



**Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference**  
**Migrants & Refugees Office**

**SACBC – MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES OFFICE**  
**WORLD REFUGEE DAY STATEMENT**

On Saturday June 20, the international community will celebrate once again World Refugee Day (WRD). Since 2001, the day has been celebrated around the world to highlight the plight of refugees and to celebrate their mettle and resilience. Every year the United Nations choose a theme for the celebrations; the 2020 World Refugee Day theme is **“Everyone can make a difference. Every action counts.”**

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) is united with the United Nations and the rest of the world, not only in celebrating the lives of refugees but also in prayer for their wellbeing and protection. As Bishops of the Catholic Church in Botswana, South Africa and Eswatini, we are aware of the amount of work that has been done and continues in responding to the needs of the almost 80 million refugees and other forcibly displaced person, most of whom live in deplorable conditions. A lot however, still needs to be done, not least on the protection and integration of refugees and other vulnerable people who have been forcibly displaced.

The 2020 WRD comes at a time when the whole world is faced with Covid19 pandemic that has ravaged many lives all over the world, exposed many inequalities, injustice and our broken humanity. We commemorate the lives of refugees totally aware that the coronavirus pandemic has added an extra burden and challenge on their lives. The SACBC is saddened and disheartened by the way many governments have, in their response to the socio-economic needs of their people, excluded refugees and asylum seekers. We would like to remind them that Covid19 knows no borders. We are all faced with the same pandemic.

The international conventions ratified by our governments and the domestic legislation clearly allow for the needs of refugees to be catered for, especially during this time of the pandemic of Covid19. Our humanity and our religious belief does not allow us not to share the little we have with our neighbour in need. As Catholic Bishops, we are concerned about their wellbeing and implore host countries not to exclude them when responding to the socio-economic needs, especially of the vulnerable during this time. We particularly ask the human family to exercise the four verbs of Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating them as we have been encouraged by Pope Francis.



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Such behaviour is reflective of the hostility that has manifested itself in many host communities. The SACBC is deeply concerned by this growing hostility which at times has manifested itself by violent reactions targeted to refugees and other vulnerable migrants. Xenophobia, particularly in South Africa, has been a recurring problem and as the Bishops of the Catholic Church we condemn any form of hostility towards a sister or a brother. We are seriously and deeply concerned by the social media campaign under *#PutSouthAfricaFirst* that is bordering on hate speech and calling for discrimination of non-South Africans in the economic and social sectors, among others. We call on the South Africans and certainly Catholics, to refrain from involving themselves in such campaigns as they go against the values of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church.

We encourage everyone to be fully involved in the theme of this year's WRD celebration- **"Everyone can make a difference. Every action counts"** because it is in each one of us doing his or her bit to make a difference in the life of a refugee, that we can improve their protection and wellbeing.

On this WRD we equally remind ourselves of the endless wars, persecutions and violations of human rights that have forced many to leave their homes and countries, in search of protection and safety. Many of them have been caused by the loud guns that have been reverberating all over the Continent of Africa and mostly robbing our children of their youth. The SACBC joins and supports the African Union in its call to silencing the guns in the African Continent. These guns have done enough damage to our continent, our people and retarded their development. Unless there is stability and peace in Africa, where justice and respect for human rights prevail, we cannot have development and there will certainly be no prosperity. Consequently, people will always be forced to leave their homes in pursuit of protection and a better life. We call on AU member-states and the international community to help in silencing the guns in Africa.

We wish all refugees and forcibly displaced people a blessed World Refugee Day. We also remind everyone else that, **"Everyone can make a difference. Every action counts."**

+ Archbishop Buti Tlhagale OMI  
SACBC Liaison Bishop for Migrants and Refugees

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