INTRODUCTION

It was a year of surprising revolt. People in ever growing numbers demanded change in the policy of their government, protesting, on the one hand, a lack of political movement on regularizing immigrants, and on the other, a host of increasingly repressive enforcement measures, most in the name of security. With fluctuating levels of hope and despair, many looked to the capital for George to take effective action.

But this was not 2006, it was 1776: and the George was not a Bush, but a King—George the III of England. One of the chief grievances that the American colonies raised against King George—in no less than paragraph 9 of the Declaration of Independence!— was for “obstructing the laws for naturalization for foreigners; [and] refusing to pass others to encourage their migration…”

As in so many countries of the world, the history of the US from its very beginning is filled with the political challenge of trying to figure out how to respond to new arrivals, and the quite obvious—but charged—solution of legalization.

This is your work, and mine. As men and women working in the Church, and together with this whole Church, we are partners in the prayers and dreams of millions, here and around the world.

But refugees and migrants are more than their movement, more than their moment of arrival in this or any other country. And like everyone else we work with—and ourselves—they are much more than their vulnerability. There is a “before” as well as a “during” and “after.” For every refugee and migrant, there is a time when options are considered, and a decision is made: to leave or not leave.

How many of you, like me, remember that moment in your own lives—or that moment in the lives of your spouse, your parents or grandparents? How many of you hold in your souls that moment: to leave or not leave.
1. THE RIGHTS TO LEAVE ANY COUNTRY & RETURN TO ONE’S OWN

All people have the universal, fundamental right to leave any country and also to return to their own.

Those rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the mother charter of all international human rights [Article 13.] Principles of Catholic social teaching have long supported the same rights, but they are in fact second on our list of migration-related rights, not first.

Because the first right is actually the right to not migrate. People have a right to stay home.

And we know that many would prefer to if only they could.

“I have no choice but to leave,” the Irish poet writes, “to leave, And yet there is nowhere I more yearn to live than in my own wild countryside, Backside to the wind.”

[-- Irish poet Paul Durcan, Sam’s Cross 16.]

We also know the aching cost for so many when they have to—millions—and for those left behind.

“Your loved ones across that ocean… will sit at breakfast and try not to gaze where you would sit at the table. Meals now divided by five instead of six, don’t feed an emptiness.”

[-- Philippina poet Nadine Sarreal, in Singapore.]

2. THE RIGHT TO NOT MIGRATE

I remember the first time I read Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, one of the most beautiful and instructive pastoral letters that the US Bishops have ever written, this time together with the Bishops of Mexico. I was surprised—even startled—at the mention on page 15 of the right to not migrate:

“All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.”

There it is, crystal clear. Common good and common sense: the goal of helping people to be able to not move.

It’s a little strange talking about helping people stay home to experts and professionals who do so much to help people stay here. But that’s the point: we are a Church doing both.

3. WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE RIGHT TO NOT MIGRATE?
Based on its experience in so many countries around the world, including a number of partnerships with ICMC over the years, CRS explains further:

“This ‘right to not migrate’ is based on the conviction that economic policies must respond to the needs of the most vulnerable sectors – in this case, those most likely to be uprooted. […]

The long-term goal is equitable development, with migration as a choice rather than a necessity.”

[--Catholic Relief Services, Recommendations to the US Trade Representative during negotiation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, October 2003.]

Migration as a choice, not as a necessity. So TWO STEPS are needed if people are to be able to exercise the right to not migrate: first, to end the necessity of migration, which means to reduce forced migration of all kinds, and then to improve choices that permit people to stay home. Our Church, ICMC included, works towards both objectives:

- at a global level, by addressing—and calling governments to address—root causes of migration; and
- directly with people and communities, in programs that help people to stay home if they want to.

4. ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES TO REDUCE MIGRATION

It’s rather astonishing how much governments spend on walls, raids and planes to keep people out. If the world truly wants migration to be a choice and not a necessity; if we want people to genuinely be able to exercise their right to not migrate, we have to address the root causes of migration. The Florida Bishops emphasized this call in a pastoral letter they published a few months ago, entitled Honoring the Dignity of Work: A Call for Solidarity with Florida’s Farm workers and Other Vulnerable Workers:

“Importantly, a comprehensive approach is one that addresses the root causes of migration as well, because no human beings should have to emigrate just to live in dignity and support their loved ones.”

Because whether for themselves or their families, with or without papers, many people leave to live.

Last month I met a man who had arrived in the Canary Islands, Spain, without papers from Mauritania, in Africa:

“The European Union and other countries should know,” he said, “that people who leave their countries do so against their own will. Because it is not natural to leave and live away from your own family! Against my own will I had to leave my own family, including a 2 year old baby son. The first time I arrived here I cried in my room…

There is something that has pushed people to leave their families. Whether political or economic, it is serious.”

[--conversation in the Canary Islands, April 23, 2007.]
An analysis of root causes of migration and remedies is the subject for another talk. Suffice it to say however, that more than any other institution on the planet, the Catholic Church works worldwide and without regard to religion, race, nationality or ethnicity, to reduce poverty, to avoid and end conflict, to provide emergency response to natural and man-made disaster, and to remedy what the Global Commission for International Migration called the “3 D’s” driving most migration today: differences in demographics, development and democracy. For over 50 years, ICMC has directed and supported such programming, both in operations and in advocacy.

