

HIPSIR AND JRS CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

DEAN of HIPSIR'S WELCOMING ADDRESS

Rev. Dr, J-O, Principal of Hekima University College, Dr. Mario Almeida, our Keynote speaker from the Dicastery of Integral Development of the Vatican, in Rome, International Director of JRS, Tom Smolich, Prof. Bill O'Neil, JRS East African Regional Director, Mr. Andre Atsu, and the entire JRS family, Deputy Principals, Dean of JST, Colleague Faculty members, Support staffs, Dear Hekima students, Alumni, Partners, and all of you friends who are following us virtually, allow me to begin my address by extending to each one of you a warm welcome at Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and international Relations. I am particularly indebted to those who have renounced their sleep and occupations to join this conversation across oceans, continents, and time zones. May you find here the expression of my profound gratitude.

Today, by coming together to celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, we honor a long tradition in the church. In fact, ever since 1914, the Church has been celebrating the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Every year, this World Day falls on the last Sunday of September, which this year was celebrated on Sept. 26th, 2021, under the theme delivered by his Holiness Pope Francis: "Towards an Ever Wider WE". We would have loved to celebrate on that very day, but due to circumstances beyond our control, HIPSIR and JRS families have resolved to celebrate it today.

Indeed, there is no better place and time to celebrate this day than here and now. For almost two decades, here at HIPSIR, we have committed to providing instruction and expertise in peace building and International Relations at a high-quality tertiary education level. Rooted and faithful to our dual Ignatian and Church traditions, we have never got tired feeling concerned about all matters related to integral human, social, cultural, and spiritual development in society. Today, more than ever before, the plight of Migrants and Refugees is a wakeup call that resonates at the heart of that mission. To celebrate Migrants and Refugees is not only an occasion to raise awareness and express our preoccupation and sympathy with millions of children, women, and men driven from their homes and thrown to uncertain journeys, but it is also a reminder of the core of our mission and an impetus to a pressing action.

As Alexander Betts warns back in 2017, "We live in disturbed times. There are more people displaced than at any time since the Second World War. Most of the 65 million uprooted people remain within their own countries, but nearly a third - over 20 million - had no alternative but to cross a border. When they did, they became refugees." He further remarks: "Almost 90 % of refugees are in havens in the developing world, and just 10 of these countries host around 60% of the world's refugees. Several of them – countries like Iran, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Jordan- have been repeat host over decades." As we stand, due to new and more disastrous plights, namely the COVID pandemic and Climate change, the numbers have increased exponentially.

Therefore, it is high time not to look at the ordeal of migrants and refugees with pitiful or threatened eyes. Migrants and refugees are neither miserable and powerless beggars to resent for, nor parasites or criminals to fear or get rid of. They are simply human beings, just like you and me, but people caught up with unbearable conditions that are not of their own making. Most of them are driven out of their homes by armed strife of both interstate and intrastate conflicts and they are only looking for safety and survival. It is only that people fail to learn from history. From time immemorial, forced or free, migration has been a source of strength and renewal for many societies. Not only did it create large-scale shifts in demographics and the establishment of prosperous diaspora communities, but they have also contributed to scientific and technological progress, culture, ideas, and wealth to the countries in which they settled.

Regrettably, however, Migrants and refugees have been often the forgotten victims of human rights violations. As Hollenbach points out, "The Human rights issues raised by forced displacement have not been addressed in the same depth as other grave human rights issues, such as depriving people of their liberty for political reasons or the use of torture in gathering intelligence. Nor have the consequences of war for refugees received more than minimal attention in most legal and ethical analyses of armed conflict."

As we celebrate this day as an academic institution in collaboration with JRS, it is therefore crucial that we recall what our duties are and reactivate our teaching, research, advocacy, and active response to fulfill this noble mission. Partaking in this event today and reflecting on the presentations to follow is certainly a step in that direction and I trust there is enough food for thoughts as we look forward to what we need to accomplish soon. Once again, a very warm welcome at Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations and have a wonderful conference.

Thank you for being with us today and may God bless you.

**Rev. Dr. Elisee Rutagambwa, SJ.,
Dean of HIPSIR**