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PRELATE NOTES RELIGION'S ROLE IN MIGRATION PROBLEM

Calls for Church's Commitment in Gypsy Question

ROME, OCT. 27, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The religious dimension has much to offer in dealing with the uncertainty and conflict resulting from migration challenges, says Archbishop Agostino Marchetto.

The former secretary of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers stated this Oct. 21 on the occasion of the opening of the 2010-2011 academic year of the Olympic Academy of Vicenza, Italy.

The prelate affirmed that the religious dimension can contribute to the "resolution of the crisis and destabilization which often, superficially, leads to looking at the migratory phenomenon with a certain suspicion, as a factor of uncertainty and conflict."

He spoke of "positive care," which seeks "primarily to educate to overcome mentalities and actions that hide a rejection of the other or are reduced to his exclusion, leading to wider limitations of rights and liberties, to unjustified criminalization of those who, driven by different motives, leave their native land to establish themselves in another country."

"For the Catholic Church," the archbishop explained, "this spells specific pastoral care, inserted in a wider action of hospitality and love for the other that is proper to the commitment of the community of the baptized."

He added that it "is also reason to raise one's voice so that justice will never be forgotten, understood as respect of the rights of the person and not just the application of legislative measures, so that the basis is established of a peaceful and lasting coexistence."

The migratory phenomenon affects almost 200 million people today, Archbishop Marchetto

stated. Almost 3% of the world's population leaves their native land, in general to go to areas with a higher level of development.

He added that this reality is growing, "which entails immediately -- and often in a dramatic way -- the necessary willingness to practice attitudes of understanding, care, solidarity, which must be expressed not only as a theoretic reminiscence, but through the instruments of politics, law and the most complex institutional activities carried out by state organs or entities of the international community."

International dimension

The prelate said that problems related to migration, moreover, affect not only each country but also the international dimension: laws, institutions, strategies of intervention.

Given these institutions, he continued, "the intervention to which religions are called is not easy, if it is not to be reduced solely to denunciation or mediation."

"In fact," the archbishop said, "it's about contributing to determine the conditions of development, and hence the policies of cooperation as an occasion of cultural and human encounter."

At the same time, he noted, "the religious dimension cannot be removed" from the present context, in which immigrants are often considered in a negative way.

"The positive contribution that migrations make to the working world generates dissension," Archbishop Marchetto observed. "The migrant becomes the one who takes work away, produces a disloyal competition at the level of salaries, drives to a greater translation of resources to social expense."

"Moreover," he said, "the religious dimension does not miss the attitude of an ever greater number of countries that opt for adopting normative policies and instruments that have an approach to more dimensions, for the management of migrations, geared to reducing forms of irregularity, movements, neglecting instead the necessary preventive action, or at least action directed to reducing the abuse of migrants."

The prelate underlined "policies and norms that will be all the more effective the more they respect human dignity in the management of migrations, and are able to favor consequent strategies based on wide consensus, fruit of a wide convergence deposited in instruments that foster the elimination of conflicts, cooperation, stability, objectives of the internal political order and of the international community, in a word, peace."

The religious element becomes hence "an essential factor for a common vision of the management of migration and, therefore, of the situation of migrants, with which many individuals are called to work, as leaders or at least being involved," he stated.

The prelate highlighted "a vision founded on the value of reciprocity and of communion between persons, states, international institutions capable of eliminating rigid positions and guaranteeing decisions for emigration where perspectives linked to security and economic profit do not prevail but also the social, cultural and -- not in the last place -- religious dimension, able to express itself through the legislative instrument guarantor of rights and duties."

Wayfarers

All this, indicated the prelate, is true for migrants, "but also for those itinerant populations, at times also sedentary, such as the Roma, the Sinti, wayfarers, etc. whom with a worldwide view, we call 'gypsies.'"

"Expulsions cannot be collective; responsibilities are personal," he said. "There must be proportion between the dangers to national security and the corresponding measures."

The archbishop continued, "The most numerous European minority, almost 12 million people, must be, because of this, the object of particular attention by the European Union and the Council of Europe."

"It is the national states that must carry out a difficult integration, not assimilation," he said.

"Above all," Archbishop Marchetto stated, "the way is the schooling of the 5 million children and young people of European communities."

"In any case," he concluded, "the 'question of gypsies' also has to do with peace and calls for the commitment of the Church and of religions in its favor."