

CCME Press Release of 28th May 2009

Refugee resettlement: an opportunity for Portugal “to pay back for the welcome received when we were refugees”

Debate in Lisbon confirms continued commitment to resettlement to Portugal

A debate on refugee resettlement to Portugal on 27th May 2009 in the Portuguese Parliament in Lisbon brought together some 90 representatives of political parties, members of the Portuguese government, the Portuguese and European Parliament, the UN refugee agency UNHCR and civil society.

The debate was the fourth of a series of debates on refugee resettlement, which the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) organised in 2009 with partners across the EU. The debate, which was co-organised by the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR), took place two years after the decision of the Portuguese government to start a resettlement programme with an initial annual quota of 30 resettlement places.

Rui Pereira, Portuguese Minister of the Interior confirmed his government's continued commitment to resettlement efforts and underlined the importance which Portugal attaches to international refugee protection. This sentiment was echoed by two MEPs, Armando Franca and Ana Gomes as well as Celeste Correira, member of the Portuguese Parliament. MEP Ana Gomes put Portugal's commitment to refugee protection in a historical perspective and saw resettlement as a chance “to repay in kind the welcome we received when Portuguese were refugees”. She also argued for a more ambitious quota as “we need to do more”.

The debate looked at the particular opportunities and challenges, which had arisen during the first years of the Portuguese refugee resettlement programme. Refugees from Iraq and Ivory Coast, which had in recent years been resettled to Portugal expressed deep thanks for the welcome they had received. However, several issues such as the speed of administrative procedures before and after the arrival of resettled refugees, in their view, needed improvement. The recognition of the qualification of resettled refugees posed another problem which might be addressed in the network of “new opportunities” centres by which the Portuguese labour administration is seeking to assess and certify the qualification of those who so far have remained without a formally recognised qualification. In this context, CPR President Maria Theresa Tito de Moraes expressed hope that one of the “new opportunities” centres might soon be opened in the refugee reception facility of CPR.

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 only eight EU member states carry out resettlement, resettling around 4.000 refugees annually. The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is since 2004 actively promoting resettlement as an additional tool for refugee protection in Europe.

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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 do in no way fall under the responsibility of the European Commission.

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.