

## **Presentation to Seminarians on 17 Feb 2021 re Migrants and Refugees**

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO ACCOMPANY THE SUBMISSION BY THE CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE/ARCHDIOCESAN MINISTRY FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES – FOR FUNDING FROM THE JULIA TAFT REFUGEE FUND**

Since December 2020, the Archdiocesan Ministry for Migrants and Refugees (AMMR), has expanded its work to also incorporate the specific needs of children who have arrived in TT from Venezuela **unaccompanied** or who have been **separated** from their parents.

Information from the Counter Trafficking Unit shows that approximately **138 such children** arrived in TT from Venezuela over the past few years and they remain vulnerable. There is no accurate data regarding this group of children.

Child protection systems are overwhelmed with limited capacity to identify and respond to the rising protection needs of children on the move, especially those trafficked, unaccompanied, and separated and requiring alternative care arrangements.

As such, CCSJ/AMMR is working closely with UNICEF and national partners, such as LWC, with the aim of providing protection and assistance to any vulnerable migrant or refugee in need, including seeking to establish family and community-based alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied, separated, and trafficked minors.

As well as a Programme Coordinator supporting CCSJ/AMMR, a Case Management Officer – Alternative Care, has been appointed, with the assistance of UNICEF. CCSJ/AMMR is working to establish community-based child protection committees within parishes and mobilize volunteers to provide temporary alternative care for children on the move

We are planning interventions to address the interim, medium and long term care needs of unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children.

Darrion Narine is the Archdiocese's Programme Coordinator for AMMR. Tameka Romeo is The Case Management Officer who is responsible for implementing the Alternative Care Programme supported by UNICEF. Her role

is to ensure that quality programming, strong networks and capacities are built to provide care and protection to unaccompanied, separated, and trafficked children.

She is working diligently with Darrion and me to encourage persons in our 61 parishes to volunteer as caregivers and care supporters. We are seeking to ensure that care interventions are informed by and integrated with other core sectors of education, health, nutrition, food security and livelihoods.

As one can imagine, this requires effective coordination between CCSJ/AMMR and child protection and/or national security actors who have a role in the provision and or supervision of alternative care arrangements.

We will be monitoring following up on children in residential or detention facilities and will advocate and plan programmes for their transition into family or community-based care options as an alternative option.

Monitoring and evaluation of this work requires that we maintain a database and regularly follow-up with children, caregivers and care supporters in alternative care and facilitate quarterly briefing sessions, focus groups and training.

We will also document and create human interest stories on the experience of children and caregivers/care supporters within the alternative care programme. We plan to have some of these published in Catholic News to help combat xenophobia, and to encourage readers to participate in the programme.

Recently we held a zoom meeting with a range of individuals/organisations that are willing to support this initiative e.g., the Society of St Vincent de Paul which operates in most of our 61 parishes, the Children's Authority, Living Water Community, the former CEO of the Chamber of Commerce etc. Those who attended this virtual meeting have pledged their support of this initiative, and are willing to use their "time, talent and treasure" (in terms of time), to support CCSJ/AMMR.

- Create monthly reports on the number of unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children benefitting from the alternative care programme and identifying gaps, challenges, lessons learned, good practices and recommendations.

## **NOTES FOR ADANNA'S SESSION ON WED 17 FEBRUARY 2021 – WITH SEMINARIANS.**

Greetings, my brothers and sisters in Christ, as you know, in 2018 His Grace, Archbishop Jason Gordon, established an Archdiocesan Ministry – a Ministry for Migrants and Refugees, specifically in response to Pope Francis' mandate that all Dioceses should welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and refugees. In Pope Francis' Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees in January 2018 – entitled: *Migrants and Refugees: men and women in search of peace*, he asks us to develop a strategy combining 4 actions to support Migrants and Refugees: *welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating*. He reminds us that Migrants and Refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity, and urges us to have respect for their lives and dignity.

He reminds us also of the words of St Paul who said in Ephesians 2:19: “*You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people.*”

The earth, says Pope Francis, is our common home and we are a universal family. Together, we are called to build the common good, that is, to create conditions in which each person can realise his or her potential.

Archbishop Jason located this Ministry in CCSJ with me as its Chairperson. AMMR seeks to assist parishes and religious communities in establishing and operationalising this important ministry. At the moment 27 of the 61 Catholic parishes in T&T have established Parish Ministries for Migrants and Refugees (PMMRs), whose voluntary members seek to meet the varied needs of Venezuelan migrants.

