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Mercy Global Action: Mercy & the Displacement of Persons: 'Migrants'

Carmen Rosa Ccallomamani rsm (Americas)

It is very painful to speak of our migrant brothers and sisters in the context of COVID 19 that we are now living. Migrants are the most vulnerable population during this pandemic. What a paradox life is. They left fleeing hunger and misery and now a virus, miniscule in size, has the capacity to paralyze the entire world; questioning all of the comforts of a minority of the world's population that has believed it had the power to possess life. However, the entire world has also questioned our lifestyle and reactions on various levels, placing us face to face with the fragility of our socio-economic and political system.

On the other hand, we see our mother earth, clean and fresh. Other beings rejoice; it is very good for them.... We hope that this experience has been a time to value that which has no price: health, family, our environment, our farmers who continue working to feed us despite the pandemic.

After sharing this reflection, I would like to focus on the issue of migrants, a population that is surely being heavily impacted during the pandemic. For two years we have been walking with our migrant brothers and sisters and so many questions have come up for me. WHY DOES A PERSON LEAVE THEIR COUNTRY, VILLAGE, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS? I am not referring to those who go on vacation, tourism or because they have work in another place. I am speaking about the migrants who leave their countries in search of a life with dignity, risking everything in the hope of finding a place to live, something so basic for a human being.

After a lot of listening and accompaniment, what I can say is that the word is not "leave," the word is "escape." They have escaped their country. Their strongest motivation is to survive because if they stayed in their country they would die. All of this is the result of a political and economic system that benefits the few and generates extreme inequality, in which the poor are more affected and impoverished, placing them in an inhumane situation.

In this context, as a team with the Pastorate for Human Mobility, we have supported legal processes, accompanied, listened and felt the pain and indignation of hundreds of migrants that arrive at the border of Peru with Bolivia. From a small and modest office, we receive the migrants who are from Venezuela for the most part, Colombia, Ecuador, etc. This office works in collaboration with other entities including the Prelature of Juli, the Municipality of Desaguadero, ACNUR, Caritas Switzerland, Kausay Network and the religious communities of Franciscans and Sisters of Mercy. By joining forces and resources, we are able to be more assertive in the accompaniment of our migrant brothers and sisters.

Our support also includes providing for basic needs like food, medicine, clothing, and transport costs for them to get to the next city. We do not have sufficient economic resources to help them get to their final destination. When they get to the next city, they search for assistance from different organizations, or sell candy or crafts to gather enough money to get to the next city. It takes them days and weeks to get to their final destinations in Argentina, Chile, Brazil or Paraguay. The most painful thing is to see families with their small children, walking for days without access to a hot meal, eating only soft drinks, water and cookies. Frequently they tell us, “We haven’t had hot food in over a week.” A nine-year old little girl said, “I haven’t had a shower for a month.” One mother with three children began to cry. I stayed with her in silence, accompanying her pain and she said, “I am crying because you have treated me like a person. You made me feel like a person because a lot of people just call me a *veneca*.” This is very painful to hear and it fills us with impotence and indignation because of governments that do not care for their citizens and people who have no sensitivity or solidarity with the migrant population.

During this time of the pandemic, there is not a single word that can describe what the migrants are experiencing. They are the most vulnerable population. Due to their condition as migrants they are not able to access economic support that their government provides to fellow citizens.

Nevertheless, from our small office we also experience many signs of hope and gratitude from our migrant brothers and sisters. The experience of working in networks with other organizations is also a sign of hope. From the border of Peru and Bolivia, we continue to work for a dignified life for our migrant brothers and sisters.