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IOM Director General: The Church is the moral authority to defend migrants' rights.

Vatican media interviewed Amy Pope, who was received in audience with the Pope today, October 2nd, in Rome, also for the conference "Refugees and Migrants in Our Common Home," whose participants met with the Pontiff together in the late morning. The Jesuit Refugee Service: Education must be ensured for those leaving their countries. Kenya needs better-trained lawyers to assist victims of serious violations and crimes.

Linda Bordoni, Tiziana Campisi, and Devin Watkins - Rome

Cuts to humanitarian funding and the Church's potential collaboration with organizations committed to supporting migrants. Amy Pope, director general of the International Organization for Migration, told Vatican media that she discussed these issues with the Pope, who received her in audience this morning, October 2, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace. In Rome to participate, among other events, in the conference *"Refugees and Migrants in Our Common Home: Roles and Responsibilities of Universities,"* organized by Villanova University and currently underway at the Pontifical Patristic Institute Augustinianum, Amy Pope emphasized that "due to conflict, the impacts of climate disasters, and rising poverty," more and more people are on the move. Therefore, more aid is needed. But many major donor governments "have reduced their support for the humanitarian response." "For our organization, we've seen an impact on approximately nine million people who have lost support or seen it reduced," says the IOM director general. "So, from a human perspective, in some cases the impact is catastrophic." With Leo XIV, he discussed "the need for the Church to collaborate with organizations" like the IOM, "that provide for people's most basic needs, to continue raising awareness and supporting them." "We also discussed the importance of reframing the issue of migration at a time when polarization is at an all-time high," he added, emphasizing that "there is still much resonance in the Church's message about migrants as a source of hope and as the embodiment of the Christian journey," "a pilgrimage we all make, spiritually or physically," while also seeking to "build a community of support and awareness for what migrants are facing" and to "be part of a more inclusive society."



Amy Pope with a delegation in audience with the Pope (@VATICAN MEDIA)

Collaborate and consider the example of the Church

Regarding the meeting on refugees and migrants currently taking place at the Augustinianum, Pope says his address aims to "reorient the debate on the humanity and dignity of what we do and what we are committed to as an organization." He also wants to "illustrate some very concrete ways in which universities, the academic community, and students can participate in this effort," "how to raise awareness, promote advocacy, and ensure that communities everywhere—be they universities, corporations, or churches—can collaborate to provide greater support to those in need." At the global level, the IOM Director General further explains that the intergovernmental organization intends to "refocus the debate on what is human," on how everyone can "provide support," "help integrate communities," "enable migrant students, for example, to access education or migrant workers to access adequately paid jobs, where they receive fair treatment," and "part of this process involves leveraging the moral authority that the Church brings." On a more practical level, the goal is to ensure that "every single parish, every single community, can serve as an example of how to work with, support, and protect migrant communities."



A moment from today's work at the Augustinianum

Education is a priority

Angelo Pittaluga, head of Global Advocacy for the Jesuit Refugee Service, shares with *Vatican Radio Vatican News*, the topics discussed in the working group she is part of as part of the conference organized by Villanova University. Professors, leaders of non-governmental organizations, and refugee students focused on "good practices that are already underway." "A professor spoke about the university corridors project in Italy, which allows refugee students to arrive legally and safely and continue their studies at universities," she reports, and something similar is happening "in Canada and the United States, so there are already projects that we hope will continue, because the political landscape doesn't leave much room for optimism about the future." "What we discussed in the working group," Pittaluga continues, "is that at a time when states and governments are stepping back from solidarity and assistance to displaced persons, refugees, and migrants, an even greater commitment from civil society is needed." The Jesuit Refugee Service believes it is necessary to place "a strong emphasis on education at this time when humanitarian aid funding is declining," because the risk is that "education will be left out" and the focus will be on "emergency aid, food, water, and tents for displaced persons." "Our view, and also my experience as a humanitarian worker," Pittaluga continues, "is that eliminating education also deprives these people of their hope of surviving." Because simply providing food and water is not enough to survive; "without quality education, hope for survival is taken away," therefore, "it is a priority to continue investing in education, even in emergency situations." Regarding Leo XIV's remarks to the participants in the conference on refugees and migrants, received in audience today, Pittaluga highlights the "key words of reconciliation and hope, which are also a guide for our work." "What struck me in the Pope's speech," he says, "was the sense of