Archbishop Jason has made it clear that "we (the church) have to welcome whoever comes and ensure whoever comes will be treated like a human being with decency, if we don't do this, we will be building the next problem for T&T in 10 to 20 years' time. We don't want that."

As Catholics, let's locate our concern for migrants and refugees within our social justice principles – the social doctrine of our Church. The sanctity of life and the inherent dignity of each human being is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of Catholic social teaching.

The permanent character of my dignity is essentially linked to the dignity of others. We are connected. And our dignity is connected. If their dignity is

trampled upon, mine becomes tarnished. It is for this reason that we work with others in TT to meet the needs of those who come to our shores seeking peace; seeking a better life, and this includes encouraging our Government to look again at the legal and practical implications of not ratifying the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

As a result of its location, TT is both a destination and transit country for mixed migratory movement, including a growing number of persons in need of international protection. During the last 10 years, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have come to TT from over 30 countries.

Let me state from the outset, that the Catholic Church recognises that T&T cannot accommodate all those who may wish to come here, let's put in place humane systems to deal with those who do come. Some recent incidents highlight the need for T&T to review its procedures/practices with regard to how we treat migrants.

The protection of refugees has many aspects. These include safety from being returned to the dangers they have fled – non-refoulement; access to asylum procedures that are fair and efficient; and measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected to allow them to live in dignity and safety while helping them to find a longer-term solution.

In Nov 2000, TT acceded to the *1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol*. These are the 2 main international legal instruments that lay down principles which the 148 States that have acceded to them, including TT, will follow. Sadly, although TT has signed on to the Convention and Protocol, these have not been incorporated into domestic legislation, although draft legislation is being prepared. Because T&T is a dualist state, and not a monist state, our Government must ratify and codify these into domestic legislation in order to incorporate these Conventions, and any other Convention or Treaty that it signs. Until this is done, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are not protected by local law.

In June 2014 Cabinet adopted a National Policy to address Refugee and Asylum Matters in TT. The Policy makes some sound recommendations, but there is a need for legislation to support such a Policy.

More than 2 years ago, at an event marking International Men's Day hosted by the Bankers' Association of T&T, Attorney General, Hon. Faris Al-Rawi<sup>6</sup> said: 3 "T&T cannot afford to put systems in place at this time to deal with refugees and asylum seekers. However, he has admitted it is an important discussion for T&T to start having since taxpayers will be the ones to foot the bill eventually when such things are put in place. "Al-Rawi said statistics are needed to guide

the policy. 'The current rate flow out of T&T is approximately 20-40 people per year, so it means that we're signing on as a country—to engage in holding all of the people in your local pot, with a rate flow out of 20-40 people per year. That's a dynamic that this country has to analyse to make sure that we can actually afford to deal with that...that is only one of the points, the other aspect is, well what other systems can we engage in and in fact there are protocols that we've engaged in right now, in terms of access to healthcare, certain access to education etc. So, we're working our way around the peripheries of it. We're in constant discussions with all of the entities.' 'On whether T&T can manage the refugee/asylum situation right now, the AG said, 'The math is, are we prepared from a policy perspective to manage this perspective right now, because once you turn that key, then you create rights and obligations which are actionable and then you have to be prepared to operationalise that law. One cannot easily jump into a situation, knowing that you can't operationalise immediately...It has to be done in a phased perspective...This is not something that one engages in an ad-hoc knee-jerk response. It has to be very carefully considered and that work is being done.'"

Not only has our Government not yet passed any implementing legislation or administrative regulations on asylum or refugee status, but it has also not established a national procedure for screening undocumented migrants and to identify asylum-seekers among mixed migratory groups. T&T needs legal frameworks to provide a principled basis for the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees.

Catholics have been working with migrants and refugees for many years. As Catholics we believe that each migrant and refugee is made in His image and likeness with an inherent, inviolable, inalienable dignity which Pope Francis and Archbishop Jason ask us to promote.

Living Water Community has been working in this area for more than 30 years and is the implementing partner of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner (UNHCR). In TT there are Migrants and Refugees from over 30 countries, including *Cuba, Venezuela, Syria, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Colombia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Congo, Mali, Sudan and Uganda*. There are many children among the men and women seeking refuge here from these and other countries.)

