

## Address to the Assembly of Delegates of Dianova International Palma de Mallorca, Spain

By Rev. Liberato C. Bautista  
Assistant General Secretary for United Nations and International Affairs  
General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church

### *Celebrating our partnership and collaboration*

1. Esteemed officers of Dianova International and the distinguished delegates of its highest body—the Assembly of Delegates; your directorate, especially Montse Rafel, your Director General, and Mario Prieto, whose friendship and collaboration I truly and continue to enjoy. Along the way, I have met friends from Dianova from Canada, Nicaragua, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and United States, and perhaps more. Your friendship and commitment to social development and social development are infectious and inspiring.
2. It is with great pleasure that I address you today as the Assembly of Delegates of Dianova International. I also bring greetings and felicitations from my General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, from our headquarters in Washington, D.C. You are the highest body of your organization, responsible for endorsing your network's strategic orientations. So I am truly honoured that you are giving me this time and space to speak on an issue that you chose but is close to my heart. The matter about global migration is in fact a major thematic emphasis in my organizational work. But it is also a concern that is deeply personally. I am Filipino citizen working in the United States. I am therefore a migrant worker and a professional in diaspora. This situation has its joys and heartaches. My presentation will hopefully explain.
3. Making this address very especial is the fact that we are launching a partnership that celebrates the uniqueness of each of our organizations—yours Dianova International, and mine the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church. For close to 10 years now I have come to know of Dianova International and the fine work you do in the fields of education, addiction prevention and treatment, as well as in the area of social and community development. I met your representatives for the first time in 2007 at the General Assembly in Geneva of CoNGO, the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations. It was at that assembly that I was elected CoNGO's President. I have since enjoyed your support and collaboration. In fact, today, you are a board member of CoNGO. I operate within NGO circles in my capacity as the main representative worldwide of my organization at the United Nations. Over the last five years, our organizations have jointly co-sponsored side events at the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
4. The signing of a Statement of Partnership (SOP) at the end of September this year speaks of the maturity of our organizational relationship and the high regard that each of our leaders give to the vision and mission of our organizations and the possibilities that this collaboration might give fruit to. The Preamble to our SOP says it well: “This Statement of Partnership between the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church (GBCS) and Organisation International Dianova (OID), establishes a relationship of partnership built on mutual trust,

respect and shared commitment to social justice and preferential option for the poor. This partnership builds on the programmatic and organizational strengths of each organization that will allow for complementarity and collaboration.” I hope that my presence among you today expresses my organization’s appreciation of this partnership and collaboration.

5. The substantive subject of my presentation is on global migration. Seventeen months ago, I had the pleasure to meet Michele Bellasich of Dianova Sweden who came to participate in the fifth international consultation in Stockholm of a tripartite group called CWWM—or Churches Witnessing With Migrants. I am one of the members of the international steering and coordinating committee of this group. This year, in fact just two weekends ago, on 10 and 11 October, we convened the sixth international consultation of Churches Witnessing With Migrants, this time in Istanbul, Turkey. Like in Stockholm, we also held our consultation immediately prior to the annual meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. I facilitated some of the sessions of the conference. More important, I chaired the drafting of what we now call the Istanbul Agreements on Forced Migration. I now turn your attention to that statement. As you will soon realize, it speaks to the most current migration crisis that is occupying a lot of newsprint and radio and television sound bites these days. I will quote from it profusely as I believe it captures what I would like to say on migration. Please note however that my use of the “we” refers to the first person plural in the grammatical sense we used in the statement to refer to the 40 persons, including myself, who issued the statement. I restate literally entirely our statement because I believe in its assertions, not to mention that I led its writing. When needed, in the context of my presentation today, I have added text to move us from one focus to the next.

