

Global Migration and the Augustinian Perspective from the United Nations
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The “phenomenon of migration,”¹ in the first five months of 2016 is one of the greatest and most troublesome movements of peoples at any time since the end of the Second World War. Today, vast populations are on the move within their nation’s boundaries and millions more leave their countries of birth in search for security, safety, and wellbeing. For most people on the move impending danger is always met along the path of travel. From the moment of departure to the country of destination, men, women, and children face a great unknown met with a mixture of fear, desperation and possible death and with faith and hope in the hospitality of those they encounter along the way. For many, migration is a global “trail of tears” not unlike the forced movement of indigenous peoples from the American Southeast to the rugged territory of Oklahoma in the 19th century.

The phenomenon of migration should give us pause to reflect on what is happening around us. Certain questions must be asked in order not to fall into a kind of fatalism how reality is interpreted. What is the meaning of migration and what are we to learn from its occurrences? What are the causes and effects underlying migration and how can they be mitigated? Is migration a global warning signal, a red flag, or is it also an opportunity, an invitation, a “sign of the times” that beckons interpretation and a committed response? These questions, and others, must constantly confront us when reasoning together what is at stake.²

The topic given to me to elaborate upon is “Global Migration: An Augustinian Perspective from the United Nations.” There is not enough time to scratch the surface in

¹ Pope John Paul II used the expression, “phenomenon of migration,” in his Message for World Migration Day, 1996. “The phenomenon of migration with its complex problems challenges the international community and individual States today more than ever” (#1).

² On the expression “reasoning together,” see Rowan Williams, “Words, War and Silence: Thomas Merton for the Twenty-First Century” in *The Merton Annual*, Fons Vitae, vol. 28, 2015, 45-47. Pope Benedict XVI spoke frequently about Western civilization “seemed to be drifting away from reason” (45). Williams agrees that evidence to support this claim. Nevertheless, Williams prefers to speak of “reasoning together” as a communal process, whereas “reason” is something that goes on in one’s head. A “reasoning together” is important when trying to understand the migration crisis

understanding the complexity and intricacies that give rise to the global phenomenon of migration. Likewise, it is difficult to comprehend the nature of a concept like the United Nations and why representatives of the Augustinian Order are involved with the organization. Many questions abound and there is little time to plumb the depths of each component. Regardless, we are open to an awareness that our minds and hearts might be forced to “migrate” in a direction fraught with uncertainties but also possibilities.

The goal of this presentation is to examine more closely the reality of migration of peoples by asking and answering questions concerning this global phenomenon. The hope is that such a process will inspire us to have new insights that will cause a shift in our thinking and understanding. This shift in one’s thinking from one perspective to a higher one or horizon. By “horizon” I mean that range of limited experience that shapes values and a set of criteria through which understanding and decisions are formulated. When there is a shift from one horizon to another, one receives new insights that have the capacity to influence our choices and decisions. What we propose here is a shift to an “Augustinian horizon” that is grounded in its wisdom tradition and is a gift to the wider conversation within the context of the United Nations. This shift cannot occur without the collaboration and commitment of individuals—you who are gathered here—that appropriate this unique horizon. My approach in this paper will be in three parts: 1) Migration in general and Latin America in particular, 2) the United Nation’s response to migration thus far, and 3) some considerations from the Augustinian perspective for the local and regional levels.

Global Migration

By the end of 2015, the latest reports indicate that 65.3 million people – more than the population of Britain -- have been displaced due to armed conflict, poverty, disease, social and political turmoil, economic strife, and the effects of climate change.³ The largest faction of this group – nearly 41 million – were still living within their own countries, and are officially called “internally displaced persons (DPI). The largest numbers were inside Syria and Iraq, but rebel groups in Nigeria and Somalia have

³ UN Refugee Agency’s report, “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015,” <http://goo.gl/XL1MxG> . See also Somini Sengupta, “Record 65 Million People Displaced, U.N. Says” in *The New York Times*, June 20, 2016, A3.

scattered millions in those countries. Tragically, over 50% of these displaced persons are children under the age of 18 years and most are denied the right to education and access to health care.

There are many reasons why people migrate. Some choose on their own free will to migrate in the hope for a better life and for security. Later I will explain the difference between a refugee and a migrant. Others are forced to leave because of war by governments and non-state actors, such as the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan in the Middle East, as well as Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa. Often, actors in these conflicts are operating as proxies. Non-state actors that foster terrorism are groups like ISIS (ISIL or Daesh), the Taliban, al Qaeda, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram.

