

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE 94th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
(13 January 2008)**

Young Migrants

The theme of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees invites us this year to reflect in particular on young migrants. As a matter of fact, the daily news often speaks about them. The vast globalization process underway around the world brings a need for mobility, which also induces many young people to emigrate and live far from their families and their countries. The result is that many times the young people endowed with the best intellectual resources leave their countries of origin, while in the countries that receive the migrants, laws are in force that make their actual insertion difficult. In fact, the phenomenon of emigration is becoming ever more widespread and includes a growing number of people from every social condition. Rightly, therefore, the public institutions, humanitarian organizations and also the Catholic Church are dedicating many of their resources to helping these people in difficulty.

For the young migrants, the problems of the so-called “difficulty of dual belonging” seem to be felt in a particular way: on the one hand, they feel a strong need to not lose their culture of origin, while on the other, the understandable desire emerges in them to be inserted organically into the society that receives them, but without this implying a complete assimilation and the resulting loss of their ancestral traditions. Among the young people, there are also girls who fall victim more easily to exploitation, moral forms of blackmail, and even abuses of all kinds. What can we say, then, about the adolescents, the unaccompanied minors that make up a category at risk among those who ask for asylum? These boys and girls often end up on the street abandoned to themselves and prey to unscrupulous exploiters who often transform them into the object of physical, moral and sexual violence.

Next, looking more closely at the sector of forced migrants, refugees and the victims of human trafficking, we unhappily find many children and adolescents too. On this subject it is impossible to remain silent before the distressing images of the great refugee camps present in different parts of the world. How can we not think that these little beings have come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as the others? And, at the same time, how can we not remember that childhood and adolescence are fundamentally important stages for the development of a man and a woman that require stability, serenity and security? These children and adolescents have only had as their life experience the permanent, compulsory “camps” where they are segregated, far from inhabited towns, with no possibility normally to attend school. How can they look to the future with confidence? While it is true that much is being done for them, even greater commitment is still needed to help them by creating suitable hospitality and formative structures.

Precisely from this perspective the question is raised of how to respond to the expectations of the young migrants? What can be done to help them? Of course, it is necessary to aim first of all at support for the family and schools. But how complex the situations are, and how numerous the difficulties these young people encounter in their family and school contexts! In families, the traditional roles that existed in the countries of origin have broken down, and a clash is often seen between parents still tied to their culture and children quickly acculturated in the new social contexts. Likewise, the difficulty should not be underestimated

which the young people find in getting inserted into the educational course of study in force in the country where they are hosted. Therefore, the scholastic system itself should take their conditions into consideration and provide specific formative paths of integration for the immigrant boys and girls that are suited to their needs. The commitment will also be important to create a climate of mutual respect and dialogue among all the students in the classrooms based on the universal principles and values that are common to all cultures. Everyone's commitment—teachers, families and students—will surely contribute to helping the young migrants to face in the best way possible the challenge of integration and offer them the possibility to acquire what can aid their human, cultural and professional formation. This holds even more for the young refugees for whom adequate programs will have to be prepared, both in the scholastic and the work contexts, in order to guarantee their preparation and provide the necessary bases for a correct insertion into the new social, cultural and professional world.

The Church looks with very particular attention at the world of migrants and asks those who have received a Christian formation in their countries of origin to make this heritage of faith and evangelical values bear fruit in order to offer a consistent witness in the different life contexts. Precisely in this regard, I invite the ecclesial host communities to welcome the young and very young people with their parents with sympathy, and to try to understand the vicissitudes of their lives and favor their insertion.

Then, among the migrants, as I wrote in last year's Message, there is one category to consider in a special way: the students from other countries who because of their studies, are far from home. Their number is growing constantly: they are young people who need a specific pastoral care because they are not just students, like all the rest, but also temporary migrants. They often feel alone under the pressure of their studies and sometimes they are also constricted by economic difficulties. The Church, in her maternal concern, looks at them with affection and tries to put specific pastoral and social interventions into action that will take the great resources of their youth into consideration. It is necessary to help them find a way to open up to the dynamism of interculturality and be enriched in their contact with other students of different cultures and religions. For young Christians, this study and formation experience can be a useful area for the maturation of their faith, a stimulus to be open to the universalism that is a constitutive element of the Catholic Church.

Dear young migrants, prepare yourselves to build together your young peers a more just and fraternal society by fulfilling your duties scrupulously and seriously towards your families and the State. Be respectful of the laws and never let yourselves be carried away by hatred and violence. Try instead to be protagonists as of now of a world where understanding and solidarity, justice and peace will reign. To you, in particular, young believers, I ask you to profit from your period of studies to grow in knowledge and love of Christ. Jesus wants you to be his true friends, and for this it is necessary for you to cultivate a close relationship with Him constantly in prayer and docile listening to his Word. He wants you to be his witnesses, and for this it is necessary for you to be committed to living the Gospel courageously and expressing it in concrete acts of love of God and generous service to your brothers and sisters. The Church needs you too and is counting on your contribution. You can play a very providential role in the current context of evangelization. Coming from different cultures, but all united by belonging to the one Church of Christ, you can show that the Gospel is alive and suited to every situation; it is an old and ever new message. It is a word of hope and salvation for the people of all races and cultures, of all ages and eras.

To Mary, the Mother of all humanity, and to Joseph, her most chaste spouse, who were both refugees together with Jesus in Egypt, I entrust each one of you, your families, those who take care of the vast world of young migrants in various ways, the volunteers and pastoral workers that are by your side with their willingness and friendly support.

May the Lord always be close to you and your families so that together you can overcome the obstacles and the material and spiritual difficulties you encounter on your way. I accompany these wishes with a special Apostolic Blessing for each one of you and for those who are dear to you.

From the Vatican, October 18, 2007

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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