### 5. WORKING DIRECTLY WITH INDIVIDUALS & COMMUNITIES TO ENABLE PEOPLE TO NOT MIGRATE, AND NOT RE-MIGRATE

Afire in the same Spirit and on the same team with you, ICMC is part of the Church in the field, working with the Bishops Conferences worldwide and in 40 countries with great partners like the Catholic Charities and Caritas organizations, the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans and Scalabrinians; the Sisters of Mercy and so many other religious communities, congregations and parishes; religious and lay people; the UN, governments, citizens and migrants.

Some of that work directly supports the right to not migrate:

- **In places like Indonesia and Pakistan**, ICMC offers displaced victims of natural disaster training in skills and livelihoods; legal counseling; special planning for the extremely vulnerable; and community building, all to help preserve for people a choice to stay in their own land;

- **In countertrafficking programs** in the Mideast and regions of Europe and Asia, two of ICMC’s major objectives are to prevent people from falling into that betrayal of migration, and to prevent those rescued from it from falling back into it or feeling they have to remigrate some other way. Community awareness-raising, intensive, individualized case work and planning are key. From across the ocean, ICMC bows in respect and appreciation to the fine work that CLINIC and the USCCB Migration and Refugee Services network do—with victims of trafficking and those abused by smugglers.

- In the growing international discussion of the links between migration and development—a discussion in which Bishop DiMarzio has been a strong and respected global leader—ICMC was one of only 5 non-government organizations chosen worldwide to speak to the UN General Assembly at its interministerial High Level Dialogue last September. Like in your magnificent Justice for Immigrants campaign in the US, ICMC tries to express at the international policy level the dignity and the rights of human beings faced with the desperation or dreams that often lead to migration.

These efforts are about trying to ensure that people have the choice to stay in their own countries, that migration is not the only choice they have.

**For people who have already migrated**, ICMC shares with you the search for temporary and durable solutions, particularly for refugees and migrants that meet walls rather than bridges. 4 quick examples:

- **Voluntary return** is always the most common option. ICMC’s largest program ever involved the return home of some 70,000 Afghans in 2004. In the Balkans and Southeast Asia, ICMC works with individuals and families who are voluntarily considering the possibility of returning home, organizing information-sharing and go-
and-see visits as well as assistance with housing, income generation, institution-building and actual return. Even beyond community building, ICMC has embraced the challenge of peacebuilding in areas torn by ethnic and religious conflict.

- **As you well know, local integration** can raise some of the hardest challenges, including difficult questions of the capacity—or interest—of the host society to absorb refugees and other displaced people, and the needs of the host societies themselves. In Albania for example, ICMC has worked for nearly a decade on community building and development in a city that has attracted a large number of internal migrants.

- **Refugee resettlement processing**, for which ICMC is perhaps best known, has included the processing of thousands of Kosovars and others from the former Yugoslavia that you welcomed in your dioceses a few years back, and today, the beginning of the tragic flow of Iraqi refugees to be resettled. Last year, ICMC won a grant from the European Union to create a “European Resettlement Network,” bringing together non-profits and governments to increase the number of refugees being resettled throughout Europe.

- **And finally, special services for the extremely vulnerable**: ICMC is honored to be working with MRS and the dioceses of Chicago, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Galveston-Houston and San Antonio on child welfare and alternatives to detention for unaccompanied migrant children in the US.

**CLOSE**

**You know, since I migrated from the US two years ago**, I have often thought of the CLINIC network here, your signature mix of high spirit and high standards, and the fine collaboration with MRS in so many areas. You should know that people overseas notice, that people in all corners of the world look to you for inspiration and leadership.

- Last year, when people were filling the streets in cities across America for the cause, I was at an international conference in Mexico City. After a talk, I received question after question from the participants—not about anything I had said, but about the great things the Church was doing with immigrants up here. The same happened again at the meeting of our members in Rome in June: bishops and other church leaders from Asia, from Africa, from Australia talking with great appreciation of your work here. Well, take a well-deserved bow!

- Just a few weeks ago, one of our French partners told me, breathlessly, of her recent visit to several of your programs in the States: how amazed and inspired she was. Take another bow!

Mark Franken, take the biggest bow. Ladies and gentlemen, the long-serving Vice-President of ICMC: this is a man who has saved lives and changed the world.

And I’d like to close with that message. Let us inspire one another in this work. **Wherever** people are in their decision to migrate, wherever we may be in our efforts for greater legalization, let us touch the pain, free the truth, feel the greatness of heart, and together glimpse the resurrection in it all.

In a new book The Visible World, about resistance efforts in World War II Czechoslovakia, the narrator observes: “It is up to us, the living, to supply a shape where none exists, to rescue from the flood even those we never knew. Like beggars, we must patch the universe as best we can.”

**Building bridges, not walls**, let us indeed patch the universe as best we can.

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