

Press Release CCME 2nd September 2009

EU Proposal on Refugee Resettlement "step in right direction, but more ambition needed"

Churches welcome EU plans to protect more refugees, but concerned about speed of progress

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe welcomes the proposal for an EU resettlement scheme, which was adopted by the European Commission this morning.

"As CCME we have worked to promote a common EU resettlement scheme since the beginning of this decade. It is obvious that we are pleased that the European Commission has finally come up with a concrete proposal. While we think that the proposal is a step in the right direction, more ambition is needed if the EU wants to have real impact." CCME General Secretary Doris Peschke said.

Peschke expressed her organisation's support for the European Commission's proposal to agree on a number of third countries from where refugees would be resettled in a joint effort by EU member states. "If EU member states agree on common priority areas and priority groups for resettlement, the EU efforts could have better results in resolving the most dramatic refugee situations globally." Peschke explained. "However, a true impact will only be achieved if EU member states provide more places for resettlement and more member states get on board. EU member states are now called upon to make this important effort a reality – as soon as possible" she added.

On a more sceptical notion, Peschke expressed doubts if a resettlement programme would in the immediate future lead to a reduction of the number of persons trying to cross the EU's external borders. "We welcome any measure, which helps refugees to find protection in Europe without risking their lives at the EU's external border." Peschke stated. A significant reduction of the number of people trying to cross EU borders would however require a more comprehensive and broader review of EU asylum and migration policies.

Speaking on the Commission proposal in Brussels on Wednesday, Peschke welcomed incentives which would encourage additional member states to start resettlement programmes. She expressed the hope that the EU efforts on refugee resettlement would in the future as suggested be better coordinated with EU activities in the area of external relations. Peschke also highlighted CCME's willingness to support further steps towards an EU resettlement scheme, for example by providing expertise to the proposed EU expert group on resettlement.

Note to editors:

Refugee resettlement is the process by which refugees who have to flee their home country and find initial, but insufficient or temporary protection in another country, are resettled into a third country and find permanent protection and a durable, sustainable solution there. While around one hundred thousand refugees are annually resettled to the US, Canada and Australia, resettlement is since the 1960ies scarcely used in Europe: currently ten EU member states carry out resettlement, resettling around 4.000 refugees annually.

In the context of the EU, resettlement describes a process of resettling refugees who find themselves in third countries of asylum to EU member states (whereas relocation describes a transfer of refugees who already are in an EU member state between EU member states).

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is since 2004 actively promoting resettlement as an additional tool for refugee protection in Europe. CCME has in June published a number of proposals on the EU resettlement scheme.

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/090629%20RR%20CCME%20considerations%20and%20recommendations%20EU%20RR%20scheme%20FINAL.pdf>

The press Release of the European commission can be found at:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1267&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

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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.