

# Missionary Society of St. Columban

JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

***Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more.***<sup>1</sup>

Pope Francis

## Migration

Columban Missionaries are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges and create mutual understanding through dialogue which is expressed through our solidarity with marginalized people and the exploited Earth<sup>2</sup>. Since 2000 the Missionary Society of St. Columban committed itself in a special way to “continue accompanying and defending the rights of migrants,” and to address the underlying causes of the migration of peoples.

Columban Missionaries serve economically poor and marginalized communities globally, often in countries plagued by poverty, injustice, climate disasters, armed conflict, and religious, inter-ethnic or political persecution. These conditions drive people to migrate away from their homes in search of economic and human security. We believe that we are called to both serve the needs of migrants everywhere, and to address the root causes of migration so that people and their families have the choice to remain at home.

As Columban Missionaries have migrated throughout the world to meet the needs of God’s most vulnerable people, we have witnessed the suffering of migrants. Wishing to welcome, serve, and take a stand alongside them, we have outlined the following concerns that need to be addressed in order to ensure the preservation of human dignity.

## Columban Concerns

### ***Root Causes***

The number of migrants has increased from 175 million to an estimated 232 million people today,<sup>3</sup> in part due to population growth, but more often due to poverty, injustice, climate change, and armed conflict that continue to displace millions of people across the globe. In the past three decades, the number of international migrants, has more than doubled to nearly 200 million worldwide.<sup>4</sup> These include economic migrants compelled to move to feed their families, refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing persecution and natural disasters, including those related to climate change and victims of human trafficking. Increasingly, women and children make up the majority of migrants. We recognize the right to migrate in order to seek a higher quality of life, but often global economic policies result in grave inequalities and oppressive working conditions causing people to leave home.

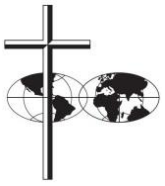
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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, World Day for Migrants and Refugees Message 2013

<sup>2</sup> Acts of the Columban 2012 General Assembly, *Called to Communion*, pp.7 and 13.

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration, “International Migrants Day” (2013)

<sup>4</sup> Global Commission on International Migration, “Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action,” (2005), 11.



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## **Poverty and Economic Push Factors**

The vast majority of migrants are economic migrants who have few options to remain in their countries of origin. Of the 200 million migrants worldwide, 30 to 40 million are undocumented. Ten years ago, 550 million people with jobs were living on less than \$1 a day, while almost half of the world's 2.8 billion workers earn less than \$2 a day.<sup>5</sup> Today, these numbers are even greater, often due to trade and investment agreements that favor corporate profit over sustainable and equitable development. Food insecurity, unemployment, low wages, and lack of dignified employment combined with the promise of employment opportunities in receiving nations are powerful incentives to migrate.

## **Climate Migrants**

Increasingly, people are fleeing natural disasters, often made more frequent and more intense by human-caused climate change. Five years ago, an estimated 25 to 50 million people had been displaced by environmental factors<sup>6</sup>, and that number could rise to 150 million by 2050.<sup>7</sup> Global warming and climate change create environmental conditions that strain local economies and create deadly conflicts for scarce resources. Hurricanes and typhoons, desertification and droughts, rising sea levels and the disappearance of tropical forests and coral reefs threaten the web of life and create "climate refugees."

## **War and Conflict**

Every year, millions of refugees are fleeing their homes and crossing borders to escape wars and deadly conflicts in their home countries.<sup>8</sup> Every year, religious and political persecution drives millions more to migrate in order to protect themselves and their families. Especially when violence is attributed to a poor or corrupt regional police force and justice systems, those affected relocate due to lack of protection. Increasingly, wars and conflicts are being fought over natural resources, including oil, precious metals, food and water, leading one UN official to say: "The wars of the twenty-first century will be fought over water."<sup>9</sup> Inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts are particularly deadly, leaving a toll of death and destruction in their wake.