We cannot achieve our goals alone; we need all of you on board. In October 2020 CCSJ signed on to a partnership project with UNICEF. The Project is entitled: *Protection and well-being of children on the move in Trinidad and Tobago*. It provides us with an opportunity to work with parishes to meet the varied needs of migrants and refugees.

The worsening socio-economic, political, human rights and humanitarian conditions in Venezuela have led to the outflow of an estimated 40,000 plus refugees and migrants from Venezuela to Trinidad and Tobago. Information from the Counter Trafficking Unit shows that more than 138 children have arrived in TT from Venezuela unaccompanied or have been separated from their parents.

As you know in May-June 2019, the Government conducted a two-week amnesty that allowed Venezuelan nationals to register. This provided those who registered with the opportunity to be able to work in TT and to access primary health care. This included those who entered irregularly or who overstayed. 16,523 Venezuelans over the age of 16 were successfully registered during this exercise, along with 2,421 children. According to data (June 2020) from UNHCR there are 3,206 children who are seen as persons of concern.

Undocumented “foreigners” who are taken into custody at entry points or during immigration raids, may suffer detention in the Immigration Detention Centre, prisons, and even in cells in police stations. Prosecution for illegal entry/breaching existing deportation orders has been a major challenge as the largest number of asylum-seekers in T&T are Venezuelan Nationals who are unable to acquire passports from their Government.

On 17 June 2019, 2 days after the 2-week registration process for Venezuelans was closed, T&T instituted a requirement that Venezuelans wishing to enter T&T must obtain a visa. Visas must be obtained from T&T's Embassy in Caracas and many Venezuelans cannot afford to go there. Also, there has been complaints about the lengthy process to obtain a visa. Persons continue to enter T&T via unlawful channels. Some are subsequently arrested, detained and prosecuted. Many receive fines and in default of payment, prison sentences. Migrants have received fines in excess of Ten Thousand (\$10,000) TTD and prison sentences up to five (5) years.

There have also been many reports of cases of women allegedly victims of gender-based violence who share children with local TT Nationals. In these instances, legal support is needed for making police reports and sorting out custody arrangements. The protection situation for Venezuelans in the Caribbean is particularly dire; in the absence of functioning Government-run asylum systems or alternative legal pathways, Venezuelans continue to live in a situation of legal limbo and vulnerability to human smugglers, traffickers, forced prostitution, and various forms of exploitation.

This makes it exceedingly difficult for Venezuelans to access basic services and the majority continue to live in the shadows, living and working in highly exploitative environments, suffering from discrimination and xenophobia. As a

result of their undocumented status under T&T's current legislative framework, asylum - seekers, migrants and refugees face many legal challenges. The most common issues are as follows:

1. Prosecution for illegal entry.
2. Prosecution for breaching existing deportation orders.
3. Prosecution for passports with irregular stamps.
4. Arrest/detention for working without a work permit.
5. Unlawful/Prolonged Detention.
6. Deportation/Refoulement.
7. Gender based violence; and
8. Denial of Venezuelan children from attending educational institutions.

### **Access to Education by Venezuelans**

On Thurs 6 June 2019, at a post-Cabinet press conference in Port of Spain, PM Dr Keith Rowley, said that " 'Government cannot prevent Catholic schools from educating the children of Venezuelan migrants...if the Catholic church, in its pastoral work, gets involved with trying to educate the (Venezuelan) children who are not going to school, that is acceptable in TT.' "He added that he welcomed the involvement of NGOs, churches, and volunteer organisations that were willing to assist migrant children in accessing education as those are positive efforts. 'If the school decides to take in certain people in their pastoral work, I don't know that the Government can say to the Catholic school, 'Don't let so and so come through your gate.'

However, he says Government can and will indicate if they are unwilling to carry any liabilities that may result from the decision. He says once those liabilities are not created, there should be no issue. "Minister of National Security and Communications Minister Stuart Young, who was also in attendance, said Government made it clear there was no guarantee of spaces in public schools for migrant children as its main priority was educating TT citizens."

Archbishop Jason Gordon worked with Sharon Mangroo, CEO of the Catholic Education Board of Management, LWC, and other stakeholders to find more than 2,400 spaces to accommodate Venezuelan children in Catholic schools - those whose parents had registered in May-June 2019. However, to date, these children cannot access schools as the Minister of National Security has to grant a waiver for a student permit for each child, and this has not been done. Principals are rightly concerned that they can be fined and imprisoned if they fall foul of the law. Archbishop Jason continues to work behind the scenes striving to secure the waiver. At the moment, therefore, Venezuelan children are not in schools, and many do not have access to online learning.

