

Press Release  
19 June 2018  
Brussels

### **Churches called to commemorate lives lost seeking safety**

Since 2000, more than 30,000 people have died on their way to Europe, drowning at sea or in rivers, or suffocating in trucks and ships. Recent events relating to the rescue ship Aquarius underscore that some policy makers are not prioritising the lives and wellbeing of those stranded at sea. This refusal to receive points to moral bankruptcy and the failure to enact European values. Against these trends, churches must continue to advocate for justice and welcoming societies. Churches in Europe have already responded to this wholly unnecessary loss of life through solidarity, supporting search and rescue efforts, and also by advocating for safe and regular ways for refugees and migrants to enter Europe.

Responding to this ongoing crisis, Fr Heikki Huttunen, general secretary of the Conference of European Churches, and Doris Peschke, general secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, have issued their annual appeal for churches to commemorate all those who lost their lives seeking safety.

In a joint letter to CEC and CCME constituencies, they recalled the outcomes of the recent 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches. "The protection of the rights of people who have abandoned their homes due to war, and driven to Europe in hope of a better life forces Europe to look at itself and reflect on its future, but also its responsibility and place in the world." They encouraged churches to use resources available on the [CCME website](#), including ideas for worship, intercessional prayers, meditations and hymns. Communities can use these on 24 June, the Sunday following International Refugee Day, or at another appropriate moment throughout the year.

The general secretaries also stressed the theological importance of commemorating, praying, and extending radical hospitality to those in need. This was echoed by the General Assembly, the highest decision-making body of the Conference of European Churches. "It is through the lens of the Word of God that human existence is truly valued collectively and individually. It is a fact that the first true stranger is none other than Christ himself."

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