

This first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) presents us with a vital opportunity to reaffirm the vision of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), acknowledge its timeliness, and strengthen our efforts to achieve its full implementation.

Since its adoption four years ago, the GCM, which is grounded in shared responsibilities and unity of purpose¹, has provided the international community with the best available alternative to the uncoordinated and unilateral responses that too often fail to protect and assist migrants around the world. Migration is a global phenomenon with differentiated impacts. To be effective, a global and well-managed response to migration must be the fruit of common efforts that account for the repercussions of migration movements at all levels and for every country.² For the international community, the GCM continues to be the best existing framework to achieve this goal.

¹ Cf. A/RES/73/195.

² Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 132.

Migrants at the center of the GCM and its implementation

While today we are called to assess gaps, challenges, and progress in the implementation of the GCM, we should not forget that this review process is not merely about the evaluation of the success of the GCM, or indeed of its failure, nor is it purely about the collection of migration data and statistics. Rather, it is first and foremost about the thousands of our brothers and sisters, who, every day, leave their countries of origin and risk their lives in search of a better future. They must be at the center of today's discussion. It is only when migrants are not regarded as a political problem to be managed through abstract analysis and utilitarian considerations, but rather as human beings that share the same intrinsic dignity and value as every person,³ that it becomes possible for the international community to come together and be united in action.

Saving lives

In this regard, the Holy See reiterates that preventing the loss of life of migrants – including through rescue at sea – is a collective responsibility and a moral obligation that should never be lost in the debates surrounding the GCM and its implementation. Indeed, the objective of saving lives is grounded in the primary and fundamental right to life of every person.

Another crucial way to promote and respect every migrant's right to life is to address the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel many people to leave their country of origin. Caught up in wars and displaced by poverty, climate change and natural disasters, an increasing number of those forced to migrate lack access to education and job opportunities. These aggravating factors lead many to embark on unsafe, irregular, and often deadly migration journeys. When conditions prevail that allow every person to meet his or her basic

³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 39.

needs, migration becomes voluntary and no longer an act of desperation.

Safe and dignified return

Thousands of migrants experience human rights violations, violence, and even lose their lives, not only during journeys from their country of origin to the country of destination, but also during deportations or forced returns, which are carried out outside official procedures and often with insufficient consideration for the dignity, health, safety, human rights, due process and procedural safeguards, including the best interests of the child.⁴

It is not only migration that should be a choice; returns should be as well. In this regard, improving access to expedient legal procedures that ensure a smooth transition from one legal status to another is essential to prevent migrants from falling into an irregular status with the risk of forced return. Facilitating access to individual assessments that may lead to the regularization of their legal status is also critical.

When circumstances do not allow for voluntary return, it is vital that return and readmission of migrants be safe and dignified and in accordance with States' obligations under international law. In particular, the return of migrants who do not have the legal right to stay on another State's territory should always follow an individual assessment, be carried out by competent authorities through prompt and effective cooperation between countries of origin and destination, and allow all applicable legal remedies to be exhausted, in compliance with due process guarantees and other obligations under international human rights law.⁵

Moreover, it is of the utmost importance that return and readmission processes involving children be carried out only after a

⁴ Cf. International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Missing Migrant Project*.

⁵ Cf. A/RES/73/195, objective 21.

determination of the best interests of the child, taking into account the right to family life and family unity. Here, the Holy See would reiterate that the practice of child immigration detention must be ended, without delay, and that the best interests of the child should always take priority when engaging with young migrants.

The path forward

As emphasized by the GCM regional reviews, as well as by the several dedicated consultations and roundtable discussions this week, significant gaps persist in realizing the vision of the GCM and achieving its 23 objectives. The many challenges that remain, however, should not overshadow the positive steps taken and the many good practices already in place, even in those regions of the world where States have not formally endorsed the objectives of the GCM.

We need to build on the progress made hitherto and strengthen international cooperation to implement a holistic and integrated approach to migration that centers on the inherent dignity of migrants. This entails ensuring the effective protection of and respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migration status, and promoting their integral human development. This remains a matter of common responsibility and of social justice for the millions of migrants that are part of our human family.

Thank you, Mr. President.