Child protection systems are overwhelmed with limited capacity to identify and respond to the rising protection needs of children on the move, especially those trafficked, unaccompanied and separated and requiring alternative care arrangements. As such, CCSJ/AMMR is working closely with UNICEF and national partners, such as LWC, with the aim of providing protection and assistance to any vulnerable migrant or refugee in need, including seeking to establish family and community-based alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied, separated and trafficked minors.

To support these efforts, CCSJ/AMMR also wishes to establish community-based child protection committees within parishes and mobilize volunteers to provide temporary alternative care for children on the move

We are planning interventions to address the interim-, medium- and long-term care needs of unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children.

Darrion Narine is the Archdiocese's Programme Coordinator for AMMR, and Tameka Romeo is The Case Management Officer will be responsible for implementing the Alternative Care Programme supported by UNICEF. Her role is to ensure that quality programming, strong networks and capacities are built to provide care and protection to unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children.

To ensure that the alternative care programme is successful, we are encouraging persons in our parishes to volunteer as caregivers and care supporters. We are also striving to establish community-based child protection committees to support alternative care.

We are working with Tameka to ensure that care interventions are informed by and integrated with other core sectors of education, health, nutrition, food security and livelihoods. Sadly, because of rising xenophobia, some health clinics are not addressing the needs of migrants and refugees, even though the Government has stated that they are to be given access to primary health care and to health care if any of them have TB, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Covid-19.

If we had local legislation and an effective Policy, what are the rights that refugees are entitled to: a permit authorising their stay in the country, the right to work, identity papers, travel documents, public assistance (if unable to work and in need), medical care, freedom of movement, family reunification, educational opportunities and recreational activities, counselling for trauma or other psychological issues, and the right not to be expelled from the country (unless the refugee poses a threat to national security or to public order). It envisages a three-phased approach to enabling the government to assume

responsibility for refugee protection and take over refugee status determination (RSD).

Let us embrace Archbishop Jason's initiative. He has asked each parish to set up a Ministry for Migrants and Refugees and we on the Archdiocesan Team will be working with members of the Clergy to support the establishment of your parish Ministry in this important area. Among other things, we will produce paraliturgies as prayer and action must go together; and guidelines and other resources that parishes can use as you seek to implement work in this Ministry. Sadly, because of the operation of the Immigration Act, migrant children are unable to access essential services including education and psychosocial support. In order to support children's access to services, several of the parish ministries have created community-based child friendly spaces (CFSs). Before the pandemic, these CFSs provided approximately 500 children with a temporary safe space for their education and protection.

Because of the current "lock down", through CCSJ's partnership with UNICEF, we have been able to open online classes for Venezuelan children and currently about 226 children participate in these classes.

In the meantime, the Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM) is waiting for the Ministry of National Security in Trinidad and Tobago to issue more than 2,000 migrant students a permit so they can be registered in Catholic schools. CEBM conducted an assessment and identified 2,033 available spaces within 70 primary schools throughout Trinidad. CEBM and other denominational school boards are ready to integrate children and continue to support child protection programming. Until the Minister issues the permits, a temporary alternative continues to be the CFSs, run by parish priests, and Equal Places, which are run by LWC. AMMR will continue to work with the CEBM and other denominational schools through the Education Working Group that has been established to integrate children into national school systems as a sustainable measure and to ensure access to learning opportunities for unaccompanied and separated children.

The AMMR team, which comprises - Darrion, Tameka, Matthew, works closely with the United Nations Agencies (UNICEF and IOM), the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and other organisations, with the aim of providing protection and assistance to any vulnerable migrant or refugee in need, including seeking alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated minors. To support these efforts, AMMR wishes to establish community-based child protection committees within parishes and mobilise volunteers to provide temporary alternative care for children on the move.

We will continue to support community based CFSs to enhance children's access to inter-sectoral programming in education, including early childhood development, psychosocial support and child protection; supporting the integration of children within local primary schools; mainstreaming child safeguarding measures, including prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation and gender-based violence within parishes; and supporting the strengthening of community-based alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children.

