



MERCY
INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION

Today, Sisters of Mercy, through Mercy International Association, use their resources to respond to issues of global poverty demonstrated in the massive displacement of persons worldwide.

No borders, only one human race

World Refugee Day calls on us to raise awareness about one of the most challenging and unjust issues of our time. The legal definition for refugees under the UN Convention defines, a “refugee” is anyone who:

“(o)wing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of (their) nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail (themselves) of the protection of that country.”

This definition dates back to 1951 and while we are witnessing major flows of refugees fleeing their home countries for reasons of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, political opinion because of war in places like Syria and numerous conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, this definition does not reflect the complex reality of today. One of the groups not represented in this definition are refugees due to climate change. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* states, that the

Rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. Stating that they are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; yet they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever (LS 207).

Climate change is fast becoming one of the main reasons for migration and unfortunately, will be increasingly so. Ovais Sarmad, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework on Convention on Climate Change, speaking at a conference in Buenos Aires in May, stated

There was migration of refugees and migrants in Europe because of the Syrian conflict and other conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, That is a big political issue, but the climate change impact will make one million look like a small number. Because a hundred million people live in developing countries in low-lying areas, in cities which are very close to sea. If sea level rises, then people will have to move.¹

It is not only rising sea levels that are a problem but desertification, destructive hurricanes and drought which affect millions of peoples across our world, who will end up being on the move. So while I would like to see the Refugee Convention change to include Climate Change Refugees and indeed mention women and children as particularly vulnerable, I also realise that renegotiating the Refugee Convention is not an easy thing to do. All one needs to

¹ Gutman Daniel, “Will Climate Change Cause More Migrants than Wars?” access <http://www.ipsnews.net/2018/05/will-climate-change-cause-migrants-wars/>

do is follow the discussion of UN member states as they discuss the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) and a [Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (GCM) which are due to be implemented by the end of 2018. We just have to look at the some of the countries within the Europe Union who are looking to restrict the scope of their responsibilities such as Viktor Orban in Hungary, who is looking to defend Christian European Civilisation for fear of the Muslim community or look to the Trump administration, who, introduced a ban to excluded people from eight countries including refugees from war-torn Syria and Yemen from coming into the country altogether along with a desire to build a wall along the border between the USA and Mexico. The challenge is that we all need to be willing to take into our country those in need of protection. Refugees flee because they have no choice. Many want to return to their country of origin if they had a choice.

The definition of who is a refugee will always be political and divide into a category who is or who is not deserving to be called a refugee. There is no hierarchy of suffering. At the end of the day a definition is but a guideline and it depends on the generosity and good will of nations who interpret it. I think this challenges us in the Mercy World, to use our global voice to advocate for nations to open up their borders rather than close them down. To move from a culture of fear, to examine the root causes of forced migration and recognise how complicit we in the Western World are to contributing to the refugee crisis whether it is through the selling of arms, or the legacies of colonisation or our involvement in environmental degradation through our need for fossil fuels, affluent lifestyles etc.

The situation of refugees across our world, illustrates how much we fail as human beings to love others as ourselves. There is only one human race and all of us are made in the image of God which means the same standards of justice apply to all. I believe the situation of refugees diminishes each of us because we are all interconnected. This places a responsibility on us to confront our own attitudes and fears and to look for ways whereby we can come together to form a global Mercy presence and voice which can take risks, show our solidarity and enable a world without borders to grow, embracing each other as one as members of one human race. As Pope Francis says when he cites the “Earth Charter” in *Laudato Si’*

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning...
Let ours be a time remembered for the wakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life (The Earth Charter, cited in LS 207).

Sheila Curran RSM JPIC Coordinator for the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland ([AMRI](#)).

First published in MercyNews Issue #776 (20 June 2018)

Email: Sheila.Curran@amri.ie

Website: www.mercyworld.org