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President: Bishop William Nolan

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We like to think that we are a welcoming people, and indeed we are. Towns and villages throughout Scotland have shown a warm welcome in recent months to asylum seekers and refugees seeking safety and a new life.

But many never get to set foot in our country to experience that welcome. The UK government controls immigration and that control ensures that many who wish to come here are hindered from doing so.

Last month I visited migrants in Calais and met people who have fled war and persecution. They hope for a better life in the UK, but meanwhile they endure harassment from the authorities designed to chase them away. Police remove their tents, confiscate their sleeping bags and move them on during the night as they sleep rough in the woods. There are unaccompanied children among these migrants. Their welfare is of particular concern.

Thankfully there are some who recognize a fellow human being in need and treat migrants with the kindness their human dignity demands. *Séours Catholique* and volunteers from a variety of aid agencies supply food and clothing. Many of the volunteers are not Christian, but they certainly act as Christians should.

The number of those in France wanting to get to the UK is not large compared to the great number of refugees in Europe and the vast numbers throughout the world.

There have always been refugees. Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus were refugees in Egypt. But we have a refugee crisis for our time that is on an unprecedented scale worldwide.

Perhaps if we spent less money funding war and more funding peace; perhaps if we put less effort into selling arms and more effort into eradicating poverty; then fewer people would be forced to leave their homeland and their families.

Military spending worldwide is \$1.7 trillion annually. If that was reduced by only 10%, and that money spent on development, then the United Nations' development goals could be reached and poverty and hunger eradicated.

Meanwhile, there are many in our country who would like to welcome refugees. I know of people who, at no cost to the state, would happily house and support refugees while their asylum application was being heard. This is something the Scottish Government should seriously consider.

But it is the UK Government which controls the numbers allowed to enter the country. So far the UK response to the global refugee crisis has been less than generous.

Pope Francis speaks of the world as being our common home, may the part of that common home where we live be a place of welcome for those in need.

May I wish you every blessing as we begin this new year, and may God bless our efforts as we work and pray for peace and justice for all.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Nolan', preceded by a plus sign.

+William Nolan

President of the Bishops' Justice and Peace Commission