You and I, my brothers and sisters, are the hands and feet of the Lord; we are His instruments who must build His Kingdom of *justice, peace, truth, love and freedom* here on earth. We are the ones who must be advocates for justice; to work to ensure that, as the prophet Amos said (5:24), justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

St Ambrose gives us an example of what justice looks like when he said that if you have 2 shirts in your cupboard, one belongs to the person who needs it. So, my brothers and sisters, remember, we are people of the Beatitudes; we are a Eucharistic people. This reality should propel us to act; let us share what we have – as everything we have is gift from God; let us become advocates for migrants and refugees.

We cannot walk on the other side like those in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The greatest commandment that God gave us is to love God, and to love our neighbour as He loves us. And our neighbour is anyone in need. We encounter Christ in our neighbour.

So let us banish fear from our hearts and welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity; let us hear their cry; stand in solidarity with them and respond to their many needs, demonstrating that we are true disciples of the living God. Amen.

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In line with the Church's policy and in keeping with Pope Francis' mandate to all Dioceses to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and refugees, more than TT \$2 million was added by the Church to the Government's grant of TT\$2 million to arrange for hampers to be made available to those in need during the pandemic. Although the initial funds have been exhausted, the Church continues to raise funds to support this initiative.

It must be noted that, as well as CCSJ & AMMR, there are a number of other Organisations and religious communities that are involved in meeting the varied

needs of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and who are involved in advocacy work for them. For example, Living Water Community, UNHCR, IOM, TTVSOLNET (TT Venezuelan Solidarity Network), R4V Platform, Government Agencies and others. Human Trafficking Human Traffickers are making a fortune by transporting Venezuelans to T&T in dangerous circumstances. Advertisements stating that for the price of US \$300, one can be brought to T&T, are circulated on social media. Greed is feeding on the desperation of persons who wish to flee from poverty. The "stories" told to me and to those working with my Commission by those who do come to our shores, are heartrending.

On 17 December, speaking at a post Cabinet briefing, PM Rowley said there are going to be stiffer penalties for human smugglers. He said: "... there are people in Venezuela organising people to go to Trinidad and many of those persons are doing so for profit and they are called 7 traffickers. And we do know that there are people in Trinidad, integrated with that, receiving them and protecting them and assisting them in Trinidad. And the laws that we are going to upgrade will make it less attractive for our citizens in Trinidad and Tobago to do that. Because this is a matter which has grown in size and stature and complexity and we just have to evolve with it...If you have people (registered migrants) staying here and encouraging illegals to come here, then you are at the head of the line to go back home," he stressed. "On the other hand, if you stayed here and are deemed a contributor and not involved in illegal activities and especially if you have skills, then we, like other states look at it in a certain way."

Sadly, there is some evidence that some members of our Police Service are among the traffickers. For example, two police officers - an Acting Inspector and an Acting Sergeant, were among three people charged with trafficking in person (child) for the purpose of exploitation, under Section 18 of the Trafficking in Persons Act. They were also charged with receiving a benefit knowing that it resulted from the offence of trafficking in a child, supporting a gang in the commission of gang-related activity and misbehaviour in public office. The Acting Inspector was additionally charged with sexual penetration of a child. The third accused, a bar manager, also faces a charge of supporting a gang in the commission of gang-related activity.

As the media reported, during an anti-crime exercise, the men were among four suspects arrested by officers of a Special Task Force put together by the Commissioner of Police - assisted by officers of the Special Operations Response Team and the Inter-Agency Task Force, in conjunction with the Counter-Trafficking Unit, Ministry of National Security (toll-free Hotline at 800-4288 (4CTU)).<sup>13</sup> Deportations and Court matters Over the years a number of Venezuelans have been deported, contrary to the principle of nonrefoulement.

As Rochelle Nakhid, LWC, has rightly said: "Non-refoulement, or the principle of no return, is the cornerstone of refugee law and is also part of customary international law, making it binding on states. This principle states that refugees should not be returned to where their life may be in danger. Most refugees remain for many years in their host country and make significant contributions to its development. Resettlement is only reserved for the most vulnerable, which is less than 1% of all refugees worldwide." On 27 November 2020, 160 Venezuelan nationals who arrived in T& T illegally were deported to Venezuela by the Ministry of National Security. According to media reports:

"The ministry stated via a media release that the deportations were carried out in conjunction with the Venezuelan authorities and in compliance with the laws of T&T. 'The Ministry of National Security remains resolute in upholding the laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and in fulfilment of Government policy,'" the release stated. You can access, via the link in the Reference section, further information about this issue and the role of the Court.

