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NEWS RELEASE

JRS CALLS FOR ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION

Senior Muslim, Jewish and Catholic leaders are supporting an international Coalition that challenges the detention of migrants and refugees. Over 100 human rights groups from around the world, including the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), have established the Coalition to draw attention to the way migrants and refugees are treated in their host countries and to try to seek alternatives to imprisonment.

The International Coalition on the Detention of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants was launched at the Vatican this week with an inter-religious round table discussion on detention. It was addressed by Cardinal Martino of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, Mario Scialoja - President of the Italian Muslim League, and Alan Nacceche - President of the Jewish Bnai Brith Youth Organisation. The event was moderated by Fr Lluís Magriña SJ, the International Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

The Coalition, involving human rights groups from 36 countries worldwide, was established to raise awareness of governments' detention policies and practices and to promote greater protection and respect for the human rights of detainees. It advocates limiting the use of, seeking alternatives to, and using the least restrictive forms of, immigration detention.

"After facing persecution and extreme poverty at home, refugees face further suffering when they are deprived of their freedom of movement and detained simply for fleeing for their lives," said Fr Magriña. "We have been visiting immigration detainees around the world for more than 20 years and our staff witness firsthand the physical and psychological harm caused to very vulnerable individuals, particularly children."

Mario Scialoja concurred. "Even in closed centres in many affluent countries, like Italy, the legal procedures governing detention are wholly inadequate and the conditions unacceptable. Such treatment is often illegal, but always immoral and degrading."

Alan Naccache said that in carrying out their role of managing migration flows, it was understandable that states should establish temporary detention centres. "Nevertheless," he continued, "states should never forget their international obligations to refugees and other migrants. In particular, the arbitrary detention of refugees penalises human beings for seeking safety, and denies their common humanity."

"Arbitrary imprisonment poisons human society. It harms those who practice it as well as those who suffer it," said Cardinal Martino.

The Coalition found that the worst detention practices adopted by governments were being copied from others and politicians frequently justify their immigration detention policies on the grounds that another, often richer, country is operating a similar policy.

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Notes to Editors and Journalists

JRS works in over 50 countries in five continents around the world. It employs over 1,000 staff: lay, Jesuits and other religious to meet the education, health, social and other needs of over 500,000 refugees and IDPs. It allows provides legal and other services to migrants refugees detained purely on the basis of their immigration status in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Its services are provided to refugees regardless of their race, ethnic origin, or religious beliefs.

The coalition involves over 100 members (non-governmental organizations/ NGOs, faith-based organizations, academics and individuals) in 36 countries from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean, North America, Central and South America, and from countries where individuals are detained purely on the basis of their immigration status.

The steering committee of the Coalition brings together a number of leading international NGOs which share concerns about the treatment of immigration detainees, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch, Jesuit Refugee Service, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, World Council of Churches, and a number of national NGOs.

The international detention coalition is being launched worldwide on 20 June 2006, with events organised by member organisations in the following countries: USA, Canada, Mexico, Kenya, South Africa, India, Australia, Lebanon, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Ireland, Jamaica.

For more information on the coalition, contact Anna Gallagher: e mail anna@comunicacionglobal.com Tel: (+34) 947 541 835 or Melanie Teff at Melanie.teff@jrs.net Tel: (+39) 06 6897 7386; (+39) 338 752 2606. For more information about the work of JRS-UK, phone 020 7357 0974.

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