People migrate to escape enormous poverty that is often caused by climate change. The number of people uprooted in 2015 due to earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters is at least 19 million.⁴ The shifts in the temperatures of ocean currents, like the Pacific El Niño, and weather patterns caused by greenhouse emissions from the burning of fossil fuels have had catastrophic effects on agriculture and fishing livelihoods, forcing entire populations to move elsewhere in order to survive.

Droughts and intense tropical storms have devastated entire areas. For example, Bangladesh, a nation where over half the population lies less than 5 meters above sea level, flooding is a common experience. But floods caused by tropical storms have been getting worse throughout the 1990s. The World Bank has estimated that by the end of the 21st century, global warming can cause sea level rise to 1.8 meters in Bangladesh.⁵ Island states and coastal areas will also experience the same threat of disappearance. Those hardest hit by the effects of climate change are the developing nations who have inadequate infrastructure. Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* draws attention to the link between global warming and global poverty.⁶ Francis writes:

[C]hanges in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to

⁴ Annual Report 2015 of IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center) at <http://goo.gl/WeS0hy> .

⁵ Mark Maslin, **Global Warming: A Very Short Introduction**. Oxford University Press, 2009, 84-85.

⁶ Ibid. Maslin makes the same connection between global warming and global poverty in his "Preface to Second Edition."

leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever (#25).

Currently, the migration flow of refugees and asylum-seekers has impacted European societies. Security concerns and government refugee processing have reached critical proportions in Europe, so much so that the situation has ignited the emergence of right-wing political groups and physical attacks on foreigners. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, expressed alarm about what he describes as a “climate of xenophobia that is very worrying in today’s Europe.” Some nations have begun the construction of border walls to keep refugees from entering their territory. There are two main migration routes into Europe. Those escaping from armed conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan move through Turkey and into Greece. The second route is from North Africa, across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy; these are migrations from poverty, the effects of climate change, and war. Thousands of people have died by crossing the sea. The Mediterranean is now called “a graveyard.” By far, the largest group of migrants and refugees flowing into Europe is from war-torn Syria. This scenario raises questions about the flight from responsibility by countries that have the power to end wars.⁷

While the migration patterns in the Middle East and Africa have their root causes in war, poverty, and ecological change, the situation of migration in Latin America is different. Recently, one of the longest wars on the continent, one that has created over 3.3 million IDPs in 2009, came to an end with the signing of a peace treaty between the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). The process implemented by the parties has become a model to adopt for other countries with internal conflict. The participants in the peacemaking process ought

⁷ If President George W. Bush hadn’t invaded Iraq under the false pretense of Saddam Hussein’s possession of WMDs in 2003, would there be an ISIS today? See Jean Edward Smith, *Bush*, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016, (Kindle Edition), location 9108, on how the war in Iraq prepared the ground for new terrorist activity. For greater exploration on this topic, see Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006. Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. NY: Penguin Books, 2008, 2009.

to be applauded for bringing an end to so much violence.⁸ The challenge now is to enter the phase of peacebuilding that recognizes the interlocking relationships between peace and development in its economic and political dimensions.⁹

While the peace treaty has brought relief for the people of Colombia, the armed conflict generated by the abuse of power, criminal gangs and the illicit drug trade has spawned enormous violence and death in other countries. Lawlessness and violence have impacted local communities and have forced many to leave for other places of safety and security. Mexico and the Northern Triangle – El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras – in Central America have received the brunt of the effects of criminal activity. Take one example - the spring and summer of 2014. Much of the migration, including tens of thousands of women and unaccompanied minors, headed north, toward the border with the United States.¹⁰ As a resident of El Paso, Texas, for many years, I have witnessed the stories of those who sought safety from the violence, rampant killings, and abductions. I have celebrated the funerals of those fallen victim to drug gangs and comforted those who lived with the fear of deportation. I have also presided at Mass for several years in detention centers in the area. Each time I was overcome with sadness when I saw the faces of grandparents, parents, and youth dressed in prison garb and under heavy security. Something is desperately wrong when people seeking asylum from gang violence are penalized and treated like criminals. Unfortunately, it is most difficult for migrants from Latin America to obtain asylum status the United States.

The root causes to migration patterns in Latin America are very complex. Due to the breakdown of the economic and judicial sectors of society, the rule of law has become nonexistent in some areas. Control of vast areas of territory is in the hands of drug lords, and in many cases, the military and law enforcement agencies have become complicit in some of the illegal drug activity. Other drivers causing migration are the effects of international treaties on trade that have had a negative impact on local industry. These trade treaties allow corporations to pollute the environment and cause

⁸ See the negotiating agenda at <http://colombiapeace.org/>

⁹ Angelika Rettberg, “The Legacies of Armed Conflict on Lasting Peace and Development in Latin America” in *UN Chronicle*, vol. LII, no. 4, 2015, 26-28. “Latin America is suited particularly well to analyzing the tense relationship between armed conflict and development and the challenges this poses for lasting peace” (26).