There have also been other deportations in the past. And you may have read about the group of 29 Venezuelan nationals, including 16 minors - including a 4-month-old baby, who were detained in November 2020 for illegally entering T&T, and were kept behind bars in a police cell. As the media reported, hours before a court hearing in which lawyers were due to demand permanent residence for them in the country, the group was placed in two private, unmarked vessels (pirogues) and escorted out to sea by coast guard back to Venezuela. <sup>8</sup> They never reached Venezuela and three days later, having been out at sea, they returned to T&T before being detained by police and placed in cells at the Erin Police Station, in the south of T&T.

They were later transferred to the heliport in Chaguaramas, where illegal migrants are held. Recently, some of them were released into the care of their relatives. Tragedies at sea Over the past few years there have been reports of shipwrecks off the coast of Venezuela and on the high sea during which events some Venezuelans have drowned. You will be aware of the boating accident in Guiria in December in which 20 Venezuelans on their way to T&T drowned. It is greed that recently led to the owner of a pirogue built to carry 8 persons, to fill it instead, with 41 Venezuelans. As you will be aware, the boat overturned and sank, and 20 persons drowned.

In the wake of statements by the OAS, on 6 Jan 2021, the Government of T&T once again responded to the OAS' statements saying that "it views with grave concern what it calls 'the continued campaign of misinformation generated by the General Secretariat of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and its deliberate attempt to tarnish the good name and reputation of Trinidad and

Tobago. “The latest in the OAS's acts is its press release of December 30, 2020, titled New Report Warns Number of Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants could Rise to 7-million in 2021, in which it made reference to the tragic loss of life of 33 Venezuelans, but inaccurately stated that the remains of the deceased were found on the maritime border of Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago, ' said the Keith Rowley-led Administration in a press release ... "The statement added that factual records have detailed that the incident occurred in Venezuelan waters off the coast of Guiria. 'To use the tragic circumstance and, even the death of Venezuelan nationals, in such a manner is distasteful, reprehensible and goes against the purpose of the organisation and its General Secretariat.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has called on the OAS to cease this activity,” the statement continued...”<sup>15</sup> Conclusion I agree with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), that "humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society." However, as well as the lack of a legal framework to address migration to T&T, there are other current challenges that stand as obstacles to progress in T&T.

For example: a. the downturn/depression in the economy and the resultant loss of jobs. b. the impact of COVID-19. Venezuelans continue to arrive in T&T illegally through our porous borders, without screening or quarantine. Although I do not have statistics, it is clear from information received from NGOs and Government Agencies, that some of those who have come, including some who have been detained, had the virus on arrival, or contracted it after arrival. c. growing xenophobia, particularly in the current context in which many T&T citizens are losing their jobs because of Covid-19 restrictions and loss of income by many companies.

The Catholic Church will continue to work alongside the Government and other stakeholders in advocating for policy and legislative changes for the protection of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in Trinidad and Tobago. And we will continue to partner with others to play our part in meeting the humanitarian needs of our brothers and sisters who come to our shores seeking peace. Now that PM Dr Keith Rowley has assumed the Chair of CARICOM, which comprises 15 members of the Caribbean Community, it is hoped that he will seek their assistance in helping us to address this humanitarian crisis. I am of the view that a regional approach will certainly be helpful. I end with the words of Pope Francis: "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity." While sanctions and the political situation in Venezuela remain unchanged, let us use our human ingenuity to find a way forward to build just, inclusive communities.

This requires effective coordination between CCSJ/AMMR and child protection and/or national security actors who have a role in the provision and or supervision of alternative care arrangements.

- Ensure adequate monitoring and follow up for children in residential or detention facilities and advocate, plan and programme for their transition into family or community-based care options as an alternative option.
  
- Maintain a database and regularly follow-up with children, caregivers and care supporters in alternative care and facilitate quarterly briefing sessions, focus groups and training.
- Document and create human interest stories on the experience of children and caregivers/care supporters within the alternative care programme.
- Create monthly reports on the number of unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children benefitting from the alternative care programme and identifying gaps, challenges, lessons learned, good practices and recommendations.

We cannot turn our eyes away from the 65.3 million persons in our world who have been displaced from their homes and the 22.5m refugees who, as Pope Francis says, seek peace.

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(The Convention defines who is a refugee and outlines the basic rights which States should afford to refugees. The Convention defines a refugee as a person who *owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or return there because there is a fear of persecution.*)