

To CCME, CEC and WCC member  
churches and partner organisations in  
Europe

22 March 2016

## **Advocacy for Refugee Resettlement to Europe**

Dear friends and colleagues,

With this letter CCME, CEC and WCC would kindly ask you to undertake increased advocacy for more refugee resettlement towards your countries with your national governments and parliaments in the next weeks.

The main reason for asking you to engage in this advocacy effort now is that national governments are currently preparing for the UNHCR pledging conference for “pathways of admission for Syrian refugees” on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 in Geneva. We believe that concerted efforts for resettlement in many European countries would have benefits beyond the situation of Syrian refugees alone. It would hopefully re-open the doors for more safe and legal pathways into Europe in general. This will be particularly important at a time when refugee protection in Europe is predominantly discussed by political actors in the context of curbing irregular access to the territory.

### **What do we mean by refugee resettlement?**

Resettlement is defined as the transfer of refugees from a state in which they have found initial, but not permanent, protection to a third state that has agreed to admit them as refugees and grant them a legal protection status, with the possibility of acquiring future citizenship.

If a refugee cannot locally integrate in the country where he or she has sought asylum and there is no prospect of repatriation in the foreseeable future, resettlement becomes the only possible durable solution. Resettlement is an important international protection tool to meet the needs of refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health and other fundamental human rights are at risk.

This would for example be the case of Syrians or Iraqis currently staying in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, but without permanent status and integration perspective, who are then transferred to a country in Europe.

### **Resettlement saves lives – preventing death on the way to European territory**

The year 2015 has seen thousands of refugees losing their lives when trying to access European territory. In the first 10 weeks of this year, 456 deaths of refugees have already been reported with a majority of casualties in the Aegean Sea.

Resettlement offers an entirely safe alternative to risky passages across the Mediterranean or other borders of Europe. Refugees will enter Europe in an orderly and protected fashion with regular means of transport. Their lives will be protected and they will have certainty of their status before they depart.

### **Resettlement – undermining smugglers' business**

Resettlement is not only an effort preventing deaths, but it also has the effect of countering the business of smugglers. If persons in need of international protection are able to travel legally across the borders of Europe, there is no longer any need to resort to these illegal, expensive, unreliable and often dangerous networks.

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## Resettlement – reducing chaotic “refugee crisis” situations

Beyond the benefits for the individuals, larger benefits could be achieved for the overall management of refugee entries into Europe. If European countries engage at a sufficiently large scale in resettlement, many of those needing protection in Europe are likely to see resettlement as a credible alternative to making their own way. Many of the most vulnerable refugees could benefit from resettlement. Through large scale resettlement, the volume of persons making their ways to and across Europe in chaotic circumstances could be reduced. Refugee reception would to some extent become more plannable, discussions on fair sharing of responsibility for refugee protection between European states could focus more on a well-managed system of arrivals.

It is important to underline that resettlement should not replace, but supplement the existing system of reception of spontaneously arriving persons in need of international protection. It would also complement other instruments of safe and legal access such as humanitarian visas, family reunification, sponsorships or lifting of visa requirements for persons from crisis regions. (see [http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20\\_Areas\\_of\\_Work/01\\_Refugee\\_Protection/2014-11-20-Christian\\_Group\\_Recomm\\_for\\_safe\\_legal\\_paths\\_to\\_protection\\_final.pdf](http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2014-11-20-Christian_Group_Recomm_for_safe_legal_paths_to_protection_final.pdf))

One important model of facilitating safe channels is now undertaken by the Federation of Protestant Churches, in the framework of the project Mediterranean Hope, and by the Catholic St. Egidio Community in Italy: they have agreed with the Italian government a quota for persons who are referred to the Italian authorities, the consulate grants humanitarian visa for the persons to travel to Italy, the Italian churches provide for transfer and reception to and in Italy. Through this programme 100 people who had to flee Syria have already arrived safely in Italy in the past weeks; the total amount of people who are expected to enter in this test programme is 1.000.

## Possible activities

In your advocacy efforts, you might choose between different types of activities, depending on your possibilities and traditions in your country.

Direct contacts with your government department responsible for asylum and migration would certainly be most effective, but involvement of parliamentarians could also prove useful. Information events on resettlement are still necessary in many places; and cooperation with civil society organisations will generate better results. You might also concretely wish to point out where your church is willing to help with receiving and integrating refugees.

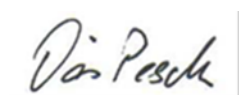
## UNHCR targets

In preparation for the High Level pledging conference, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has set the target of resettling 10 % of the refugees who fled Syria to neighbouring countries to be resettled over the coming three years. In addition to resettlement, UNHCR is also calling for additional admission programme through humanitarian visa, sponsorship etc. For your information, we attach the current table of pledges UNHCR has so far received. More information on the conference is available in the background note for the UNHCR [conference](#).

We would be happy to advise and inform you further and would also love to hear from you what activities you initiated and what were the results.

In this Holy Week, in which we commemorate the crucifixion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ and look towards the celebration of His resurrection, we wish you a blessed Easter.

Yours sincerely



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Encl: UNHCR table of pledges