**First, let me address the pain and tragedy of forced migration.**

6. A quote from one of the keynote speakers in our Istanbul meeting, Eni Lestari, who is a domestic worker from Indonesia working in Hong Kong, but is also the chairperson of the International Migrants Alliance. On the so-called migration crisis in Europe, she said in a statement in September: “The picture of three-year old Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, face down and lifeless after trying to cross to Greece, has been making the rounds of alternative and mainstream media. It moved people, as it must. It called for change, as it should...Let the tragic pictures of the death of children not only break our hearts, but also the walls of exclusion and inhumane migration and refugee policies that do not respect the fundamental rights of people already forcibly displaced by economic want and wars.”
7. Truly, we are gripped by the horror of suffering and deaths of thousands of human beings brought about by forced migration and massive displacements occurring in many places around the world. Such forced migration of peoples stare us in the face. We see this in the ongoing massive dispersal, displacement and dislocation of peoples across the Mediterranean, from and within Africa and the Middle East and into Europe, with many of them braving the elements of long distances, dangerous seas and fortified borders. The thousands of unaccompanied minors crossing into the US from the Mexican border is another appalling situation too vivid and horrific to ignore. Equally appalling is the fate of the Rohingyas of Myanmar and in Bangladesh whose massive migration by sea have been met with largely unwelcoming gestures in the Southeast Asian region. And then there is the violence and abuse against migrant workers and human beings

in various situations of trafficking. The pain and tragedy arising out of these conditions pose challenges we must fully consider and obligations we must take to heart.

8. The great loss of human lives and the massive dislocation of populations from their homes, livelihoods and circles of familiarity are painful and tragic. But pain and tragedy are not going to immobilize and paralyze us. We bear a common responsibility to stop forced migration as peoples of one planet acting beyond our national allegiances, and without fear and prejudices. And respond we will, as we already have and are doing. The urgency of the situation demands the continuation of our acts of mercy, relief and compassion, even as the tragedy of forced migration compels us to work intentionally on acts of justice that take into account the historic roots, systemic causes and contemporary challenges of forced migration.
9. Acts of altruism for migrants and refugees involve the provision of humanitarian services and necessities like food, shelter, clothing, medical care, psychosocial support and the like. Acts of justice involve, among others, the advocacy for structural change and systemic transformation. At the nexus of acts of altruism and justice are acts of solidarity and accompaniment that make available platforms for migrants and refugees to raise their own critical voices and decide for themselves how to protect their human dignity and assert their human rights, and in this context, how to break the walls and prison bars that restrict freedom of movement.

**Our assertions in this Istanbul statement follows the consultations in 2013 in New York and in Stockholm in 2014.**

10. Churches Witnessing With Migrants (CWWM), which issued this statement, is an international platform for advocacy and forthright action focused on global migration, particularly forced migration in all its forms. We are organized as a tripartite body of equals that includes migrants and representatives of migrant-serving and faith-based organizations from various faith traditions. In our practice of the tripartite arrangement, we have come to value working together and inclusively on acts of altruism, accompaniment and justice.
11. Three substantive documents arising from the last three consultations of CWWM, held successively from New York, Stockholm and Istanbul, have propagated the understanding and critical analyses of forced migration, the forms of advocacy and action required to address the wanton disregard for human dignity and the rampant violations of human rights that ensue from forced migration, and the crucial work involved in addressing the historic and systemic roots of today's forced migration. Together, the three documents address outrages to the well-being of peoples and the planet by greed, exploitation and resource extraction. They collectively propound a discourse and practice of development justice whose pillars include redistributive, economic, social, and environmental justice, and accountability to people.
12. In New York (2013), we asserted that the magnitude of neoliberal globalization, and the deepening of structural inequalities within countries and between countries and regions, have unduly privileged profit, greed and unsustainable development practices, including the commodification of human beings and the commoditization of their labor and services. In Stockholm (2014), we affirmed that "it is not possible to understand the realities of forced migration without understanding the intersectionalities of racialized, gendered, sexualized, and securitized migration". New York enunciated the centrality of the personhood of migrants (notion

of being) and the crucial role of human rights for their protection. Stockholm affirmed that migrants—their being and their labor—cannot be commodified and commoditized; they must decide for themselves their lives and labors, and freely determine their destinies (notion of becoming).

