



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
SACBC - Migrants & Refugees Office

PRESS STATEMENT

WORLD REFUGEE DAY – 20 JUNE 2022

Every person on this planet has a right to seek safety – whoever they are, wherever they come from and whenever they are forced to flee. Each year on June 20, the world celebrates World Refugee Day. This year, the UNHCR chose “Everyone has the right to seek safety”, as the theme. We are all invited to think and understand on this important and necessary right for millions of refugees seeking safety and protection. What remains universal is the right to seek safety. Whenever people are forced to flee, they have a right to be protected. Whatever the threat – war, violence, persecution – everyone deserves protection. Everyone has a right to be safe.

Refugee Day is rightly so a time to remember home, a time to explore and to promote solidarity vigorously, it is a time to remind the leadership of the countries of origin of the untold pain suffering and even the untimely death of its citizens. While it is important to protect and improve the lives of refugees every single day, international days like World Refugee Day help us to focus global attention on the plight of those fleeing conflict or persecution.

But perhaps the Refugee Day is a time to focus our attention on the host-country where refugees presently reside. Does the host country conform the rights to or has it domesticated international law and practices of welcoming refugees and of providing them with the necessary documents and means of survival? More importantly, has the domestication of international practices of welcoming and protecting refugees been accompanied by an equally vigorous promotion of the acceptance and inclusivity of refugees by the citizens of communities of the host country.

Refugees have a right to seek employment in the host country. Refugees are often among foreign truck drivers who are harassed and violently prevented from carrying out their duties. This violates their right to employment. In South Africa, this equally applies to refugees whose businesses are set alight during service delivery protests across the country.

Admittedly refugees have to compete strenuously against many job-seekers who have migrated from the countryside to urban areas in search of work. But then there are also the many who come from neighboring countries and other countries. They also seek better opportunities. The scramble for work is fierce.

In South Africa people on the move, without distinction if they are migrants and refugees, have experienced rejection, harsh treatment and being named “foreigners” with negative connotations. They have been called “outsiders”, the “unwanted” even though some of them have been here since the dawn of the South African democracy, 27 years ago. They have been falsely accused of “stealing” jobs that should be given to local people. When there are “service delivery” protests, that is, violent complaints about the provision of water, electricity, housing, roads etc. people on the move become scapegoats. They bear the brunt of the anger of local people. Their stores are often looted and even set alight. They are accused of selling drugs and are said to be involved in human trafficking. These are extremely harmful generalisations that tarnish the image of the



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migrants and refugees. Forcibly displaced people have been thoroughly victimised and turned into scapegoats for the short-comings of the socio-economic system and political leadership of South Africa. On the whole, people on the move strongly feel that their human rights are trampled upon and their human dignity violated. They have this deep desire to confront their fellow-Christians about the many negative experiences that pain them. As the church we should continue to create platform where there will be mutually respectful dialogue between the host community and the forcibly displaced persons. Assisting refugees to develop attitudes and skills needed to successfully adapt to the new society, by becoming open-minded towards new and different cultural norms, especially women that might encounter more social and cultural barriers.

We cannot forget that refugees can become ambassadors of peace, solidarity, and social friendship if we give them a chance. This can be taken up by dioceses and parishes by operating counselling centres that can help refugees make appropriate choices, thus addressing unrealistic or false expectations and misinformation with accurate and reliable information

Members of the host country, on this Refugees Day, should humbly recall, that all human beings have been created in the image of God and that we are our brother's and sister's keeper. This imposes a biblical and moral obligation on us all to be inclusive in our relationships with each other especially concerning refugees.

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