

**European Churches Responding to Migration 2010–
Achievements, Challenges and Future Perspectives”
Vienna, 17-18 December 2010**

Opening Speech

Revd Arlington Trotman, Moderator CCME

Your Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Bishop Bünker, Doris, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. It gives me the greatest possible pleasure to say that my heart is warmed each time we come together as Europeans to think about this issue, perhaps to analyse how we've gone about addressing it, to underline your point Your Eminence that for the Church in Europe migration is at its very heart, its very existence is crucial in relation to migration.

The year's special focus on migration across the churches has been for CCME and CEC as tremendous opportunity to spread the news so that churches and civil society, political institutions and the political establishment generally could come to see that we speak about migration, not only from a Party political perspective, or indeed a church political perspective, but from viewpoint that we share something in common.

And that is twofold: Migration is ages old, it has always been a fact of our lives whether we live in the first Christian century or today, in poverty or in abundance. The new realities of migration place us in the position of having to look differently at how we as Christians in Europe view the question. But secondly, what also comes to mind is how we respond to the physical needs of those seeking safety and survival, trying to make a life for themselves, those who are confronted by international pressures of one kind in order to find protection and well being.

I can illustrate this by reference to a book I coauthored some year ago, *Asylum Voices: It asked people seeking who could not be named (178 persons) because of their status what was their main motivation for being in Europe. And almost without exception it was fear. Fear of hunger, fear of disaster, fear of war, and civil strife, fear the things that you and I take easily for granted. As I say that it rings true in my ears that I cannot speak dispassionately about the issue of migration because I am a migrant too.*

Europe now becomes my home after more than forty years, and I am sure you welcome me. But the reality is that the very issues and tensions that migrants who are suffering on land and sea on a daily basis face, we all carry in one way or another.

I want to take a moment, therefore, to express on behalf of CCME and CEC grateful thanks to you who have in you academies, churches, local, regional and national structures, decided that we must interface and challenge the injustices connected with migration. And of course there those of you who have been working tirelessly for very many years on this question and we congratulate you!

Congratulation seems an inappropriate term in these circumstances, but we want to urge you to continue the fight: the struggle against poverty and hunger, the fight for protection, and the policies that then force unfortunately and desperately poor people from the south to find refuge in the north only to be met with rejection of one kind and another either in law or by societal attitudes to them.

I want to express thanks to the staff of CCME. I cannot help but imagine how they do this work, 3 or 4 sometimes in an office, as it feels like they are running the whole ship on migration issues across all of Europe. I sometimes speak with Doris and wonder when is she able to take some rest at her home? But I suspect that is because of deep devotion CCME has to truth, the truth against injustice and that we share a common humanity, but that even in political, terms, in economic terms, certainly in religious or Christian contexts, the fight must be carried forward.

I stand and my friend Pat White as evidence of that fight, where we live in Britain and experience untold levels of racism and discrimination on a daily basis – we still do, though we have lived there for many years. I want to suggest though that for the rest of continental Europe, migration is not temporary reality; it is a fact of life for now and in the foreseeable future. The work that the Churches are doing, therefore, and will be prepared to do in the coming years must acknowledge, not simply that we stand theologically as one people under God, but recognises the dependency of the poorest and most marginalised in any given society: Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, black and minority ethnic people, migrants returning from Russia to countries such as Finland, the Sami people, or people seeking asylum because of fear, threats to their existence in countries of origin - a vast range of human community denied their rights establishes an ongoing agenda for us as churches in Europe.

Finally I close with two points: when we see television pictures of people being collected from the high seas, I often ask myself: 'what is my reaction to that?' To personalise this response tells me something about the reaction of the church to which I belong. It tells me that there is a role the churches must play in respect to the political authorities in Europe. Politics and economics must work hand in hand to form agendas that often ignore the reality of the dignity of life, and it is the dignity of life at the heart of which our focus must be placed. Secondly, the need for churches to stand together to celebrate equality and diversity together, to be clear about their theological foundation for acting on the opportunities and challenges of migration, for actually thinking, for bringing to the academy the question of migration - that need is vital to the life blood and empowerment of the person who happens to be a migrant.

I stand to say thanks to you for the work you have done and continue to do because it gives people a chance for security and well-being, for justice and equality, people who are at wits end to defend their dignity and opportunity for survival in the face of hostility. Thank you for the year of European Churches Responding to Migration 2010. Thank you Bishop Bünker for hosting us; at CEC and CCME we are most grateful to hear that the work for which we stand will continue. Thank you.