



**Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe**

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

Caritas Europa

CCME

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

COMECE

Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community

ICMC

International Catholic Migration Commission

Justice and Peace

Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

JRS

Jesuit Refugee Service Europe

QCEA

Quaker Council for European Affairs

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Brussels, 11 December 2001**

### **CHURCHES CALL FOR A MIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICY FOR THE EU:**

#### **"SAFE HAVEN NOT FORTRESS"**

**Seven Christian Churches and Church agencies today issue a call to the upcoming European Union summit in Laeken (14-15 December) to give new political impetus to the EU's common asylum and immigration policy.**

Whilst expressing appreciation for the work carried out so far, the Churches point out several shortcomings. Restrictive visa policies and fines imposed on carriers force people in need of international protection to use irregular ways to get access to the asylum procedure. Procedures for assessing asylum applications remain flawed, and public opinion towards asylum-seekers continues to be negative. Concerns about the protection of refugees and discussions about legal channels of immigration are overshadowed by the fight against illegal immigration.

This statement calls for genuine harmonisation of EU policy, based on best practice, including:

An asylum system based on the full application of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, ensuring that those in need of protection have access to the territory of the EU, are received in dignified conditions, and have their asylum claims examined fairly, efficiently and fully;

An immigration policy that balances Europe's need for labour with fairness to migrants and increased commitment to co-operate with countries of origin.

Harmonisation will need to overcome the major obstacle of member states reneging on their political commitment to establish an area of freedom, security and justice. A reasonable way out of the current impasse in decision-making would be to abolish the requirement of unanimity regarding asylum and immigration policy.

The statement calls on EU leaders, in evaluating the progress made in the field of immigration and asylum since the EU summit in Tampere in October 1999, to go beyond national and Euro-pean interests by sharing responsibility fairly and creating equal opportunities at a global level.

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