



CCME Press Release

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Understanding the Refugee Crisis – Nordic churches exchange on refugees and migration

Migration advisors of the Nordic churches (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland) gathered in Oslo for their annual regional network meeting 29-30 September 2015. They were joined by Doris Peschke, general secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, and Father Michel Jalakh, secretary general of the Middle East Council of Churches.

Presentations highlighted that the refugee crisis is primarily a crisis in the Middle East affecting severely Syria and neighbouring countries. Globally, the displacement of people has reached numbers not seen for almost 70 years. Despite massive media focus, the number of registered asylum seekers in the Nordic region has not seen dramatic change with the exception of Sweden, which now has 70,000 refugees; and an increase in Finland with 17.000. There are 10,000 registered in Denmark and 12,000 in Norway.

Europe and the international community have waited too long to act, even after refugees started to arrive in larger numbers in Italy and Greece since 2013. The many declarations of support for refugees in the region were not followed up with necessary resources.

It now is time to act swiftly and use protection instruments complementary to each other: The region hosting the vast majority of refugees and internally displaced persons needs sustainable support quickly. And, efforts need to be stepped up to meet meaningful targets of refugee resettlement quotas as suggested by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. These instruments have to be complemented with granting asylum, and additional admission for e.g. family members and students.

Sharing responsibility among European and EU member states is important, and agreement on relocation may provide a first step. Refugees and their needs and potentials must also be considered to make integration successful.

The meeting underlined the need for Nordic societies and churches to maintain their culture of global solidarity in these times of need. Those gathered reiterated the plea of Father Michel and called the attention of governments to his words: "I believe that now we are living the true globalization. What affects the other, could not but affect me. What hurts other will hurt me. When injustice is practiced elsewhere or abroad, it will sooner or later impact me."

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