

"Increase resettlement of refugees to EU Members States"

After a visit to the refugee camp in Dadaab/Kenya, CCME delegation underlines the importance of resettlement for sharing responsibility for refugee protection

Six representatives of refugee assisting organisations from Finland, Austria, Italy, Belgium and the UK took part in the capacity building visit to Kenya coordinated by CCME from the 8th to the 13th of June 2006 as part of the project "Understanding Resettlement in practice: capacity building for action!"

The delegation was welcomed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' Offices and met also with representatives of the International Organisation for Migration and NGOs such as Joint Voluntary Agency of US NGOs, HIAS, JRS, Mapendo, which are dealing with refugees and resettlement in Kenya. A meeting with the embassies of Australia, Canada and the US as well as Belgium and Finland was held to discuss the different resettlement approaches. Important for the delegation was the visit to Dadaab refugee camp.

Kenya is situated in a region where several conflicts have led to the highest number of uprooted people in the world. Some estimates speak of around 10 million uprooted people; in Kenya alone there are 250.000 refugees from other countries like Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and the Great Lakes Region. **Due to the high number of refugees, the Kenyan government decided to have them in camps and not to offer them a possibility of local integration.** As a consequence, thousands of people live in camps for more than 15 years. The Dadaab camp at the border to Somalia in a semi-arid area, was established in 1991 hosting 130.000 refugees, mainly Somalis. According to UNHCR the lack of employment possibilities leads also to psychosocial stress and high numbers of suicides.

Instability and ongoing conflicts in Somalia make it impossible for Somali refugees to return. Since a change in the situation is not to be foreseen, UNHCR is convinced that the only durable solution for these refugees is resettlement to third countries. But so far only the United States is resettling a substantial number of refugees from this region. A Somali refugee who will be resettled to the USA stated: "I'm very lucky to have this opportunity but, please, do not forget those left behind!"

The members of the CCME delegation see the need for EU Members States to share the responsibility and to provide for a durable solution for these refugees. "This is a matter of urgency, has to be done quickly and in a sufficient number." urged Franca di Lecce, Director of the Service for Migrants and Refugees of the Protestant Churches in Italy.

UNHCR is currently identifying refugees with disabilities and survivors of torture and violence as the most vulnerable group in the Dadaab camp. Within the camp they suffer from prejudice, are marginalized and are exposed to abuse and rape. "It is a call of humanity to take them out of the camp and resettle them immediately", said Michael Bubik, Director of the Protestant Refugee Service of Diakonie in Austria.

European NGOs and Churches' related agencies could assist the governments to set up the appropriate procedures. "It would be an advantage if governments cooperated with non-governmental actors in all the stages of the resettlement process", Bubik concluded.

Conclusions from this visit along with the results from the previous visits to Finland and to North America will be drawn during the final conference of the project which will take place in Brussels from the 3rd to the 5th of July 2006. The Resettlement Newsletter provides additional information on resettlement.

For more information contact CCME T. +32 2 234 68 00 e-mail: info@ccme.be

The newsletter can be found www.ccme.be or <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/ccme.shtml>



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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.