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# Holy See Calls for New Strategies in Refugee System

**Prelate: Children Should Be Allowed to Be Children**

GENEVA, Switzerland, OCT. 18, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- In a world where refugees are often treated like prisoners, the Holy See is calling for "new strategies" and "new policies."

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See permanent observer at the U.N. offices in Geneva, made this call Oct. 4 when he addressed the 62nd session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Agency for Refugees (ACNUR).

The archbishop emphasized particularly the plight of child refugees, appealing that their childhood be protected.

The 1951 convention on refugees had a "civilizing effect," the archbishop said, but "in many regions of the world, millions of refugees are still unable to enjoy these rights."

He characterized many refugee camps as comparable to the penitentiary system.

"These people who seek protection or ways to try to survive are literally locked up and watched as if they were criminal prisoners and even children are subjected to the same conditions," the archbishop said. "The environment similar to prisons that exists in many of these centers, the isolation from the 'outside world,' (...) affect the mental and physical health of those asking for asylum and cause psychological stress, depression, insecurity, loss of appetite and insomnia in different degrees."

Creative compassion

Archbishop Tomasi said it is urgent to "develop and promote alternatives."

He offered proposals from the Holy See, including "community programs, introduction of control mechanisms and information, formation of support groups and the addition of visiting centers to open house projects so that at least families with children can reside in a safe environment."

The Vatican official also noted the problem of unaccompanied minors who precariously travel to Europe by the thousands.

"They must be treated like children and the main concern should be to defend their greatest interests regardless of the reason for their flight," he said.

The prelate noted studies that have shown religion is an important factor for these fleeing youth, and they desire the assistance of spiritual advisors.

Finally, the permanent observer expressed his hope that "new strategies and new policies" would be devised, which would make it possible "to understand the root causes" and "clarify border management and integration."

"Creative compassion becomes possible if it has a genuine sense of solidarity and responsibility toward the neediest members of our human family," Archbishop Tomasi affirmed. "Refugees aren't anonymous numbers but persons, men, women, children with their individual histories, with gifts to make available and aspirations to satisfy."

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