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churches' commission for migrants in europe

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Press Release

Remembering persons who have lost their lives calls for a commitment to prevent such catastrophes

One year after the tragedy off the shores of Lampedusa, persons across Europe remember the persons who have lost their lives in this and many other incidents in the Mediterranean Sea. The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe takes this opportunity to call on churches, governments, European institutions and people across Europe for a commitment to prevent such catastrophes.

While more refugees and asylum applicants have come to Europe in the past year, and the Italian government operation Mare Nostrum has rescued 90.000 persons in distress at sea, more than 3.000 died in the last year trying to cross the Mediterranean, and the brunt of the refugee crisis in the Middle East is carried by the neighbouring countries to Syria and Iraq hosting already 3 million refugees. "Facing these challenges requires renewed commitment to share the responsibility to protect and to ensure legal and secure access to Europe for those in need of protection," CCME General Secretary Doris Peschke stated.

In the absence of quick and durable solutions to the current conflicts, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe calls for an extension of the operation Mare Nostrum to search and rescue persons in distress at sea, and for the EU Member States to support this action. To reduce further loss of lives and tragedies, legal and safe avenues for refugees ought to be considered and CCME suggests the temporary lifting of visa requirements for Syrian and Iraqi refugees and an increase of emergency resettlement from neighbouring countries as measures for Europe to take more responsibility.

CCME underlines the concrete actions undertaken by churches in the Mediterranean region such as the project "Mediterranean Hope" of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy. "We are encouraged by so many initiatives and actions undertaken in our membership. We would hope that this spirit of sharing and supporting can be taken forward in political decisions to share the responsibility to protect", Doris Peschke said, adding that "also internally in the EU, solidarity is needed. As Italy and the Southern European countries, potentially also the Eastern EU Member States, carry the brunt of arrivals, and only few EU Member States, including Sweden and Germany, have received the highest numbers so far, it appears of utmost importance to share the responsibility for the protection of refugees among EU Member States in a better way."

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe – Commission des Églises auprès des Migrants en Europe – Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

CCME therefore requests EU Member States to recognise the protection status granted by another EU Member State so that persons can move on to another country, e.g. to take up employment. An agreement on a distribution system of refugees, perhaps also asylum applicants, could help share the responsibility; CCME would favour a system in which the desires and personal situation of the persons could be considered as a priority.

CCME urges churches, governments in Europe, European institutions and persons across Europe to take the commemoration of persons who lost their lives to renew the commitment to save and protect persons.

The full statement can be found at: www.ccme.eu

Further information:

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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 in presently 18 European countries. CCME cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.