13. In Istanbul, we gave time to understand the nexus, also wide swath, between public policy formulation, legislation and implementation on one hand, and the engagement of migrants themselves as deciders of their lives, labors, and destinies, on the other hand. Even as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers negotiate the ambiguities and formalities of public policy formulation, in the process they forge identities that assert their dignity, they struggle so as to protect their human rights, and they organize so as to forge associations and circles of familiarity meaningful to them and that sustain them in their struggles (notion of belonging).
14. Our public policy involvements, our advocacies, and our solidarities need to be intentional about focusing on the actual material, concrete, sensuous human bodies of human beings and how such bodies respond to the violations of their dignity and the exploitation of their labor and services as they negotiate the workings of market and capital. Hence, the Istanbul consultation examined the metaphors of the body and the “body politic” in understanding the dynamics of “global capitalism” and its consequences. This difficult but needed discourse provided the opening for how to ground and orient our understanding of migration, immigration, and emigration, but also, and perhaps more important, as a way to resist the objectification, reification, and commodification of human beings and nature arising out of the estrangement intrinsic to the dynamics of capitalism’s relations of production, reproduction, and representation.
15. In Istanbul (2015), we agreed that the just, durable and sustainable solution to forced migration involves sustainable development that prioritizes the rights of peoples, protects their environment, and promotes democratic space at all levels of participation and governance, which in turn prospers sustainable peace. This form of sustainable development focuses on freeing peoples from poverty and hunger and protecting the planet from development aggression, global and structural inequalities, and neocolonial plunder and exploitation, including extractive practices and policies. This is development that truly eliminates the reason for forced migration and massive displacements.

**Let me now turn to the realities and challenges of forced migration and massive displacement.**

16. Yet again, we were made painfully aware that migrants and their advocacies for their immediate welfare and struggles for social justice are being challenged, even ignored. Increasingly, nation-states are using the phantoms of jobs scarcity and dwindling resources to justify clamping down on refugee and migration flows, and the reduction, if not abolition all together, of various forms of social safety nets and public services. As economic and other crises rage with so-called sluggish economic recovery, refugees and migrants are being used as convenient scapegoats, blurring, if not totally skipping over, the reality that skewed economic policies and the lack of political will and the courage to forge human solidarity beyond national allegiances are at the root of the problems related to forced migration.
17. The same neoliberal-driven economics that uphold labor export is forcibly driving millions of people from their homelands who are seeking a safer and more secure life, if not for them, also

for their families. Extreme poverty and unemployment, global economic exploitation, militarization, environmental degradation, resource grabs, longstanding wars and conflicts in many countries and regions, and political and religious persecution, severally or collectively have resulted in a combination of internal displacements and forced migration of hundreds of thousands of peoples from their countries and across lands, borders and dangerous seas. In their wake are migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and a variety of human trafficking conditions (sex, child, labor, drugs, and human organs) and various forms of sexual and gender violence. Climate change that has resulted into environmental degradation is reshaping our planet that is home to diverse species and humanity itself, and producing what we call today as climate refugees.

