

Faith-Based Organisations on World Refugee Day 2020
“To know in order to understand”



Children living in the JRS Safe Haven play and sing during morning activities. Kakuma camp, Kenya. ©F.Lerneryd

In his 2020 [Message](#), Pope Francis invites all people of faith and goodwill to get to know migrants and refugees and, this year in particular, those who have been forced to flee but have been unable to cross an international border, the internally displaced persons (IDPs). Pope Francis encourages us to “know in order to understand” -- personal knowledge is a necessary step towards appreciating the plight of others and making it our own. On World Refugee Day 2020, we wholeheartedly support the Pope’s invitation because the plight of IDPs is an often unseen tragedy that the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated.

Today, our world counts more than 50.8 million internally displaced persons forced to leave their homes because of conflict, violence or persecution. IDPs live in very difficult situations as they struggle to find safety within their home country or are unable to reach and then cross an international border to claim refugee status. Millions more are IDPs because of natural disasters. As humanitarian organizations and communities, we accompany, serve and involve IDPs around the world and call on policymakers and practitioners to listen to their needs and draw attention to their struggles.

In this time of COVID-19, we have seen this already radically vulnerable group running increased protection risks from their own governments. The profound social and financial crisis brought about by the pandemic will surely result in the concerns of IDPs receding further into the background. Some of our organizations are advocating for enhanced legal protection, non-discriminatory access to services, respect for their dignity and the enactment of peace building and reconciliation programs for IDPs. By engaging with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs and the Global Protection Cluster, which have taken the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the landmark Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and the UN Secretary-

General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, we call for renewed attention to the plight of IDPs around the world. "It is important that internally displaced persons not be abandoned in this crisis. I call on States to exercise their sovereign responsibility to protect them based on the [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) and without diverting from existing delivery of humanitarian assistance", says Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs.

Displacement is about real people, and we must always remember that Jesus was once an IDP. It is likely that most of us have displacement of some kind in our own family histories. If we engage with present day seekers of sanctuary in our midst, we will know more about the urgency of their predicament. Opening our eyes and mind will lead to a clearer idea of what we need to do to help them.

COVID-19 has stirred us to reflect on the displacement in our own hearts and on the flaws in our economic and political systems. Greed can so easily displace compassion. Deep in our hearts we know that care for others - not exploitation of them - makes us truly human. Mantras like "me and my country first" lack depth and are the products of misguided thinking.

In these uncertain times, Pope Francis exhorts us to be close in order to serve. On World Refugee Day 2020, we call for transformation. We call for eyes and hearts to open to action by recognizing, contemplating, and sharing the life of refugees, IDPs, and migrants. Through them we can see more clearly the truth about ourselves, our societies, and the direction we must follow. We unite our voices with Pope Francis in his 2020 Message: "It is not about statistics, it is about real people! If we encounter them, we will get to know more about them. And knowing their stories, we will be able to understand them."

This statement has been signed by 55 faith-based organisations, including JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service). They are all involved in the care of migrants and refugees.