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IMMIGRANTS – OUR COUNTRY AS A LEADER IN ETHICAL VALUES

Following reports involving the recent tragedy we have just faced, I wish to share this reflection, without entering into the merits of its political nature and without passing judgment on the events of the past few days. I shall leave that to the competent authorities. I would like to give a wider spectrum to my reflection.

Up to a few months ago, our major concern regarding 'those who seek asylum' (or 'irregular immigrants') seemed to be the fact that these persons reach our shores in very large numbers. As a result of this, the states involved are compelled to work out viable ways in which these persons can be cared for and how, with the aid of other states, especially within Europe, they may be resettled in other countries, thus lifting somewhat the burden on the country in which these immigrants would have landed.

This concern used to arise whenever the immigrants arrive in Malta or in other countries. Unfortunately, during their journey across the desert or on the seas, the safety of these people is threatened. In spite of this, in their desperation to flee their countries, they are prepared to face such dangers. It has always been very evident that they have a fundamental right to life and that we this right has to be safeguarded by all.

More recently, it seems as if the situation has deteriorated, in the sense that the problem no longer seems to be simply the granting of legal status, which would enable these persons to live in countries where they feel more secure, but rather it is their health and safety which is at stake. To begin with, there are always negative consequences whenever they are repatriated in their own countries. Secondly, our African brothers are becoming victims, as a cost of the arguments involving limits of territorial waters.

I wish to appeal to the State to bear in mind the ethical dimension in any discussions which are being held with the other countries involved, in order that their deliberations may have as a starting point the health and safety of the human person and only with that at the fore, should solutions at a political level be sought.

Our State should recommend to other states that we not only concentrate on the repatriation of these persons who seek asylum, but we must also enter into discussions with the governments of the countries which they fled in order that their security is safe-guarded. Any political solution that endangers the health and safety of these persons is unjust.

Our discussions with neighbouring countries regarding territorial waters should not centre around which particular state is not responsible to ensure the safety of these people whose lives are endangered, but rather, before any permanent political solutions are found, it should be clarified exactly who is duty-bound to help them, whichever country they land in. This decision cannot be left until a precise moment of crisis, neither should it be left to be discussed after a tragedy occurs.

I appeal to our country to be a leader where ethical values are concerned. The Church in Malta is offering its full support on this count. I appeal also to all Maltese citizens, especially those who are motivated by Christian ethical values, to offer encouragement, in a spirit of solidarity, to those members who represent us during these discussions.

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