

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

June 2016

**Commemorate Persons who lost their lives on their way to seek safety –
Recommended date: 19 June 2016**

Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Dear Friends,

Almost daily these days we hear reports about tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea. 2.809 persons are recorded to have lost their lives to date in 2016 alone, during the month of May alone 1.160. This underlines the despair migrants and refugees are facing: they have little or no other choice than using smugglers, the routes become more risky and more expensive. Currently the Central Mediterranean route is seeing larger movements with persons rescued being taken to Italian ports. The recent shipwreck close to Crete indicates longer routes.

The statistics of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and of the European Asylum Support Office for 2015 and 2016 show that a majority of persons arriving come from conflict regions and thus are likely to be in need of international protection. The Middle Eastern countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, and Turkey, still host the largest number of Syrian refugees. More support has been pledged by the international community. Yet, the appeals by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to resettle at least 10 % of the refugees from this region, and to start additional humanitarian admission programmes have not yielded the necessary response. The support for other refugee hosting countries, e.g. in Eastern Africa, has also not reached necessary levels.

Since 2000 more than 25.000 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 number of arrivals, the attention is currently focused on Italy. The situation at the Greek and Spanish borders however requires attention, too. Greece had to cope with around 900.000 persons arriving on the islands in 2015. 203.981 persons have risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean in 2016.

While Greece and Italy have improved their reception capacity, unfortunately the focus of most EU Member States remains to reduce the number of refugees coming to Europe, rather than assisting the few EU Member States which had to cope with an increase.

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. To this effect, CCME together with partners launched the "Safe Passage" project.

The 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 the 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 **19 June**, the Sunday before the 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 Assembly and thus appeal to churches across Europe to commemorate the persons who have lost their lives on their way to Europe. We have only slightly updated the material 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. Please find a copy attached.

As CCME and CEC, together with the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands are holding the conference "Have no fear" in Lunteren 14-16 June 2016, a commemoration service will be held at Keizersgracht Kerk in Amsterdam on 15 June 2016 at 17.30.

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.

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,



Fr. Heikki Huttunen
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches



Doris Peschke
General Secretary
Churches' Commission for
Migrants in Europe

Encl.