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Public Issue Statement Called to value migrant people

Every year thousands of people die on their way to Europe. The Mediterranean Sea, far from being a crossroad of peoples and cultures, is becoming a new Wall of separation. Within Europe and internationally, migrants in irregular legal situations face exploitation, uncertainty, exclusion and violation of some of their basic human rights, such as the right to health care, education, family life, etc. Many migrants and their family members, even those who have lived for years in European societies or were born in Europe, are considered irregular and are often in danger of being expelled back to countries they have never lived in. We are also concerned that emigration can impoverish the churches of the countries of origin. We also note that immigrants can bring benefits to the countries that they come to and from.

Christian approaches to migrants are rooted in scripture and particularly in the clear command of Christ: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). “The stranger who lives with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34).

Building good, fraternal relations with migrants has become an important task for many churches in Europe in recent decades. Migration poses considerable challenges and opportunities for the witness and unity of the church in Europe as well as in society at large. Some of those people who have been forced to leave their countries because of poverty, wars, persecutions or environmental disasters, arrive in Europe in the search of a better future for themselves and their families. However they often find it impossible to receive the much needed protection which they deserve.

Migration has increased cultural and religious diversity across Europe and in European churches. While this diversity is a source of great enrichment and joy, it can also evoke feelings of insecurity and prejudice in society and churches. Increasing poverty and rising levels of unemployment contribute to social tensions in society and often migrants are used as scapegoats. In recent years there has been an alarming increase in racism and in acts of violence against migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe, in particular the Roma minority, which has lived in Europe for centuries.



European churches have proclaimed 2010 as the “European year of churches responding to migration” in order to make more visible the churches’ commitment to strangers thereby responding to the message of the Bible and in order to promote inclusive policies at European and national level for migrants, refugees and ethnic minority groups.

As churches in Europe we commit ourselves:

- to speak out publicly against violations of migrants rights and to denounce any acts of racial discrimination and institutional racism;
- to set up and maintain services for the vulnerable among migrants and refugees in Europe;
- to address fears in societies about migration and to facilitate churches’ initiatives on finding ways to live peacefully together;
- to include migrants who are fellow Christians as equal members of our churches and to encourage their full participation and leadership within the churches, and to promote fraternal relations with migrants and minority ethnic churches;
- to commemorate those who have died on their journey to find a dignified life in Europe through an annual day of prayer;
- To support and accompany churches living under critical conditions in other parts of the world.

As churches in Europe we ask the public authorities:

- to improve the social and legal protection of the most vulnerable migrants in particular of trafficked persons;
- To ensure basic human rights of undocumented migrants, particularly those in detention centres;
- to remove legal and other obstacles to the family life of migrants;
- to guarantee effective access to refugee protection for those in need;
- to create a clear legal framework to combat racism;
- to refrain from any discriminatory legal or administrative measures which result in the singling out of particular racial groups;
- to strengthen development aid amongst the poorest of the world.