# CROSSROADS – Grail International - February 2018

# Does the Migratory Crisis of the Second Millennium Create Conflicts?Gemma Di Marino Italy

Spurred on by all the talk about the migration crisis (opinions, discourses, interviews, polls, etc), I re-read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and because of the issues the material raises or can unleash, in the spirit of sharing, I suggest you all read it as well.

It is a declaration that was produced by representatives from all regions of the world and included all the legal mores. Formally adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, it is the most universal document on human rights that exists. It describes the fundamental rights that form the basis of a democratic society, recognizes the dignity of every human being and is the basis of liberty, justice and peace in the world.

The Assembly asked all member states to share the Declaration – in order that it be diffused, posted, read and explained in the schools and other educational institutions, without discrimination, and is the basis of political positions in countries and regions.

The Declaration is a concrete document, accepted throughout the world as a contract between governments and its people.

I cite some articles:

Article 1, no. 1 reads: **All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards others with a spirit of brotherhood**.

Articles 14 e 15 in no. 1 state: **each individual has the right to seek refuge from persecution in other countries. Every single person has the right to citizenship**

Article 16, no. 1 states: ***Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to move and found a family.***

The underlying question that I ask myself is: if we think and insist that we all have the right to move freely, to cross borders and to choose where to live, regardless of birthplace, economic or political conditions, or color of the skin, why do we define this movement as a problem or crisis? Migration is one of the major signs of our times, a movement, an event of global import and connection that is particularly noteworthy in the Mediterranean region, on the border between Mexico and the United States, in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, in Southeast Asia and in Eastern Europe.

The geopolitical borders and equilibrium changes but we cannot remain indifferent looking at some of the following numbers:

- 47 Countries involved in conflicts in the world,

- 4,733 Refugees who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in 2016,

- 748 million people in the world without access to food and water,

- 2,5 billion people in the world without sanitary facilities, due to war and natural disasters. - 40 years – life expectancy of one third of the population in the poorest countries, due to the absence of basic services, such as potable water and medical care.

- 3 out of every 4 individuals in the world do not turn 50 years of age.

- 1 out of 14,000 women in Sweden at risk of a maternal death, while in Chad (Central Africa, it is 1 out of 15.

- 122 million young people between the ages of 5 and 15 are illiterate.

- 40% of the Earth’s surface is threatened by desertification – a phenomenon that transforms 12 million hectares of fertile land into desert every year.

These are some of the reasons behind why millions of people migrate in search of a better life or merely survival. The difficulties of migrants are even graver for women and children, and often take the form of abuse by handlers along the migration routes and being taken advantage of and enslaved or trafficked en route by criminals.

A truly inhuman picture emerges from a report of the support mission to the United Nations in Libya, published in 2016, which denounces the extremely precarious conditions of the migrants, held up in various detention centers, and subjected to extortion, forced labor, abuse, torture, and to whom are distributed very little, horrible food and no medical/nursing care. Women are victims of domestic violence, and the employees of the state and local administrators participate in contraband and human trafficking.

We know that the international community has mobilized to address some of these issues: of all of them, probably one of the most urgent questions in the history of the world today, where there are so many conflicts. It all calls on the entire society and the Church to act and take a clear and definitive stance, based on conscience.

Migrants led into the detention center in Garabulli, Libya – July 8, 2017

Whoever is reading this will certainly ask: But what can I do or say? It doesn’t depend on me. Maybe it is true, but we Christians have lots of ways of responding, questioning ourselves, and putting ourselves in crisis, if need be.

Pope Francis has been one such person who, from the beginning, was not afraid to address this conflict. From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has said explicitly in the *Gaudium Evangelii*, no. 226: “Conflict cannot be ignored or wished away. It should be accepted. But if we become trapped by it, we lose perspective, horizons become limited and the very reality becomes distorted.”

What does it mean for us to confront this conflict, or better, this contrast of ideas about that which we are and that which we want to be. Do we ignore it or confront it and try to resolve it?

Between that which we see and that which we wish to see. We can not only think about emotional responses or gestures of solidarity towards some of the victims of the worst injustices. In my opinion, one should make a choice that is rooted in the way of understanding all evangelizing action of the Church.

During the International Forum “Migration and Peace”, held in February 2017, Pope Francis Bergoglio synthesized the dimensions of this choice through four words: accept, protect, promote, and integrate, inviting us to live these verbs concretely as individuals and as communities, adding: “I believe linking these four verbs, in first person singular and plural, today represents a duty, an obligation with respect to our sisters and brothers, that for various reasons, are forced to leave their place of origin, an obligation of justice, civility, and solidarity.

Strong words were also used by Pope Francis during his last trip to Colombia – words that moved the entire world, and it is a warning: “Reconcile and open a door to all who have experienced the dramatic reality of conflict. Some need to have the courage to take the first step in this direction, without waiting for the others to do it.  Not every one of us can be this person.  It does not mean we ignore or dissimulate with the differences in conflicts.  Like Mary, say yes to the whole story, not just to a part, like Christ, taking this weight on.  Embrace this story, because we are all in it together.”

“Sustain a turning of the wheel; those fleeing from the abuse of the powers that be.  Abandon neutrality of those who choose nothing but to remain alone among themselves.  Work for the dignity of all our brothers and sisters, especially the poor, the marginalized, the abandoned, for immigrants, for those that suffered violence and trafficking.  They all have human dignity because they are the living images of God.”