

**ACMRO Colloquium
Melbourne, 22 August 2018**

Your Grace, Distinguished guests, friends and colleagues,

I'm so happy to be with you here tonight. While the past six months has been a whirlwind of travel and meetings, this is my first official *Australian* engagement as ICMC President. I very much appreciate the invitation and the opportunity to be speaking about this important issue with such a distinguished, knowledgeable and committed group of people.

Most of you are familiar with ICMC so I'll only say a few words of very general introduction. We're almost exactly as old as UNHCR –created at a time when the international community first acknowledged the need to work together on the issue of migration.

Our members are the Catholic Bishops Conferences in all regions of the world. Our mission is to protect and serve uprooted people, from refugees to migrant workers - from the internally displaced to victims of human trafficking – regardless of faith, race or any other difference.

Our approach is a straightforward one: a combination of principled advocacy and practical good works. In relation to advocacy we've been at the forefront of promoting humanity, justice and compassion in migration policies and practices. In relation to good works, since our establishment, ICMC has helped to resettle more than a million refugees and provided support to many more.

I'm very much looking forward to the discussion so I'll keep my remarks brief. I want to begin by saying a few words about how I see the current situation: the obstacles we're up against and the opportunities that might be out there. I'll then turn to the Global Compacts: how important are they? How good is the final text? Where are the roadblocks ahead and how can we deal with them?

In terms of the current situation, I'm sure I'm not alone in my conviction that we have entered a period of great stress and uncertainty. The faith in multilateral cooperation and multilateral institutions that sustained us so well over the past half century is crumbling before our eyes. Commitment to fundamental principles of human rights and justice that we thought set in stone has eroded across the board. Countries that have long been leaders in our epic battles for equality, rights and non-discrimination have fallen silent, or worse.

And *migration* has become the flashpoint in this rapidly changing political and social reality. Increasingly, *migration* is the lens through which governments and communities are interpreting and responding to the world.

On one level this is not surprising. There are more people on the move today – and more people living outside their country of birth - than at any other time in human history. The number of refugees and internally displaced is edging up towards the unimaginable figures

that were recorded after the last world war. There can be no doubt, in my mind, that the 'migration crisis' we hear of so often, is very real.

But the 'crisis' is much more complex and much deeper than commonly portrayed. We know that migration is as much a part of globalization as the free flow of goods and capital. We know that the global economy would grind to a halt without migrant workers. We know that many countries would be economically, culturally and spiritually poorer without their migrants.

We also know that current migration regimes are deeply unfair. They put individuals, families and communities at great risk. They disempower - and too often criminalise - migrants; they rob workers and reward exploitation; they deprive millions of women, men and children of the most basic rights including the right to be recognised as a person before the law and the right not to be discriminated against.

This is the environment within which a decision was taken, by the international community, to develop two broad cooperation agreements: one dealing specifically with the issue of refugees (the Global Compact on Refugees) and the other, dealing with migration more broadly (the Global Compact for Migration).

Before going into any detail, it is useful to briefly reflect on the motivation for the Compacts. While this could be the subject of endless discussion and debate, the simplest answer is probably that the current situation is not working well for anyone. Countries of origin and countries of destination are equally challenged, albeit in very different ways. And there is a growing sense, shared by almost every country, that working together is the only way to make sure migration works for everyone.

ICMC was involved in the negotiation process for both Compacts from the beginning; working closely with the official Vatican delegation and the Vatican Section on Migrants and Refugees. I'll leave it to Father Baggio to explain the Section's role in more detail. Suffice to say that the Catholic Church has been disproportionately influential.

In terms of the instruments themselves, the first point to make is that we rat ICMC remain worried about there being two separate instruments. That was a political compromise and it is doubtful if States are ready for a single clear vision of migration, set out in one unified agreement.

But the fact remains that placing 'refugees' in one box and 'all other migrants' in another, is not a true reflection of modern migration. By maintaining this distinction, we've missed – or at least postponed – the chance to develop a truly comprehensive global migration regime. There is also the very real chance that certain categories of migrants – including those who are fleeing terrible situations of violence and human rights violations but don't meet the narrow definition of refugees will fall between the cracks. Another, rapidly growing group: those escaping natural and environmental disasters, face a similar fate.

On the specifics of both instruments, I just have a few short points. In relation to the Global Compact on Refugees, I think it is fair to say that negotiation of this instrument was relatively straightforward and the outcome more or less as predicted. UNHCR was in the Chair and the legal and policy framework around refugees is fairly settled. There have been some points of contention but overall, we've managed to secure agreement on a solid final draft.

The Global Compact for Migration has had a less smooth road. We do have a final text though, and, on balance, it represents a net advance for migrants and their rights. I will just focus my observations on three issues. First: the risk of countries pulling out; second: the issue of detention, and third, the matter of 'integration'.

