

**Anglican Communion Permanent Representative to the United Nations**

***‘Welcoming the Stranger’ – Refugees, Migration and Internally Displaced Persons***

It is now well-known that the world is witnessing unprecedented levels of people on the move. Some are economic migrants, others refugees, more still are internally displaced people – forced from their homes but remaining within their home country.

In September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously agreed and adopted the ‘New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants’. This Declaration committed all UN members states to work together to ease the pressure on countries hosting refugees, seek durable solutions to the causes of population movements and displacement, and put in place processes and structures to help support refugees and migrants more effectively and predictably.

As well as broad political commitments to protect people on the move, the Declaration paved the way for the adoption of two ‘Global Compacts’: the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) will set out “practical measures that can be taken by a wide range of stakeholders to enhance international cooperation in response to large movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations, and to ensure a more equitable and predictable sharing of the burden and responsibility for providing protection to refugees."[[1]](#endnote-1)

The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is an attempt to bring states together for the first time to agree a global governance system for migration, and in doing so “address the challenges associated with today’s migration, and to strengthen the contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Since the adoption of the New York Declaration, governments have been busy negotiating the text of the two Compacts – the Global Compact for Refugees at the UN in Geneva and the Global Compact on Migration in New York. The process has been long for both – involving states, UN agencies and civil society – with themes and priorities identified, language suggested and then amended throughout negotiating sessions that will likely continue right up to the moment that the Compact’s are finally agreed.

There have been setbacks along the way – the United States pulled out of the Global Compact on Migration in December 2017, stating that the Compact “contains numerous provisions that are inconsistent with US immigration and refugee policies and the Trump administration’s immigration principles”.[[3]](#endnote-3) In negotiations for both Compacts, the position taken by the Hungarian government has meant that the European Union has been unable to approach negotiations as a unified block, with Hungary taking a strongly opposing view of the migratory process and the UN’s strategy: “migration is an unfavourable and dangerous process, which has caused serious security challenges in many regions of the world.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

With deadlines for both Compacts looming (the GCR will be presented to the UN General Assembly in September and a conference has been arranged in December to finalise the GCM), there is still much to agree. The challenge then will be implementation.

Whilst civil society has been able to participate in the processes for both Compacts and their role acknowledged and affirmed in the texts, their voice has been limited and in many ways ignored. Such an approach runs the risk of alienating those who are most committed to the protection and flourishing of all people, whether migrants vulnerable to violations of their human rights, refugees fleeing protracted conflicts with no likelihood of resolution in the near future, or internally displaced people (IDPs) forced elsewhere within their countries, perhaps by conflict or natural disasters.

Support for internally displaced populations has a particular relevance this year. 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the UN’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.[[5]](#endnote-5) With the number of those displaced internally growing – recent figures put the number at 40.3 million people[[6]](#endnote-6) - a new global approach is needed to reduce levels of internal displacement are reduced and help those forced to leave their homes to return to safer situations. With neither the GCR or the GCM taking up the cause of IDPs in a meaningful way, the UN and its member states must now seriously consider a new approach to protection of IDPs

The Anglican Communion Office at the United Nations has supported civil society efforts to improve both Global Compacts. Underpinning this work is the Anglican Communion’s commitment to the ‘Welcoming the Stranger’. ‘Welcoming the Stranger’ is an initiative to encourage faith communities to welcome those who arrive and who are seen as “strangers” in their communities. It is a way for us to stand together as people of faith as we receive migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons. Welcoming the Stranger grew out of a dialogue of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with faith leaders, faith-based humanitarian organisations, academics and government representatives from around the world, which developed a set of affirmations to be used as a tool to encourage us to support refugees and other displaced persons. The commitment was signed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2013 and remains a core document and ethos for how ACOUN approaches issues of refugees and migration.

What does this look like in practice?

It means working together with ecumenical and interfaith partners to encourage a culture of encounter between host communities and refugees – through the Share the Journey campaign[[7]](#endnote-7) inspired by the words of Pope Francis.

It means standing with other civil society groups to challenge governments with a strong collective voice to ensure that vulnerable migrants aren’t forgotten in the Global Compacts.[[8]](#endnote-8)

And it means using all opportunities available to us to share the experiences of Anglican and Episcopalian communities around the world, as they support refugees and migrant communities – living out the 3rd Anglican Mark of Mission: to respond to human need by loving service.

If you would like to learn more about ACOUN’s work on refugees, migration and IDPs, you can contact the Anglican Communion Permanent Representative to the United Nations:

Jack Palmer-White: un.rep@aco.org

1. <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/8197> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <http://abouthungary.hu/blog/security-first-hungary-responds-to-the-un-with-a-12-point-proposal-to-handle-global-migration/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/43ce1cff2> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/internally-displaced-people.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.sharejourney.org/> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.madenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Open%20Civil%20Society%20Letter_11May_Final_EN.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)