

**CCME Press Release of 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007**  
**"Refugee resettlement inevitably part of future Belgian refugee policy"**

*While Belgium does currently not resettle refugees from third countries, it is only a matter of time until it will start to do so. This was the conclusion of a one-day conference on refugee resettlement organised by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the Flemish Refugee Council in Brussels on 27<sup>th</sup> April. Inputs from Belgian governmental officials, the UN refugee agency UNHCR, NGOs, academics and European institutions confirmed the growing interest of Belgian institutions to start a refugee resettlement programme as an additional means of refugee protection.*

The conference, which brought together some 70 participants from political parties, ministries, NGOs and churches, took place as Belgium is preparing for national elections in June. Several speakers expressed hope that the new government will look favourably at starting a Belgian programme of refugee resettlement as part of a global approach to asylum and migration. In preparation for the debate a number of political parties had indicated their support for such a programme.

In an opening statement, Judith Kumin of UNHCR reminded participants that Belgium had engaged in resettlement from the 1950s to the mid-1990s on an occasional basis, for example after the Hungary uprising 1956 or in rescuing Vietnamese boat people. Georgia Georgiadou from the European Commission outlined how the EU could provide coordination and funding for EU member states, which would start resettlement programmes. Representatives of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service of the neighbouring Netherlands explained how the Dutch resettlement programme works.

In a statement reflecting upon the prospects of Belgium becoming a resettlement country, Dirk van den Bulck, the Belgian Commissioner-General for Refugees and Stateless Persons expressed confidence that "refugee resettlement will inevitably be part of future Belgian refugee policy". However, there would still be a need of further building support and knowledge on refugee resettlement in Belgium. In that respect, efforts of civil society organisations such as the debate were both welcome and timely.

CCME General Secretary Doris Peschke commented: "This event shows that more and more European countries recognise the need to offer solution for those refugees, stuck in protracted situations across the globe. European Churches are part of a global fellowship and therefore well-placed to help broadening the basis for more global solidarity in refugee protection. Refugee resettlement is an essential part of this solidarity."

**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 1970ies scarcely used in Europe: currently only six EU member states carry out resettlement, resettling around 3.500 refugees annually. Since 2004, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe is actively promoting resettlement as an additional tool for refugee protection in Europe. For more information contact Torsten Moritz at +32 2 2346800 or [info@ccme.be](mailto:info@ccme.be)

  
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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.

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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.