

English transcription of video message from Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission, Responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security

I would like to congratulate CCME for organising this conference on resettlement of refugees in Europe. Thank you for letting me take part in the debate via this video message, as I cannot be with you in Stockholm.

We are in the process of building a Europe of asylum. The respect of human dignity, tolerance and freedom are the founding values of the European Union. They have to be expressed through granting entry to those who are persecuted.

We need to reawaken the faithfulness to the values of Europe and encourage the generosity of the people of Europe, despite the (financial) crisis. To respond to this duty to offer asylum looking at what we refer to as the resettlement of refugees is indispensable.

This resettlement must be at one and the same time both internal to the EU and external.

To look first of all at internal resettlement. We need to have a greater solidarity expressed within the EU to relieve those member states which because of their geographic location are submerged by refugees. I'm thinking of Malta, Greece, Cyprus Italy and Spain.

In 2008 Europe received nearly 240,000 asylum seekers, more than a quarter of whom were received by Mediterranean member states.

It is this spirit that the commission received a mandate to start a pilot resettlement scheme for asylum seekers in Malta where the situation is one of the most serious.

France has already set an example by taking in 99 refugees.

I shall be giving information about the level of commitments member states are making in this regard at the upcoming Council of Ministers meeting on 21 September.

But resettlement also has to be external.

As the UNHCR reminds us, there are many refugees who can reside near to their country of origin, with the hope of being able to return there.

But there are others who will never be able to go back and we need to be able to envisage resettling some of the most vulnerable of them in Europe.

The UNHCR estimates that of the 10 million refugees world wide in 2009 approximately 560,000 are waiting for (permanent) resettlement.

The Commission finances regional protection programmes for those regions in the most affected areas.

But at the end of 2008 the EU also took the decision to receive and organise the resettlement of 10,000 Iraqi and Palestinian refugees who were very vulnerable and currently living in camps in Syria and Jordan. As of today we can say that about half of the objectives are on the way to being met. And this action must serve as a model for the future.

With that goal in mind, the commission will adopt a proposal at the beginning of September which will establish a common European programme for resettlement of refugees.

This proposal will have three principle objectives:

1) The first is to give the EU the general conditions to consult with member states about what is needed for coordination at the European level.

2) The second objective is be able to better target the European funds available for refugees to certain nationalities, certain regions and geographical zones

The current programme in favour of Iraqi refugees could be one such priority area for common action in 2010.

3) And the third objective is to work much more closely with the UNHCR

So, with this proposal we will be taking the first step on the road to having a more ambitious European resettlement programme.

The commission has put this objective of resettlement into its plans for the Stockholm 2010-2014 programme. Which gives you an idea of how important we think this issue is

So in conclusion I want to once more underline the importance for the EU to fulfil this duty of solidarity towards refugees, who have to see their situation improve, their possibility of being received increase, to have a future open up for them.

It is a major struggle for me; it needs a lot of determination and perseverance faced with the reticence of some member states and in the context of the financial crisis which does not favour generosity towards those who need it most.

The success of this action will also be through how European citizens feel able to support these programmes of resettlement and how public opinion, rather than distrusting them, feels able to support them.

And of course the churches have an essential role to play.
They can educate people's minds and activate their hearts.

I know how much you care about this issue and your constant engagement with it.
So I am counting on the active contribution of each of you as we together lead the way and win this struggle on the right of asylum.

Provisional translation from French