

Vatican rep says countries must respect refugee rights

GENEVA – Countries must find better ways to respect human rights in their efforts to cope with the growing number of refugees and displaced people, said the Vatican's representative to international agencies based in Geneva.

The increasing number of people fleeing their homes because of persecution, conflict or severe poverty has resulted in frustration for the international community, public anxiety and "emotional political reactions," said Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican official.

He told members of the executive committee of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Oct. 2 that nations should tackle the refugee problem from "a human rights approach."

"Regrettably, the number of refugees has increased again to some 10 million persons, and internally displaced people to well over 24 million," he said.

The archbishop said that, although refugees were forced to flee their homes because their rights were not being recognized, in their "exodus their rights are again violated" when they are denied access to cross borders to seek safety and when they face increasingly difficult asylum procedures and unnecessarily harsh detention policies.

The situation in refugee camps also is dire as people's freedom of movement and access to work are denied, and "donor fatigue and insufficient funding" result in chronic malnutrition and a lack of the "basic essentials," he said.

Archbishop Tomasi said policies based on recognizing that all people have the right to protection would help governments and nongovernmental organizations see that they have a duty to help these vulnerable people survive and serve them in "a timely and effective way."

A human rights approach, he said, would also help nations see that their "duty to

protect reaches beyond the narrow national interest of single states,” and it would help alleviate citizens’ fears that the refugees’ presence “may be a disguised form of domination.”

He added that more needs to be done to prevent conflicts causing the many human rights violations that force so many ordinary people from their homes.