

Communiqué

The World Council of Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria and the Evangelical Church in Germany jointly hosted a Church Leaders' Consultation on the European Refugee Crisis. The leaders met in Kardinal-Wendel-Haus, Munich on 29 October 2015. 35 participants came from Churches and ecumenical organisations from the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Welcome addresses by the Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the WCC and Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, set the scene for presentations from countries across the regions.

In this meeting there was an opportunity for an exchange of information from places that are countries of origin of refugees, from those countries of transit and from host countries. The discussions were focussed on the tragic situation of the Middle East and on refugees from the Middle East and Africa.

The participants were deeply conscious in their discussions of the presence of Christians in the Middle East for 2000 years from which Churches in Europe also trace their origins. We are called to be a people of faith and hope, and we are grounded in every place; we know the hearts and desires of our people, as well as the resources and spiritual riches that are potentially available to all of us.

In this process we heard the following affirmations:

1. As Christians we share the belief that we see in the other, the image of Christ himself. (Matthew 25.31-46), and that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1. 26-27).
2. The experience of migration and crossing of borders is known to the Church of Christ. The Holy Family itself were refugees; the very Incarnation of Our Lord is a crossing of the border between the Human and Divine.
3. While we deeply deplore the crises forcing people to leave their homes, we welcome all refugees in Europe as we see in them the image God, and as God's children they bring their gifts to our continent.
4. Today there is evidence of a renationalisation of politics. However the Church is both local as well as universal, and in the life of Churches we resist tendencies to work in isolation and we affirm our deep commitment to a universal and ecumenical horizon.
5. Many in Europe are willing to provide assistance and help to all refugees. At the same time there is a high degree of fear and anxiety. In addition we observe polarising tendencies that cause instability. In the face of this challenge the Church promotes collaboration, cooperation and solidarity.
6. The need of sustainability of support systems was evident in many reports. The refugee crisis is not merely a short-term issue. The Church always takes the long view; we are ready to accompany people into their future. A new paradigm is emerging in Europe - living with fragility, but as Christians we understand how our fragility can also become our strength.
7. Governments are recognising that the Churches can offer additional and fresh wisdom, and some are turning to Churches to ask for ideas, vision and partnership. The UN is wishing to engage in a closer dialogue with the WCC. We welcome this developing deeper cooperation.
8. The strong message heard in reports was an appeal to stop the wars, persecution and injustice. These are the main causes forcing people to flee their homelands.
9. We resist the tendency to look at the refugee crisis only in terms of numbers and statistics. This violates the Christian value of respect for the dignity of every human being. These are people with lives, families, homes, and youth.

10. We recognise the devastating effects on their homelands of the flight of many young, skilled and educated people.

Based on these affirmations we make the following recommendations:

1. We recognise that there are no quick solutions and we urge political leaders to acknowledge that persistent, consistent long-term efforts are needed and as Churches we wish to accompany our governments in seeking these sustainable solutions.
2. As Church leaders we recommend to governments and political parties to refrain from any exploitation of this human crisis for political ambition or benefit. We urge political leaders not to let any such fears shape their policy.
3. We also hear the fears of Christians and others in society, fear of loss of material and job security, of being in competition with others, and of loss of identity. We urge Christians not to let our fear mean a rejection of refugees. We are aware that integration of newcomers is hard work. However Christians are a people of hope and we can see the arrival of refugees among us as a potential blessing, bringing new life and energy to our communities.
4. We make an appeal to all governments in Europe to uphold our common values and shared responsibility for life as a community living in this continent. This means addressing in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation and fellowship, not only the emergency situation, but the upcoming related challenges of integration in society, education, and design of inclusion policies.
5. As Churches this is an opportunity to share more widely experience and expertise in offering spiritual and pastoral support, ecumenical and interfaith cooperation and building bridges between diverse communities.
6. We urge political leaders to ensure a balanced approach, addressing the root causes of refugee crises, supporting refugee camps in neighbouring countries, and receiving refugees in our own countries. We urge these to be addressed in a complementary way. As Church leaders all situations are equally important to us.
7. As Church leaders we recommend to all people of good will a deep commitment to communicating the truth avoiding distortion and exaggeration.
8. We recommend investing in safe passage, assisting those regions which are receiving the majority of refugees, such as the Greece, Italy, and other countries of transit.

We are committed to continue our ecumenical dialogue on the refugee crisis in Europe. We have found this free space for discussions among Church leaders in Europe in cooperation with WCC, CEC, CCME and other ecumenical partners to be of value.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of life, hope and compassion, continue to grant His Spirit and to receive all in his grace.