¹⁰ See the report from the American Immigration Council at <http://goo.gl/YVUJ27>

irreversible damage to the livelihoods of ordinary citizens.¹¹ The oil companies and their outdated drilling operations on Lake Mamacaiabo in Venezuela have decimated the local fishing industry. This is one example how the lack of concern for the protection of the environment has driven people deeper into poverty. The destruction of the Amazon forest in Peru by illicit gold mining is another example of an ecological assault that will have dire consequences. The list seems endless.

One of the questions raised by the Latin American *phenomenon of migration* for destination states is who qualifies for the status of being a “refugee”? People who migrate to the United States or to other places cannot obtain refugee status or even be qualified as asylum-seekers. Why is this so? The term *refugee* has a very precise definition in international law and the laws governing human rights, such as the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951. A refugee is defined as someone who crosses national boundaries because of war or fear of persecution. People who migrate within their own country because of armed conflict are not considered refugees, but considered “internally displaced persons.” They do not fall under the protections of international law out of respect for national sovereignty and its governance. For example, in Central America and in Mexico, since gang activity is not considered “a war,” those fleeing violence and seeking safety in the United States cannot be considered refugees, and therefore do not enjoy the protection of international law.

This situation is problematic. What laws guarantee protection of life, security, and wellbeing when one escapes drug violence or even the effects of ecological violence and extreme poverty? Given the phenomenon of migration today, we need greater clarity on the term *refugee and asylum-seekers*, as well as new descriptive categories embracing those people on the move for political, economic, and ecological reasons.¹² This task falls within the purview of international organizations like the United Nations.

¹¹ “Root Causes of Migration” Fact Sheet. <https://www.weareoneamerica.org/root-causes-migration-fact-sheet>

¹² The Charter of the Jesuit Refugee Service explores new definitions for the term “refugee.” In footnote 9, the document “Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity, (Pontifical Council Cor Unum, and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1992) applies the expression ‘de facto refugee’ to all “persons persecuted because of race, religion, membership in social or political groups;” to “the victims of armed conflicts, erroneous economic policy or natural disasters;” and for “humanitarian

United Nations

Founded seventy years ago, the United Nations was organized by sovereign states, which voluntarily come together to bring an end to all world wars and future conflicts. It is sometimes called the “home for the nations of the world” or the “parliament of nations.” Currently, 193 countries are member states and two states – the Vatican (the Holy See) and the State of Palestine – are permanent missions with observer status. The best way to describe the United Nations is that it is a forum, a space where parties in conflict can come together to resolve their differences. The second Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold from Sweden (1953-1961), said, “The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.” The UN is a space for dialogue and collaboration.

The United Nations has achieved many accomplishments over the past seven decades. Generally, it has prevented another World War, and can take credit for “upholding human rights, promoting the rule of law, providing international dispute settlement mechanisms, protecting the environment, eradicating diseases, and bettering the living conditions of millions of people around the world.”¹³ As it moves forward, it also moves sideways in counter productive ways. The UN system is overburdened with a bureaucracy that stifles progress in foreign affairs. Bias has become institutionalized against NGO applications for consultative status and against certain nation states. I have witnessed this contradiction expressed in the testimony of one of the delegates of a member state. The delegate said, “When there is talk about human rights, everyone is in agreement.” However, when the discussion turns toward the violation of human rights against Palestinians, especially women and children, the conference chamber is filled with silence and passivity. On another note, the structures of the UN have not changed and they still reflect the global reality of seventy years ago. The world has greatly changed and the UN system must update itself to meet the new exigencies and well-founded anxieties of the contemporary world.

reasons” to internally displaced persons, that is, civilians who “are forcibly uprooted from their homes by the same type of violence as refugees but who do not cross national frontiers.”

¹³ Amitav Banerji, “Global and National Leadership in Good Governance” in *UN Chronicle*, vol. LII, no. 4, 2015, 33.

Even with these serious shortcomings, last September the United Nations has shown its “enormous convening power and consensus-building capacity” in New York by taking a major step in the promotion of world peace, development in its social and economic dimensions, and attention to climate change. Building on the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), a new agenda for 2016-2030 was established as The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or the 2030 Agenda. This new agenda, which evolved with reference to Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*, has seventeen goals with 169 corresponding targets that forecasts a world that is “inclusive, equal, and sustainable and which urgently addresses climate change and its impact.”¹⁴ Most of the topics under discussion at the UN are either directly or indirectly linked to one or more goals of the 2030 Agenda. How is global migration treated under this new agenda?