18. I assume we all agree that all human rights are migrant rights; that human dignity is inalienable and indivisible. It bears repeating in this moment of urgency that this current massive dispersal, dislocation, and displacement of peoples has clear, although complex, historical roots of injustices brought about by slavery, colonialism and racism even as neoliberal globalization exhibits contemporary forms of economic exploitation, political oppression, cultural subjugation, and intervention and occupation by enriched and powerful countries that we must confront.
19. Our understanding of forced migration and the many challenges and responsibilities to address it were enriched by the stories, narratives and expertise shared by our participants representing themselves and their organizations from and based in countries and regions around the world, including Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Zimbabwe. We did not have a participant from Spain and therefore we lacked a perspective from this country, even as we were made aware of important work being done in Spain, including the situation in Ceuta. Is it possible that Spain's relative egalitarianism can persist into the foreseeable future so as it maintains a general openness to migration, including integration, and the widening of avenues for legal immigration rather than limiting flows? I'd be interested to learn from you.
20. Among several issues we discussed are the following: 1) the massive migration across the Mediterranean, from Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa (Syrians, Somalis, Afghans, Eritreans) of peoples fleeing brutal dictatorships, political and sectarian repression, extremist violence and ethnic cleansing, arriving on the shores of Europe, if they survived drowning at sea; 2) the decades of migration of some five million Palestinians into Lebanon, resulting from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, demonstrating migration within the same region and the long term impact of hosting refugees; 3) two cases of various forms of violence and physical abuse against domestic workers from Indonesia and the Philippines, illustrating the success of organized global solidarity and action; 4) two cases of human trafficking, one from Cameroon into the United States and another from the Philippines to Canada, both cases demonstrating the importance of perseverance in running after human traffickers and the necessity of community support in fighting against human trafficking especially in the courts; 5) the gender dimensions and concerns of the invisible African women hidden away in crammed housing in Italy's Lampedusa, especially cases involving women and girls who are brutalized, raped, trafficked for sex, and enslaved as domestic labor and how national policies are reinforcing such practices; and 6) the Lumads, indigenous peoples of Mindanao, southern Philippines, who have become refugees in different parts of the Philippines after fleeing from escalating militarization and

violence, rape and harassment by mining and other business interests taking over their ancestral domains, and from attacks on their schools and communities that have led to extrajudicial killings of its peoples and leaders.

21. Even more so than previously, forced migration is challenging the migration policies of migrant-origin and migrant-destination countries. The situation in Europe is a case in point. The closure of borders and heightened restrictions in the entry of foreign nationals—be they migrants displaced by economic hardships, or refugees and asylum seekers fleeing from wars and political strife and religious persecution—are slowly creeping not only into Europe but also in other destination countries of many who are forcibly displaced from countries of birth or transit. The United Nations has proclaimed the European migration crisis a global threat. For the European Union (EU), it is primarily a regional unity and security issue. But this unity and security are now fractured by national policies that are fueled by statist, populist, xenophobic and discriminatory ideologies and practices that threaten national and regional, if not, global peace and security. In turn, some European countries are devolving into fortress states, threatening if not deploying police and military action against those who seek to cross their borders and those who aid them, emphasizing that border crossings are potential security threats.
22. While the migration crisis has led to considerable challenges in countries affected by it, we underline that in cases like Europe, it is a crisis which is manageable for a regional community which has the size and wealth of EU. At the same time we call on public authorities and all stakeholders to acknowledge and put into practice the rights which migrants, refugees and asylum seekers already have under domestic, regional (EU and African Union) and international laws. We believe that in order to solve the crisis, we must not do any more harm and avoid the unnecessary loss of lives. A new system of safe and legal passage must be put in place, including provisions about resettlement, family unification, humanitarian visas and suspension of visa obligations.

#### **What do the realities say of the responsibilities and tasks that lie ahead?**

23. The Istanbul consultation directed us to develop strategies, mechanisms and protocols on how to respond to urgent life and death situations facing migrants, their families and communities, while continuing public policy advocacy and organizing at all levels to achieve the longer term struggle for social justice. We will be sure to undergird the intersections of migration, human rights, and development justice, moving beyond protection towards recovery, restoration and transformation of migrant's lives and well-being. This will include work that will truly eliminate hunger and eradicate poverty for all. It is in this light that we will engage critically with local, national, regional, international, governmental, intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and multilateral mechanisms, including the United Nations and related bodies, to work for the welfare and human rights of migrants and their families and communities. The same manner of engagement will include the processes and mechanisms to implement and realize all internationally agreed development goals, including the newly agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its 17 goals and 169 targets, acknowledging how fragile and threatened are the political will and promises, and the economic and political infrastructures, which undergird them.
24. In Istanbul, we also celebrated the many forms of solidarious acts of accompaniment, empowerment and capacity building rendered by our faith bodies, together with grassroots and