On countries pulling out: The Australian Government has [recently signalled](#) the possibility that it may withdraw from the process – which would make it the third UN Member State after the [U.S.](#) and [Hungary](#) to do so. There is a risk that others may follow, jeopardizing a hard-won, fragile consensus at its most critical stage.

It is especially unfortunate that this resistance is based on a misreading – or misrepresentation – of the Compact. For example, the three countries I have just mentioned have all asserted the Global Compact for Migration is a threat to their sovereignty; that it will force them to take actions against their interests. This is not the case. Development of the Compact was only possible because all countries agreed, from the beginning, that it would *not* impose legal obligations. That is clearly reflected in the final text.

And the countries questioning the Global Compact must be reminded that it is about much more than irregular migration. It is also about the need to develop a strong evidence base, so that migration policies everywhere are smarter and better-tuned to the needs of both sending and receiving countries. It is about promoting regular migration pathways that benefit everyone. It is about making sure that migrant workers, the backbone of many developed economies, including Australia's, are able to move, live and work in safety and dignity.

I don't need to tell an Australian audience that detention is a highly charged political issue for many countries. Despite claims to the contrary, the Global Compact's provisions on detention are balanced and finely nuanced – as would be expected with more than 190 countries involved in crafting them.

- The Compact does not reject detention of migrants: rather, it carefully and judiciously recognises that detention should be seen as a measure of last resort and encourages States to work towards non-custodial alternatives.
- The Compact reminds States of their existing legal obligation to ensure that the human rights of detained migrants are respected and that decisions about detention are made in accordance with the law.
- It urges that detention *not* be used as a tool to punish or deter migrants.

- It highlights the special vulnerabilities and needs of children in detention.

None of this is a threat. Rather it is a decent, achievable goal that all fair-minded countries can work towards without feeling that their security and sovereignty is being trampled upon.

And a quick, final point on integration: the delicate, critical transition of the migrant from outsider to insider – the process by which migrants become a part of their new community. While many migration issues remain hotly contested, integration is widely considered to be a good thing for migrants *and* for the societies they have moved into.

It is curious therefore, that we find it so hard to discuss, debate and agree on both the big picture and the specifics of integration. The [Global Compact for Migration](#), contains four, largely non-substantive references to integration. The [Global Compact on Refugees](#) is only a little bit better, dealing briefly with integration over three of its more than one hundred paragraphs.

What happened?

I think there are two issues at work here. First: Integration is a difficult matter for States because it exposes a truth that many are reluctant to publicly acknowledge. Despite the overwhelming international focus on return and reintegration of migrants back into their home communities, many migrants, including most irregular migrants, will not – often *cannot* – go home.

This applies to the 325,000 refugees who were granted protection in Germany last year. It applies to the 12 million migrants living without legal status in the United States: less than 3% of whom will ever be returned home. It is possible that the million-plus refugees fleeing sectarian violence in Myanmar who entered [Bangladesh](#) over the past 12 months will need to call that country home for generations to come. And no-one can predict when – indeed if – the refugees from Syria who currently make up around [ten percent](#) of Jordan’s population will be able to leave.

Integration is also difficult to discuss and deal with because it is not amenable to anything resembling a quick fix. Building a wall, establishing a camp, creating a new border force, stopping the boats are political shorthand for decisive action. Even if they don’t amount to much in the end, they give the impression of progress; they hold out the hope of immediate results.

By contrast, integration of migrants is a long and often fraught process for all involved. It requires migrants to accept the reality of their new lives and to agree to taking those lives forward in ways that may not have been their choice. It requires receiving communities and governments to accept new arrivals, to accommodate their presence with material and spiritual generosity.

I believe that we cannot put off the issue of integration. The consequences of doing it badly or not at all are all around us. Not just social and economic isolation of migrants. We also see the ripple effects of failed integration in the erosion of support for generous migration policies. We see it in the rise of nationalist political movements that, even when they do not get enough support to enter government, are nevertheless able to manipulate mainstream parties into adopting policies that are much less friendly to migration and to migrants.

The two Global Compacts acknowledge a truth we all know: human movement is the life-blood of human progress, it cannot be stopped. Together, they lay out a vision for the future: one where countries, working together, succeed in making sure that migration is overwhelmingly safe, legal and beneficial for all. But for that to happen, we need to keep integration – and by that I mean the long-term wellbeing of our migrants and the communities that are receiving them – front and centre.

It is appropriate to conclude by noting the invaluable guidance that Pope Francis has provided on the migration issue. In a world that seems devoid of consistent, principled leadership, he stands as a beacon to many, both within and outside the Catholic Church.

The Holy Father has called out the “*globalization of indifference*” that allows suffering and injustice to continue. His simple edict, that “[none should have to feel there is no room for them on this earth](#)” is a call to solidarity that we cannot ignore.

We must fix our eyes on a future that is achievable in our lifetime: a future where peace and justice, love and compassion, overcome our indifference, our fears and divisions. A future where we recognize each other as brothers and sisters, united in one human family.

Thank you.