

Press Statement

Bratislava/Slovakia 23 March 2007

Churches' assistance vital for refugees – exchange with EU best practice models important

During a visit to the churches' refugee programmes in Slovakia, the General Secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe commended the churches in Slovakia for the support rendered to asylum seekers and refugees. "This support is vital for refugees, not only for their material well-being, but for building bridges into the Slovakian society and eventually the integration of refugees", Doris Peschke said in a meeting with the General Secretary of the Ecumenical Council of Churches.

Churches in Slovakia provide material and social support for asylum seekers and refugees who generally are housed in accommodation centers called camps after they leave the reception center. Olga Auchenbach from the Ecumenical Council explained that many congregations were actively engaged in supporting refugees. However, as the accommodation centers are mainly in remote areas, meetings require a real organisational effort.

"As governments and non-governmental organisations in the EU will evaluate the transposition of asylum related directives this year, more exchange with European organisations will be of importance to learn from other models and to adjust and improve programmes", Doris Peschke said encouraging closer cooperation with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe. For churches in Europe, the focus of refugee and migration related work is based on the dignity of the person which needs to be respected. The dignity is inherent to the person as God's creation and thus it cannot be "earned".

European and international organisations are concerned about the discrepancies in asylum decisions between EU Member States, which may jeopardize the legitimacy of other EU regulations.

The meetings with the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia were part of a visit by the CCME General Secretary on 22-23 March 2007. A visit to the accommodation camp Gabčíkovo was part of the programme. On 23 March 2007 a seminar takes place to disseminate the results of a research project: POLITIS – Civic participation of new citizens? The EU funded research project looked at civically active immigrants in all EU member states.

For further information:
CCME Secretariat, +32 2 234.68.00

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies across Europe. CCME formally cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.