## **Columban Response**

### ***Welcoming the Stranger***

Migration is one of the major social phenomena of our time, a "sign of our times," and the Gospel invites us to welcome the migrant as we would welcome Christ (Matthew 25:35). In more than a dozen countries around the world, from Taiwan and the Philippines in Asia, to Peru and Mexico in the Americas, to Ireland and the United States where we find our roots, "Columbans have listened and responded to the cry of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We have been energized and blessed by our work in this area" (*Strong and Courageous*, 2006). We are committed to "continue accompanying and defending the rights of migrants" (*Called to Communion*, 2012).

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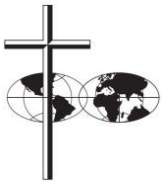
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Polk, T. "Climate Change and Forced Migration: The Gathering Storm," in P. McMullan, *Climate Change: The Agenda for Mission Today* (Korea: Dulsum Nalsum), 102.

<sup>7</sup> Vidal, J. "Global Warming Could Create 150 'Climate Refugees' by 2050," in *The Guardian*, November 3, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates there were 10.8 million refugees and 28.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world in 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Ismail Serageldin, former Vice President of the World Bank, *Newsweek Magazine*, 1995.



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## ***Addressing Root Causes***

Forced migration has many causes, including poverty, food insecurity, climate disasters, violent conflict, and religious and political persecution. Too often our foreign policies preserve these underlying causes, rather than seek to change them. Governments should promote sustainable development goals, debt and trade policies, and reforms of international financial institutions that address the root causes of migration and enable people to remain in their local communities. Above all, practices that destroy indigenous communities and ravage the earth, such as corporate mining and agribusiness, must be ended, and a more equitable and sustainable model of development promoted.

## ***Protecting Human Dignity and Human Rights***

Governments must create humane temporary worker programs that include the same benefits that non-temporary workers receive, including a living wage, and safe and dignified working conditions. Programs must include regulated visa / work permits to allow employees to move between employers, prohibition of debt bondage and inflated broker fees, and protection of workers' rights in conjunction with severe employer repercussions for noncompliance. Regular monitoring and enforcement are key.

## ***Family Reunification and Protection of Children***

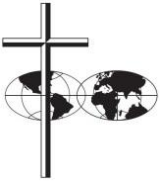
We echo the words of Pope Benedict XVI's call for migration policies aimed at "safeguarding the needs and rights of individual migrants and their families, and at the same time, those of the host countries." Lack of legal documentation forces immigrants to live in a culture of fear, insecurity, and vulnerability. Migration policies need to be just and compassionate, granting protection and support to migrants, especially unaccompanied minors so that their families may be reunited. The criminalization of migration, the militarization of borders, and deportation practices that tear families apart.

## ***Climate Migrants***

We call for a reduction of carbon emissions, mindful of the ways in which our energy use contributes to global warming and endangers the environment. We ask the United States and other nations to adhere to the suggestions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which indicated that the global community must reduce emissions by between 25 and 40 percent by 2020, and by a minimum of 80 percent by 2050, below a 1990 baseline, in order to remain sustainable.

## ***Interreligious Dialogue***

Whether as refugees, migrants, or asylum seekers, the movement of peoples is a reality for communities of all faith traditions. The host countries and communities can often be environments where religious tolerance is not practiced. In contrast, we seek to create space where people, especially migrants, can freely practice their faith and dialogue with people of other faiths as a witness to our belief in the universality of God's love.



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[Columban Peace Ecology and Justice Center](#)

### **USA**

[Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#)

## *Columban Founded and Sponsored Centers, Projects, and Ministries*

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### **Ireland**

[Migrants Rights Centre Ireland](#)

### **Taiwan**

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- [Vietnamese Migrant Workers and Brides Office](#)
- [Hsinchu Migrants & Immigrants Service Center](#)

### **Philippines**

- [PREDA](#)
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[Columban Mission Center – US-Mexico Border](#)