
Meeting of Mediterranean Bishops and Mayors. Card. López Romero (Morocco): "In migrants, it is Christ himself who is crying out: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'"

An appeal to Europe to "respect the human right to immigration." An invitation to overcome the fear of diversity "through proximity and personal encounter " since "prejudices disappear when we look the other person in the eye." A call to the mayors of Mediterranean cities to "read and apply to their cities Francis' two encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*": it is the view of Card. **Cristóbal López Romero**, Salesian Archbishop of Rabat (Morocco). SIR contacted him by phone to discuss the Meeting of Mediterranean Bishops and Mayors scheduled to take place in Florence on February 23-27, to be concluded with the visit of Pope Francis. "If - despite its numerous national, historical, cultural and religious differences - Europe has been able to unite and virtually erase the borders separating the 27 member states of the Union, why not dream of a Mediterranean in peace and without borders, united in diversity?" asks the archbishop. "Admittedly, it is a distant and utopian horizon," he adds. However, "a 10-kilometre walk starts with the first step. If this first step is not taken, there will be no journey and no arrival". **Morocco is the first port of entry for many migrants from African countries. Which is the message that these young men and women are sending out to Europe and the 'rich world'?** Morocco is not only the first point of arrival and transit for tens of thousands of people emigrating from sub-Saharan countries. For many, it is a country of destination and asylum, given the extreme difficulty or impossibility to reach their intended destination, which is always Europe. Yet it is also the country of origin and departure for many Moroccans who wish to enter Europe. Both are appealing to Europe and the rich world to respect the human right to immigrate. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State." *Therefore, everyone has the right to leave any country and to return. How can anyone deny a brother the right to flee situations of poverty or war? How can we deny someone the right to seek a dignified life in humane conditions?* Clearly, the right to migrate must be organised and regulated, but it is unacceptable that the only measures taken are police measures consisting in enclosing an entire continent. **On many occasions, the Pope has denounced the tragic reality of the Mediterranean as Europe's largest cemetery. What is the voice of the Churches in this respect?** I think that it is Christ himself, in the person of these brothers, who is crying out to us: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'. And Christ himself will announce in the final judgement: 'Come to my right side because I was a stranger and you welcomed me, or come to my left side because I was a stranger and you rejected me.' It must not happen that the only measures are border closures or the building of walls, fences and ditches. *The cry of Christ is: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'.* **The mayors of Mediterranean countries will also attend the Florence event: what are your requests to the political and city authorities?** Unfortunately, migration policies normally are the responsibility not of municipal, local authorities, but of national governments. However, cities can declare that they are open and welcoming cities and provide social services that help those who have already arrived in Europe, albeit undocumented. Cities can embrace the objectives of reception, protection, promotion and integration, but they must involve citizens, civil society, groups, movements and associations, and also the Church, through parishes, religious orders and her social service agencies. *Cities cannot do everything, but that should not be an excuse for doing nothing.* However, migration is not the only challenge facing cities today. Many other issues remain unresolved, including ecological, social and cultural issues and the labour market. In all cities, improvements can and must be made. I call on mayors to read and apply to their cities the two encyclicals of Francis *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. **Europe is afraid of Islam. Morocco is a land of Islam with a small Catholic minority. How is dialogue created? How can the walls of fear be overcome?** *The walls of fear are overcome with proximity, with direct encounter. Prejudices disappear when we look into each other's eyes,*

when we listen to each other, when we share our work and our table, our leisure activities and our social life. That's when we discover that the other person is like us, with his lights and shadows, just like us. The Churches of the southern Mediterranean region can offer to those of the north their testimony that Christians and Muslims can live together amicably, that human fraternity is indeed possible, irrespective of differences, nationality, religion or culture. Which is why I often say to my Spanish and European compatriots: talk less about Muslims and talk more with Muslims. Because talking with them, drawing closer to them, will overcome prejudices and reveal that we are truly brothers, in Adam, in Abraham, in Moses. **Mediterranean: frontier of peace. How can peace be built and how can the Churches contribute?** I am not completely satisfied with the title of the meeting. I would rather say: Mediterranean, peace without borders. If - despite its numerous national, historical, cultural and religious differences - Europe has been able to unite and virtually erase the borders separating the 27 member states of the Union, why not dream of a Mediterranean in peace and without borders, united in diversity? Admittedly, this horizon is distant and utopian, yet it is inspiring. Seventy years ago, politicians with great visions imagined a united Europe. We have gone a long way since then, although that goal has not been fully achieved. But I do think that from heaven Schumann, De Gasperi, Adenauer ought to be pleased with the progress that has been made. *A 10-kilometre walk starts with the first step. If this first step is not taken, there will be no journey and no arrival.* We therefore need to meet, get to know each other, interact in mutual respect, overcome prejudices, establish agreements and build trust-based relationships. I suggest we start building this Mediterranean in peace and without borders, involving the Maghreb countries - from Morocco to Tunisia and Algeria - the Middle East from Lebanon to Syria, from Israel and Palestine to Turkey. And the Balkan countries, from Croatia to Serbia.

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