The SDGs cover issues like ending poverty (goal 1), ending hunger (goal 2), and securing the right to safe water and sanitation (goal 6). Interestingly, the issue of global migration is not identified as a goal. Perhaps it is implicit in the targets of a particular goal. Or migration might be considered as a consequence of a certain condition, such as poverty, hunger, or the right to employment (goals 1,2,8). Even though migration is not listed as an SDG, it does not mean that the issue has little importance for the UN.

Since the beginning of the year, groups have gathered together to discuss the rights and protections of refugees and asylum-seekers. In February, Augustinians International (AI), in coordination with other religious communities gathered in Rome for several days to ask how religious communities are responding to the migration crisis. This crisis is now understood as the new norm in Europe. In June, Augustinians International, with the Holy See Mission in New York, hosted an event at the UN on migration and refugees. More recently, in July, a High-Level Roundtable on the plight of people fleeing violence in Central America was held in San Jose, Costa Rica. It addressed the issues of international protection and protection measures in the countries of origin. This was the first international event on the issue of forced displacement in the region. The meeting, co-chaired by UN High-Commissioner for

¹⁴ The main authority on global warming is the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). “The IPCC, created in 1988, is the main international body established by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program to assess climate-change science and provide advice to the international community.” See Joseph F. C. DiMento and Pamela Doughman (eds.), *Climate Change: What It Means for Us, Our Children, and Our Grandchildren*. The MIT Press, 2007, 6.

Refugees (UNHCR) and the Organization of American States, is one of the key events leading up to the September 2016 Summit on “Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants,” to be held during the next UN General Assembly, and in the World Leaders Summit on Refugees to be convened by the USA.¹⁵

Without a doubt, progress is being made in the development of laws for the protection of rights and securities for people on the move in countries of origin, transit, and destination. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, remarked, *Refugees have been deprived of their homes, but they must not be deprived of their futures*. Mindful of the futures of displaced persons, the discussions are attentive to issues of inclusion, gender, and greater participation of civil society. As members of civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)¹⁶ like AI, are invited to take an active role, to embrace the SDGs as an action plan, not only at the UN, but also at local and regional levels. The question becomes first, what is the Augustinian perspective or “horizon” toward global migration and second, how do communities participate in this ongoing effort of dialogue?

Augustinian Perspective

Many Augustinians ask, why are we involved at the United Nations? What does it have to do with the vows? We first have to bring clarity to the Order’s role at the UN before we can explore its contribution to the ongoing discussion on migration. Since our affiliation with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN DPI) in April 1997, various general and intermediate chapters of the Order have recognized the importance of the Augustinian presence at the UN. The 2010 Intermediate General Chapter in the Philippines approved the proposal to apply for accreditation with the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC). This accreditation offers us an opportunity to have Augustinian voices heard by having consultative status with the UN on specific issues of education, human rights and development.

¹⁵ See San Jose Conference on forced displacement in Central America, <http://goo.gl/x3Ljx4> .

¹⁶ Definition of NGO as a non-profit, voluntary citizen’s group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Their task is driven by a common interest. <http://www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html> . Augustinians International (AI) is NGO: www.augustinians-un.org .

Furthermore, in the 2008 revised edition of the Order's *Constitutions*, the importance of involvement at the UN is mentioned for the first time. Paragraph 185 in the *Constitutions* makes explicit the tasks and kinds of involvement by the local communities on issues such as human rights, the situation of migrants, the dignity of women, the economic order, and the integrity of creation. Through a process of attentive listening, communities identify major questions and concerns impacting people's lives and to bring these to the attention of the office of Augustinians International. John Paul Szura calls this the empowerment of "the multilevel community." This is the reason for obtaining consultative status at ECOSOC. A flow of information and collaboration ought to exist between the office in New York and the regions where there are Augustinian communities. Hopefully, better management with social media will be able to facilitate this relationship of two-way dialogue.

Yet, the dialogical nature of the relationship between communities does not end in mere dialogue, rather it enables us to be informed and wise change agents in the church and society. The aim is to engage others in processes of change that will address systemic causes of injustice, the questions concerning peace and climate change, and economic structures. The goal for economic structures is a higher standard of living for all people, especially those on the margins of church and society. With the recent formulation of the 2030 Agenda, or SDGs, we now have a valuable framework that can assist us launching forward into new directions. But this framework is not adequate in itself. What is needed is a profound conversion of minds and hearts enabling an understanding of reality from another, more profound, horizon. I will explore a few points of a strategy that contributes to an Augustinian perspective and the authentic conversion of which I speak.

