



# HAÏM KORSIA

## Chief Rabbi of France

There is a clear connection between the previous round table and this one: the refugee issue has been around for a very long time because of the climate. There are drought refugees, climate refugees, and if I wanted to make a little joke, I would even say that the first refugees were refugees because of the climate. In the Bible, the climate is what made Noah build the ark.

On a more serious note, I believe climate is a significant factor. When refugees move between the southern countries — people moving within Africa, within Asia — we feel less concerned, which is tragic, even intolerable. The issue only comes to the fore when these refugees — by the way, I am glad the World Policy Conference uses the word “refugee” instead of “migrant” — come north. Suddenly the impact is perceived, which suggests that it is not so much movement or the status of refugee that bother us, but the fact they are coming here. That obliges us to think simply about human dignity, I think. Human dignity is the same everywhere. The Bible insists on telling us something as obvious as “You shall love the foreigner, for you were a foreigner in the land of Egypt”, but nowhere does it say, “You shall love your father and your mother”. The Bible says, “You shall fear your mother and your father”, “You shall honour your father and your mother”, but not “You shall love your father and your mother”. On the other hand, it says, “You shall love the foreigner”.

In the end, when I see a foreigner — somebody who, as you very rightly just said, may not have the same language, culture or religion I do — I see another me. I see somebody whom I perceive the way others might perceive me. So, either we rise to the challenge and really build a society where all of humankind is the same everywhere, or we admit that we are cheating, that we are no longer capable of upholding the values we affirm.

The refugee issue is essential. It is even vital, insofar as there are two levels, in my opinion. The first is a political level, and others on this panel will be able to talk about that much better than I can. But there is also an individual level. For example, in Paris I have set up a system to care for children who are alone. People are not aware of this issue. You were talking about the older son who goes out exploring, practically, but we have isolated children, alone, whose parents are sometimes dead. We see to it that an organisation that knows how to care for children in France can take them in. We told them, “You know how to manage children. You’re going to know how to manage isolated refugee children who are alone”. With the pastor of Roissy, we welcomed them; we welcomed families from Iraq and brought them to a Protestant charity in Bordeaux. So there is an individual level. Collectively, it is critical to define policy directions, but individually there are things we can do.

To me, the main issue seems to be considering that there is a difference from your example of the situation right after the war. The population movements just after the war were definitive. Today, we must make sure these movements are temporary. In other words, the refugees must be taken in because it is our duty to welcome them — whether it is on humanitarian or religious grounds does not matter, it is a duty to take them in — but then everything possible must be done to secure places where the religious diversity that still vaguely exists in the Middle East can endure. A friend of mine, Father Gollnisch, is the head of the Orient charity. It was upsetting when he explained the plight of Christians in the Middle East to me, but at the same time he said that synagogues had been devastated, destroyed, and that the stones and people must remain there to bear witness to a history. In fact, it is different because the goal is to be able to resettle them in a time and a place of peace.

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Merci beaucoup.