

35th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council (6-23 June 2017)

Panel Discussion on Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Adolescents and Human Rights

Geneva, 9 June 2017

Mr. President

Caritas Internationalis and the co-signers of this statement wish to take this opportunity to raise the issue of the current threats to the human rights of children in a migration situation, both unaccompanied internally displaced children and migrants.

We would like to call upon the Human Rights Council to intensify its efforts to protect and promote the rights of migrant children in accordance with international human rights standards, and especially with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In a time when the human rights of refugees and migrants in general are being eroded and violated at alarming rates, the Council has a duty to show strong leadership to protect migrant children, especially when they are travelling alone.

We would like to remind State parties to the CRC their commitments to protect all children, including migrant children. Far too often migrant children are not seen and treated as children. Authorities and ordinary people tend to forget that child protection principles and measures should be applied in all circumstances, including to unaccompanied migrant children. Unaccompanied migrant children are not a security threat, they are fleeing in search of shelter, better living conditions and often have to stand up for themselves without a legal guardian. Security issues should not be an excuse to by-pass the steps that should be taken for child protection.

Therefore, we want to recommend the following:

- 1) There should be a prohibition on detention of both unaccompanied minors and of those with a family or travelling with an adult. Studies on detention of children have proved how this kind of treatment affects their lives also in the long term. Alternatives should be provided, such as community or family placement, or special open facilities for families with minors, which have proved to be effective and less costly.
- 2) Children should never be deported. They can only be sent back if the return home is in their best interest and does not put their life or wellbeing at risk. Often children, even as young as 14, are sent abroad by a family or a community as an investment, including to earn and send money back home to support their relatives, who they do not want to disappoint. The international community shall urgently address the many root causes of forced displacement of minors and ensure that both global compacts are ambitious in terms of providing protection to all children.

3) Curtailing the human rights of anyone, let alone children, should never be accepted, regardless of the context. We hope the Council will show leadership by reminding duty-bearers of their obligations to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights for all children.

Thank you Mr. President.

Joint Oral Statement submitted by

Caritas Internationalis

Co-signed by

Dominicans for Justice and Peace : Order of Preachers

Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII