

## Oral Statement on Rights, Mercy for the Children Unaccompanied Across Borders



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Panel discussion on unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents and human rights

### ***Migration in Central America: Migrants are not a danger, but are in danger Rights, Mercy for the Children Unaccompanied Across Borders***

*Joint statement signed by: International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23), International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE-ICCB), Compagnie des Filles de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers), International Movement of Apostolate in the Independent Social Milieus (MIAMSI), New Humanity for a United World, Pax Romana (ICMICA/MIIC), Association Points-Coeur (Heart's Home Association), and Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN).*

UNICEF reports that **between 2015 and 2016, 300,000 children worldwide** journeyed without parents through countries not their own, nearly five times more than between 2010 and 2011.<sup>1</sup> Government reports indicate that **75,000 of these children moved from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras**.<sup>2</sup> But those reports only count the children who were apprehended! The real number is even higher.

Many are fleeing war, generalized or gang violence, climate change, or lack of work or food in their home countries. **All are vulnerable.** From our work directly with the children, our organizations know that many—*many*—are terribly treated by smugglers, traffickers and even authorities along the way. Tens of thousands are forced into detention and to return, only to try again, sometimes even three or four times!

**Pope Francis** urges us all, “*Let our hearts be attentive and open to the pain of our neighbours, especially where children are involved.*”<sup>2</sup> Let us respond to the pain of the children on the move. The new Global Compact on Migration must include **practical, existing mechanisms—with timelines for action that:**

- **respond immediately, “needs-first” to unaccompanied children and other vulnerable migrants in vulnerable situations;**
- **take forward paragraphs 51 and 52 of the *New York Declaration* to develop guidelines for their assistance and protection;**

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund), *A Child is a Child*, May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2015>  
<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016>.

- **fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to strengthen the right to *not migrate***, so that migration is by choice, not by necessity;
- respect widely ratified international treaties containing “**red-line**” prohibitions against forced return of refugees, stateless persons, victims of torture and others to places where their human rights will be gravely violated;
- implement universal right of children to **best interest determinations** in all procedures affecting their rights;
- **end detention of children** on the basis of their or their family members’ migration status, with community-based alternatives that ensure the safety and welfare of the children *first*;
- empower child protection authorities systematically to work with unaccompanied migrant children to **trace and reconnect them with their families**;
- strengthen **data** on the full number of children migrating, and re-migrating;
- reinforce the **consular network** in transit and destination countries.

We must *take care of the children*. So we welcome this event, and leaders like Bishop Ramazzini and other Church and civil society actors, who do take care of children, on the move, in Central America and around the world.