

CCME PRESS RELEASE OF 14th November 2007

Refugee resettlement to Austria: "time is right to start programme"

CCME debate encourages Austrian contribution to co-ordinated European resettlement effort

Some 40 representatives of National NGOs, churches, national and regional government as well as international organisations met in Vienna 12th and 13th November to discuss future perspectives of Austria as a country receiving refugees through resettlement. The Austrian Diakonie Refugee Service hosted the event as part of the project "Refugee resettlement - broadening the basis in Europe" which is co-ordinated by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).



During the two-day debate, participants heard about the "gateway" refugee resettlement programme of the United Kingdom, which was started in 2003. Richard Pearce-Higginson from the UK home office presented the UK programme on resettlement as a good example of starting resettlement activities. In the view of the UK Home Office, this programme through which some 500 refugees are resettled annually had helped to boost the credibility of the UK asylum system.

Experts from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees underlined the importance of resettlement as a tool of

global solidarity on refugee protection, from which the most vulnerable of the world's refugees would benefit. NGO representatives from Hungary and Romania outlined how their countries are currently starting their resettlement activities. Particular attention was devoted to the question how resettlement and integration of refugees could best be combined.

Hillbert Karl of the Austrian Ministry of Interior underlined Austria's willingness to continue discussions on resettlement in the context of an EU wide approach.

Christoph Riedl, Director of the Diakonie Refugee Service expressed strong support for starting a resettlement programme to Austria. He stated that: "It is encouraging to see that neighbouring countries are committing to resettlement as an additional instrument of refugee protection. Based on our daily experience we know that there is sufficient infrastructure and experience to start resettlement to Austria. The time is therefore right to start an Austrian resettlement programme."

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Resettlement is a process by which refugees who have fled their country of origin and found temporary protection in another country are settled onwards to a third country in which they are granted permanent protection. Resettlement is one of the three "durable solutions" of refugee protection as recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Since 2003 CCME has been promoting resettlement as an additional tool for refugee protection in EU member states.

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ERF 205

The Project "Refugee resettlement - broadening the basis in Europe" is coordinated by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). It is funded by the European Commission ERF.

The views expressed and information provided by the project and the partners involved do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the European Commission and in no way fall under the responsibility of the European Commission.