a strong continuity with the teachings of Pope Francis, which remain strong and present in the Church's magisterium, and also with the words he addressed to us, both teachers and humanitarian workers, to encourage us and tell us that we are doing the right thing." For the representative of the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Pontiff's "words of encouragement" are "a source of inspiration" and encourage us to continue working "for this work of solidarity, welcome, and protection, because it is the right thing to do." "Universities can do a lot," he says, "with university corridors" and also with "scholarships for students." But the conference working groups also suggested "using technology to offer distance learning." "These can also be simple projects that can be implemented immediately." that make a difference to people's lives - concludes Pittaluga - therefore there is this possibility of offering access to quality education and giving hope to people fleeing wars, conflicts and other forms of persecution".



Angelo Pittaluga, Head of Global Advocacy for the Jesuit Refugee Service

The situation in the United States

Donald Kerwin, director of advocacy, research, policy, and partnerships at the Jesuit Refugee Service USA, explained to the English-language Vatican newsroom the goal of the Rome meeting: to help people better understand refugees and migrants, "because they are often portrayed negatively in public discourse, and they don't deserve it." "In many cases, they are heroic people who strengthen the countries they arrive in," he emphasized. "Forced migrants are simply seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Research therefore has an important role in educating the public and policymakers. And that's what we're pursuing at the conference." Kerwin then described the current climate in the United States over the past eight or nine months, "very bleak" due to "many programs the world has relied on for years" that "have been wiped out in one fell swoop" and policies affecting immigrants.

What Villanova University has initiated, Kerwin clarifies, is a "process" that is "part of an ongoing journey, but also the beginning of something new, and we seek to be confident in our ability to influence change." As for the Church's work in the United States for refugees and migrants, "it is crucially important," but there are many Catholics who "must recognize how important migrants and refugees are to the Church and the world. They have immense gifts and much to teach us. They are not people who want to abuse society, nor become bad citizens or criminals: they enrich society in every way. They are worth fighting for, and we do so alongside them."



The conference participants meet with journalists

Adequate legal assistance for violations of rights

Valentina Cominetti, executive director of Global Justice Kenya, an independent, women-led Kenyan non-governmental organization committed to upholding human rights by promoting the right to compensation for victims of serious violations and international crimes, offers a glimpse into the dramatic realities of migrants. "We work in Africa, and unfortunately, the majority of the population lives below the poverty line; there is no work, no opportunity, and no education to create them. Therefore, there is no alternative to migration; it is a forced choice," she bitterly observes. The NGO where she works focuses on "the intersection of migration routes with human trafficking" and "providing legal services to migrants who have been exploited and manage to return." "We also conduct repatriation operations and find ourselves repatriating many abused or vulnerable individuals from Arab and Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia," Cominetti specifies, "but we also find ourselves repatriating many bodies of people whose exploitation ends in a much more tragic way." Global Justice Kenya also believes that "education is fundamental." Working in legal services,

the NGO notes the need for more exchanges with Western institutions and universities. For example, lawyers in Kenya have a particular need to "understand their role and how they can obtain justice." Yet, "tragically, very often, the type of education they receive there tends to be too procedural and doesn't help them carry out their mission." "We hope to create fellowships that will enable lawyers in developing countries to better understand and embrace their mission," hopes Cominetti, who believes it's necessary to educate people about "their rights because they have never been taught them. And unfortunately, often, governments that provide compulsory education have no interest in ensuring these rights are promoted and taught." Various organizations, institutions, and NGOs are therefore seeking to provide training in this regard, and the conference on refugees and migrants hosted in the capital may provide support and concrete ideas. "There is a need to connect, to start projects together," concludes the executive director of Global Justice Kenya, praising the event organized by Villanova University, which embodies Leo XIV's invitation to "keep hope alive."



Valentina Cominetti, Executive Director of Global Justice Kenya

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