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EUROPE'S ASYLUM RULES PUT LIVES AT RISK AND CAUSE SUFFERING

73 European refugee groups challenge EU's 'Dublin Rules'

Seventy-three organisations assisting refugees, members of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), united today to warn that the current EU asylum system is putting lives at risk and causing unnecessary suffering to traumatised refugee families who have fled persecution in their homelands. The signatories include the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)/Conference of European Churches and many other church-related organisations.

The coalition of groups from 30 European countries sent a public letter today to Mr Frattini, European Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, urging him to address the 'serious shortcomings' of the current system known as the 'Dublin II Regulation' or 'Dublin rules'. These were introduced in 2003 and are due to be reviewed later this year. The rules require those fleeing persecution to claim asylum in the first European country they reach, regardless of that country's policies.

"Refugees are put at risk of persecution as European states try to shirk their responsibilities for asylum seekers. Flaws in the Dublin system need urgent attention, but in the longer run, the EU must find a fairer, more humane and workable alternative," said Peer Baneke, General Secretary of ECRE.

The signatories warn that the Dublin II Regulation is failing to guarantee asylum seekers a fair hearing, is putting refugees at risk and causing unnecessary suffering to families, children and survivors of torture.

"Our concerns for asylum seekers including children, families, and other vulnerable affected groups cannot wait", the letter says.

The letter draws Mr. Frattini's attention to the findings of ECRE's report on the operation of the Dublin system. It shows that some states are denying access to a full asylum procedure to individuals transferred under the Dublin system, placing them at risk of being returned to their home countries to face persecution.

By requiring that those fleeing persecution must claim asylum in the first EU country they reach, the Dublin II Regulation does not properly take account of the fact that a person's chance of being recognised as a refugee varies hugely from one EU country to another. As well as being unfair, the Dublin rules are also inefficient, resource-intensive and an obstacle to genuine sharing of responsibility between European states.

Among ECRE's recommendations to Commissioner Frattini are proposals to:

- *Guarantee access to a full and fair procedure for all asylum seekers transferred under the Dublin II Regulation;*
- *Better ensure the reunification of family members under Dublin II;*
- *Exempt separated children from transfer under Dublin II except to allow them to join other family members provided this is in the best interests of the child;*
- *Ensure that all Dublin II applicants receive adequate reception conditions and are only ever detained as a last resort.*

For further comment/background and interviews:

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Notes to Editors:

1. The European Council on Refugees & Exiles represents refugee-assisting organisations in 30 European countries.
2. The ECRE letter to Commissioner Frattini, 27 June 2006, is available at www.ecre.org
3. *Summary Report on the Application of the Dublin II Regulation in Europe*, ECRE/ELENA, March 2006 is available at www.ecre.org
4. The Dublin II Regulation replaced the Dublin Convention and came into force in September 2003. It is a mechanism for allocating responsibility to a single Member State for processing an asylum claim. It establishes a hierarchy of criteria for identifying the responsible Member State and aims at ensuring that every asylum claim within the EU is examined by a Member State as well as preventing multiple asylum claims. It works in conjunction with EURODAC, a central database containing fingerprints of all individuals entering and lodging asylum applications within the EU.

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.