nongovernmental organizations. These include essential parts in rendering an inclusive welcome and radical hospitality to newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Remarkable work is being done especially in frontline countries like Italy and Greece, where there is advocacy within Europe for the adoption of models of action declaring “humanitarian corridors” for safe passage or issuing “humanitarian visa” based, for example, on EU Visa code, for those who need and deserve immediate humanitarian protection. Faith bodies and civic organizations in countries like Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, , Spain, and Turkey, have acted with compassion to the migration crisis, opening doors to those in need and planning for sustainable and just resettlement. We celebrated and expressed solidarity with the churches in focal points such as Lampedusa, Lesbos, Ceuta, and in the Hungarian borders that have granted assistance to and solidarity with migrants. Their work and ministries on all sides of the Mediterranean—Africa, Europe and the Middle East—is longstanding and therefore not new. What is new that led to the recent dimension of emergency in Europe is the heightened and offensive rejection of migrants and the hermetic closure of its borders. The demonstration of shared responsibility and obligation by many peoples and communities is testament to the actual living out of radical hospitality and inclusive community in our world. We resolved in Istanbul to share as many of our stories and narratives, singly and collectively, utilizing many forms of communication tools, to tell of the great, albeit daunting, tasks being done and are lying yet ahead. To make this a reality today is not just a challenge but already a joy to behold!

25. It was clear from the representatives of ecumenical and other faith traditions that we must speak prophetically and decisively! For the global grassroots movement of migrants and refugees, including survivors of human trafficking, gender-based violence, and religious and political persecution, the challenge was for them to vigilantly reclaim their human rights and speak with forthright determination of their struggles and hopes in their places of work, countries of transit and destination, and communities of belonging. Everyone gathered in Istanbul affirmed that we will no longer allow migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to be defined by their stations and status in life except by our common and inalienable dignity and indivisible human rights as human beings.
26. For the faith-based institutions in the CWWM, we considered the moment that is before us as something about God’s order of justice and peace, and a summons to our faith and resources to serve God’s people, not the least the migrants. This same moment is about the cry, call, and struggle of the people called migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, survivors of human trafficking, and their movements for justice, peace and sustainability. We claimed our responsibility to respond with duty and obligation, even as we realized that religious institutions and social movements—including their structures, efforts, mechanisms and processes—remain largely inadequate in responding to such a moment and struggle. We prayed we will seize the moment, grasp the tasks ahead, and all rise to the occasion.
27. And so we agreed that what we already do to address forced migration and massive displacements must be heightened and sustained. Together, we reaffirmed the collective work we do through CWWM and resolved to improve upon the structure, network and resources that make this joint work possible. For the church and the ecumenical communities, we resolved to make visible God’s justice and accompaniment in the struggles and hopes of the displaced, dislocated and dispersed migrants. For the migrants among us, we pledged to persevere in organizing their ranks and reclaiming their dignity and asserting their human rights. For everyone,

we celebrated the strength that comes from our unity and solidarity to establish just, peaceable, durable and sustainable communities for all. We prayed for fortitude and courage to forge ahead.

28. We left Istanbul last week asserting saying that “the time to act decisively is long overdue and cannot be delayed.” Might it be that our Dianova and GBCS partnership and collaboration bear fruits that allow us to work together on migration in general, and forced migration in particular? These are pressing issues of great magnitude that demands forthright action by as many groups as possible. Our ethical response to these issues cannot fall short of social justice that we jointly endeavor to achieve and prosper.

**Thank you again for having me here and allowing me to share these thoughts.**

23 October 2015

Palma de Mallorca