

**Message from the Dicastery for Communication of the
Holy See to SIGNIS Africa workshop
“Reporting on migrants and refugees”
Kampala (UGANDA), 10th to 16th July 2023**

To Father Professor Walter Ihejirika
President of SIGNIS Africa

On the occasion of the workshop at Saint Mary’s Seminary, Ggaba, Uganda promoted by SIGNIS Africa, in collaboration with the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, I would like to send my greetings and best wishes for a fruitful outcome to the organizers, speakers and participants; as well as to all the guests from African and international institutions and to all men and women involved in communication.

These days I was partaking in the tenth commemoration of Pope Francis’ extraordinary witness, his first papal trip outside Rome to Lampedusa, Italy. In a deep act of penance, Pope Francis has prayed begging “forgiveness for our indifference to so many of our brothers and sisters.” It was one of the most paradigmatic papal trips of all time from where, Pope Francis willed to shake the world’s consciences and lead us to reflection towards a concrete change of heart.

With this symbolic land of Lampedusa in mind, I would like to express my deep regrets for not being with you in Uganda, the land of African martyrs which is also well-known for being a model refugee-hosting country. As thousands of desperate men, women and children flee conflicts and natural disasters in search of a place of refuge, Uganda has always opened its doors to welcome record numbers of our brothers and sisters.

Indeed, you have chosen a topic of substantial interest for this training: not only for the African continent but also for the future of humanity at large. Your project includes a plan to realize and release a *SIGNIS Africa Media guidelines for Catholic media*

practitioners on reporting on migrants and refugees' issues. Besides targeting Catholic journalists, such guidelines will hopefully concern and interest journalists from the secular media for more humane reporting on people already distressed by difficulties and suffering.

In his recent message for the 57th World Communications day, Pope Francis invites us to purify our hearts in order to communicate truth with charity, to focus on “speaking with the heart”, radically challenging the inclination of our generation “towards indifference and indignation, at times even on the basis of disinformation which falsifies and exploits the truth”.¹ If we are truly capable of looking and seeing reality and others with the eyes of the heart, if we are capable of listening with the ears of the heart and above all if we exercise ourselves to speak with the heart, we will also be capable of empathy, capable of true compassion.

I trust that your continental efforts to share in the synodal process which is pushing us as a Catholic Church to weave more communion by lighting hearts, and caring for each other’s wounds will bear much fruit. We count on your work to strengthen the link between Rome and the local Churches. Vatican medias look forward and are willing to share more of your stories in a “communication which puts the relationship with God and one’s neighbor, especially the neediest”, the marginalized and the discarded of society. These include our brothers and sisters who are suffering, asylum-seekers, climate-displaced people, internally displaced people (IDPs), and victims of human trafficking. African church narratives may help in shining light on our common journey.

Through the Pentecost Project of the Dicastery for Communication, Vatican Media are already listening and sharing stories with religious sisters from Africa and elsewhere as witnesses of the “mighty works of God”. Similarly, within the

¹ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20230124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>

project “Voices of Migrants” we share in missionaries’ efforts to promote migrant people’s inclusion in the world of work through education and vocational training.

Sharing stories, relevant information and also projecting within the world’s public sphere, issues which can mitigate the plights of the vulnerable persons, is a most practical solidarity witness in our Church.

We need media that build bridges and break down walls, working toward social cohesion. May this workshop contribute to building a different way of making information and generate more interrelationship for a sense of more responsibility among all communication stakeholders so that they may carry out their profession as a mission! May this moment help each one of you to rediscover the potential of Signis to be a network that unites, a network woven of truth and beauty, faith and hope. May these days be a space for communication at the service of communion!

Paolo Ruffini,
Prefect