- First, living in community is always a challenge. The level of the "world" community can be more daunting. The 2030 Agenda is designed with the vision of what constitutes a better world. Or to put it in another way, what kind of future do we desire for our children and grandchildren? We are the first generation to really grapple with this question as the world's destiny is in our hands. For the first time, our generation will make decisions that will impact

the physical, chemical, biological, and psychical composition of the planet. Our so-called short-term solutions will have long-term consequences. The articulation of the SDGs cannot be overstated; they are the milestones for a plan of action. Given their importance as an agenda agreed upon by 193 member states, it behooves us to first study and understand the implications of the SDGs. Likewise, we must ponder how our communities, and those in our apostolates, can participate in the selection and achievement of the corresponding targets.¹⁷

- Second, an issue that keeps resurfacing in conferences at the UN is the lack of participation by civil society. This means that grassroots organizations are not involved in the discussions with government at the local, national, and international levels.¹⁸ Without the participation of civil society, conversation on major SDG issues like migration and the impacts of climate change will be lopsided or blocked, favoring particular power groups. One of the reasons for the shrinking participation of civil society is the lack of skills and opportunity. At the local level there are few opportunities to be involved in actual debates and discussions on political and economic issues. Our parish and school communities, for example, are in excellent position to create a safe space to facilitate and train groups, such as *comunidades de base*, on the skills of public discourse and critical reflection on specific targets of the SDG goals. Leadership should not overlook the importance of the ministry of lector as a way of learning how to overcome fear and to speak in public. A Peruvian bishop once told me that the ministry of lector is the most “revolutionary” ministry, because once a person learns how to overcome the fear of speaking publically at Mass, nothing will prevent that person from speaking in the public, political forum. It is vital for civil society to find its voice to engage public debate and discussion and to confront institutionalized bias and power groups.

¹⁷ The primary UN document for understanding the SDGs is “Transforming Our World,” accessed here: <https://goo.gl/zcqhUH> .

¹⁸ “Civil society” is defined as “a public space between the state, the market and the ordinary household, in which people can debate and tackle action.” See the BBC article at <http://goo.gl/s9hNBy> .

- Finally, one of the root causes for migration is the effects caused by climate change. Human-induced changes in weather patterns have had a negative impact on people's living conditions. Because of flooding or drought have forced them to move elsewhere. Some communities are pushed deeper into poverty and intense suffering. National security becomes an issue as people are displaced within their countries or migrate elsewhere by crossing borders. Today it is absolutely necessary to take into account the environment as an active player and as a priority SDG #13 – Climate Action -- in the discussion on economic development and the governance of a state. We should reflect with "fear and trembling" the long-term effects of the destruction of the Amazon rain forests, the contamination of rivers, land and air. This is the shift required in a new Augustinian perspective: the inter-relatedness of the environment with development and culture, thinking of the long-term consequences of decisions, and finally, and thinking about climate change by moving from a provincial to a global perception of reality. All change is difficult and to analyze situations from a different perspective can be uncomfortable as the unknown variables are embraced. Still, it is vital to see the whole picture. To do anything less is to miss the connectedness of the human-Earth- divine experience.

In summary, I addressed three key factors that comprise a new Augustinian perspective on social justice, and on migration in particular. Those factors are first, embrace and appropriate the SDGs as the new lens through which communities can evaluate their situations regarding social justice and migration of peoples. Second, Augustinian communities can do much by providing a safe space for training and organizing the grassroots organizations and civil society on the SDGs and how to raise their voices for the voiceless in the public forum. And finally, the new Augustinian perspective is future-oriented. As an action plan, the SDGs are a framework for building a new future and a better world for human and non-human life forms. This new horizon requires us to take more seriously the integrity of creation and to recognize short-term

solutions are perilous and will have devastating effects on the future our grandchildren. Everything is connected: migration, national security, economics, culture, and religion.

What is urgent at this moment is that we work and think together. We need greater collaboration and sharing of experiences and resources at all levels, from the local to the international. Our charism of community demands it. This is the gift we offer to the world's "restless heart." And the challenge we receive from "the world" is the invitation to serve from a higher perspective, one not taken before. We have choices. Truly, the vast migration of people is a phenomenon. It is either an alarm signal or a red flag; or, it is a graced moment of the "signs of the times," an opportunity to transform hostility into hospitality.