

CCME Press Release - 11th November 2005

### **Enhancing Refugee Resettlement as an important tool for protecting refugees**

Project of European Churches to build capacity for Refugee Resettlement in Europe

As only five EU Member States regularly resettle refugees, European Churches and Church related organisations urge European Union Member States to actively engage in refugee resettlement and in the establishment of regular programmes. With such a scheme, refugees who have to flee their home country and find initial, but insufficient or temporary protection in another country, would be resettled in EU member states and find permanent protection and a durable, sustainable solution.

Some 35 participants of European and North American churches, human rights organisations and EU institutions have been meeting for a conference on refugee resettlement in Brussels since 9<sup>th</sup> November 2005. The conference is the first of a series of meetings and visits, in the context of a project on refugee resettlement, co-ordinated by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). This project seeks to build the capacity of non-governmental and governmental institutions to engage in refugee resettlement. Further steps will include fact-finding delegations to Finland, Kenya and North America to see how the different stages of the resettlement process work in practice. Conclusions will be shared in a final conference as well as through a regular resettlement newsletter.

Participants heard testimonies from refugees and learned about the extreme difficulties of countries, such as Kenya, to offer durable protection for all the refugees coming from neighbouring countries. These experiences underlined that resettlement is indispensable for protecting refugees who are particularly vulnerable, e.g. refugees with disabilities or refugees who have been stuck in refugee camps, often for years, in deplorable conditions and without future perspectives. Based on the experiences of Finland and the Netherlands, two of the five EU member states currently running resettlements programmes, the potential for refugee resettlement as an instrument of protection was demonstrated. The participants also learned that the possibility to mobilise support of broad parts of the population for refugee protection has so far not been used as much as in more experienced refugee resettlement countries, like Canada and the United States.

Representatives of Churches and NGOs called on more EU member states to engage in refugee resettlement programmes and to envisage an EU-wide programme to increase the number beyond the 4.000 places currently offered for resettled refugees by EU member states. The essential role of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in resettlement was underlined along with the need to enhance the capacity of the UNHCR offices to provide protection. In 2004 UNHCR resettled some 30.000 from the Middle East or East Africa to the USA, Australia or Canada.

"Most of the world's refugees find themselves outside Europe, often in deplorable conditions and without any perspectives for their future lives. As one of the EU's objectives is to enhance global solidarity in protecting refugees, refugee resettlement would send a clear signal that this objective was turned from theory to practice. It is time for an ambitious EU resettlement programme – and churches and refugee assistance organisation want to contribute to help building the necessary capacity for resettlement in practice " concluded Doris Peschke, CCME General Secretary.

For more information contact CCME T. +32 2 234 68 00 e-mail: [info@ccme.be](mailto:info@ccme.be)

The newsletter can be found: [http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CCMEResettlNewsletter\\_SeptOcto2005.pdf](http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CCMEResettlNewsletter_SeptOcto2005.pdf) )



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