

To CEC and CCME Member
Churches/Organisations,
Councils of Churches
and Organisations in Partnership

7 June 2019

**Commemorate Persons who lost their lives on their way to seek safety –
Recommended date: 23 June 2019**

Esteemed church leaders,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear Friends,

Tragedies in the Mediterranean region unfortunately continue - 2,262 persons are recorded to have lost their lives in 2018, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and during the first five months of 2019 more than 500 deaths were counted. While total figures have decreased in the last years, the likelihood of dying has increased. New dangerous routes, for example across rivers at the EU's external borders, remain largely unmonitored.

Since 2000 more than 30,000 people are reported to have lost their lives on their way to Europe, drowning at sea or in rivers, suffocated in containers on trucks or ships. Due to higher numbers of casualties, the attention is currently still focused on Italy. The situation at the Greek and Spanish borders as well as the EU's Eastern borders however requires attention, too. The fate of those still in international waters or waters of North African countries is often unclear.

Search and rescue operations by civil society have in recent years been systematically sabotaged and criminalised by EU member states. Those few search and rescue operations which were still successful, have often resulted in prolonged odysseys of the crew and those rescued, as EU member states refuse to meet international and European obligations regarding safe disembarkation and reception. With the end of the search and rescue component of the EU lead "Operation Sophia" in March, the chances of rescuing migrants in distress at sea are even more marginal. At the same time, many persons stuck en route, for example in Libya, still attempt the dangerous journey – in view of unbearable circumstances including violence, famine, slavery and death in the transit countries.

Churches in Europe have responded to the ongoing loss of life in the Mediterranean by offering practical solidarity, but also by advocating for safe and legal ways for refugees and migrants to enter

Europe. Churches in Italy have concretely offered to host those rescued at sea in order to unblock political impasse and allow for disembarkation.

CCME together with partners a few years ago launched the "Safe Passage" project. An exchange between churches for safe passage has been thus facilitated, for example support by the European parliament for humanitarian visas on EU level has been achieved. Projects for sponsoring safe refugee arrivals through resettlement and humanitarian visa have been undertaken by more and more churches in Europe.

The General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches held in Budapest in July 2013 renewed the call on churches to *"to commemorate those who have died on their journey to find a dignified life in Europe through an annual day of prayer."* In past years, many churches and parishes across Europe have taken up this call and held commemoration services around 20 June, International Refugee Day. This year we wish to recommend holding services of commemoration on 23 June, the Sunday after International Refugee Day 20 June. In some countries, other dates during the course of the year may be appropriate.

We would like to reiterate the call of the CEC General Assembly and thus appeal to churches across Europe to commemorate the persons who have lost their lives on their way to Europe. We have in the last year updated the material initially produced together with the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, supported by the Evangelical Church in Berlin, Brandenburg and Silesian Oberlausitz and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), CCME has published material which can be used for worship or intercessions during a service. This is available in English and German and can be found on the CCME website. (<https://ccme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-06-18-Commemoration-Day-June-2018-00000002.pdf>)

We would like to request that you share this material as widely as possible in your constituency. If you were able to inform us about your activities, we would be most grateful.

In this period of Ascension and Pentecost filled with hope and light that are intended for all humankind, we are deeply saddened and disturbed that the way of the cross, of suffering, hopelessness and death, continues for thousands of our human brothers and sister on the outer borders of the European Union. We cannot escape the facts that reveal our - the European citizens' - responsibility for this unending ordeal. As churches and Christians our divine calling is to be witnesses and servants of the Resurrection and of a new life in justice and peace for all, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality or religion. Let us jointly remember the documented as well as the undocumented persons who have died at European borders, let us share our sorrow in prayer.

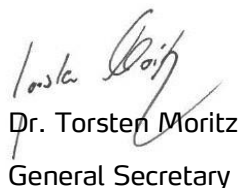
With our best wishes and greetings,



Rev. Christian Krieger

President

Conference of European Churches



Dr. Torsten Moritz

General Secretary

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe