



The Holy See

**MESSAGGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING OF BISHOPS
OF COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA AND PANAMA**

[Panama, 19-22 March 2024]

I cordially greet the participants in the meeting, “Easter with our migrant brothers and sisters. Meeting of Border Bishops of Colombia and Costa Rica and Bishops of Panama”.

I am glad that your meeting joins initiatives such as the Ninth Meeting of Bishops from the borders of Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean held in El Salvador; the Second Meeting of Bishops from the Colombia-Venezuela border in Cúcuta; and the Meeting of Bishops from the Colombia-Ecuador border in Pasto.

The evangelist Matthew tells us that “on the first day of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus, asking “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” (26:17). Today, the Church on pilgrimage in Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama, in association with the Lord, wants to answer: “In the Darién, with our migrant brothers and sisters”. It is there that they are waiting for us, on the shore of a sea of tears and death that unites men and women, adults and children from the most diverse latitudes.

Migration in this region includes Venezuelans, Ecuadorians, Colombians, and Haitians, who along the way join with groups of Nicaraguans and other Central American migrants, as well as those from other continents. With its multicultural facet, this human caravan passes through the Darién Gap, a jungle that is a triumph of nature, but which today has become a real *via crucis* that not only highlights the limits of migration governance in the Western hemisphere, but also feeds a thriving business that allows for the accumulation of illicit profits from human trafficking.

Neither the dangers posed by transit and illegal blackmail, nor the increasing returns or stalemates in countries where these brothers and sisters are not wanted, diminish the attraction (real or

illusory) of satisfying the needs of employment and better living conditions, or even of a hoped-for family reunification.

The Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, as witnessed by the five general conferences of its Episcopal Council, has always expressed her concern for the issue of migration, seeking to be a Church without borders, Mother of all. That is why, as Christians, every refugee and migrant who leaves his or her homeland challenges us. In our villages we find at the same time the hospitable fraternity that welcomes with human sensitivity, but also, unfortunately, the indifference that stains the Darién with blood.

I encourage you to work tirelessly to eradicate this indifference, so that when a migrant brother or sister arrives, he or she will find in the Church a place where he or she will not feel judged but welcomed, where hunger and thirst can be quenched and hope revived. Therefore, pastoral care for human mobility urges us, as Isaiah says, to widen the space of the tent (cf. 54:2) so that, recognizing that we are also foreigners, with our own vulnerabilities and needs, we can create the necessary conditions to welcome our neighbour as a brother or sister, and thus make him or her a part of our daily life.

I acknowledge with gratitude that the Church in the Americas, from the North to the South, including the Caribbean, has a broad and diverse system of pastoral, charitable and human mobility ministry at national and local levels, which manifests itself through a broad and robust response in direct assistance to migrants, in the form of shelters, returnee centres, emergency humanitarian assistance, medical care, psychosocial care, legal advice, spiritual support, strengthening of migrant collectives, livelihoods and processes with political impacts. Please do not neglect these establishments, which are an opportunity for welcome and charity towards our brothers and sisters who are most in need.

A regional approach to migration is also a pastoral opportunity. In my message for the [World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023](#), I recalled that the right not to migrate is presented to us as a solution, albeit a long-term one, to forced migration, through the regional integration of countries of expulsion, transit, destination and return of migrants. I urge you, therefore, to join forces with all the bodies of the international community, so that everyone may have the right to remain in their homeland with a dignified and peaceful life.

The path of migration needs pastors and pastoral workers who dare to go beyond the limits of the established, who are not afraid to acknowledge any path because they have lost the fear that paralyses, who are capable of returning to the essential, detaching themselves from indifference, because they are aware that only by walking at God's pace with his holy people will it be possible to cross the barriers of the conventional, leading the Church, together with our migrant brothers and sisters, along paths of hope.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we be capable of forming one Church ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone, without distinction and without leaving anyone out, recognizing the right of each one to offer his or her contribution, through work and personal effort, to the good of all and to the protection of our common home.

I encourage you to live these days with joy and hope, and may the approaching Easter be the reason that reminds you that all efforts are worthwhile. May Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin watch over you, and, please, do not forget to pray for me.

Fraternally yours,

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 19 March 2024

Francis

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