

18 June 2010

**20 June 2010 – World Refugee Day:
Commemorate Persons Dying on their way to seek safety**

15 million persons were counted as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in addition, 26 million people are displaced within their countries. 80 % are hosted by developing countries in Africa and Asia. Only a minority of refugees find protection in Europe.

“Churches in Europe have declared 2010 the year of European Churches Responding to Migration”, Prof. Viorel Ionita, acting General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches stated. “In the month of June with World Refugee Day on 20 June, churches all over Europe, and indeed beyond, focus on the situation of refugees. Many of our member churches across Europe have impressive programmes to assist refugees and asylum seekers.”

However, access particularly to EU Member States has become increasingly difficult, and generally the figures for asylum applications have dropped dramatically, and in contrast to the word refugee situation. “European countries can and have to do more to provide protection to refugees.” Doris Peschke, General Secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe explained. “In addition to assisting the poorer countries to provide protection, food, shelter and water, more European countries need to participate in and establish regular programmes to resettle refugees to European countries. The cooperation between UNHCR, governments and civil society organisations in these programmes would allow for much higher resettlement number than we currently see in Europe.”

Pictures of boats arriving in Spain, Italy and Greece have shaped the perception of refugees and underlined the risk persons take on them to reach Europe. Since 1993, more than 13.000 persons were counted dying on their way to Europe.

From Finland to Italy, prayers and intercessions will be held to commemorate the persons who have died on their way this Sunday. The Assembly of the Conference of European Churches held in Lyon in July 2009 had called 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.”

The Year of *European Churches Responding to Migration 2010* is a joint activity of the Conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe and shall make visible the churches' commitment to strangers, responding to the message of the Bible, which insists on the dignity of every human being, in order to promote an inclusive policy at European and national level for migrants, refugees and ethnic minority groups.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 120 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 associated organisations. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

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.