

Rev. Arlington Trotman – CCME moderator
Welcome words, resettlement conference 25th August 2009 Stockholm-Sigtuna

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear Minister, Assistant High Commissioner, General Secretaries, friends and colleagues from governments, civil society and UNHCR across Europe and beyond,

It is a true privilege and honor to welcome you to this event as moderator (in other organizations one would say chairperson) of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe.

We are holding this conference on the EU resettlement scheme and the way towards it at a crucial point in time: this time next week, the European Commission will have officially adopted the proposal for an EU resettlement scheme – an important moment in the discussions of such a scheme, which have been going on for a good six, seven years. While we will be discussing the expected proposal in more detail during the next days, it is clear that this proposal will not signal the end of the discussions on a European scheme, but probably just the beginning of a new phase in these discussions. These discussions have gained momentum over the last few years as more and more EU member states are beginning to engage in resettlement, civil society support of resettlement is growing and more coordination of EU level is desired. We hope that our conference will be able to provide a space for thought on the details of such a scheme and the strategies towards it and we had as CCME prior to the summer break taken the opportunity to formulate a number of considerations and proposals.

Allow me to shortly highlight the importance which the issue of resettlement has for us as CCME and the context in which we as an ecumenical umbrella organization of the churches in Europe address it. It is our conviction that Europe is a continent, which has both the expertise and the resources - and I may say the historical obligation - to play a major role in protecting refugees globally. As we are today in the fortunate situation that there are only few remaining conflict, which force persons to flee within Europe, it is clear that this responsibility to protect is something which needs to be extended to other regions of the world. For us as churches, this global solidarity is nothing abstract or theoretical - rather on the contrary. I think it was essential for CCME's involvement in the issue of resettlement that at the beginning of this decade, our friends and partners from other regions began to ask: where is Europe in resettlement? For the colleagues from the All Africa Conference of Churches or the Middle East Council of Churches, it was crystal-clear that resettlement for many of the refugees in their region would be the only viable option to rebuild lives and that Europe needed to do more to help with this rebuilding of lives. At the same time, it was church colleagues from the US or Canada who, based on their involvement with resettlement in their countries' programmes, encouraged us that civil society could play an essential part in making resettlement a reality.

The context in which resettlement is discussed is still somewhat confusing and confused – despite various attempts to set straight definitions and concepts on resettlement. For us as CCME it is essential that when talking about an EU resettlements scheme, we talk about a mechanism of GLOBAL solidarity. This means we are talking about resettling refugees who have fled from their home country and have found initial asylum in another country OUTSIDE the EU and who are then resettled further INTO the EU. While we welcome any informed discussion about how to best share the responsibility to protect refugees who already have found their way onto EU territory, we would like to reiterate that such discussions should be kept separate from discussions on resettlement – also by choosing a different terminology.

We are extremely privileged to be able to discuss the issue of an EU resettlement scheme here just outside Stockholm during one of the first working weeks of the Swedish EU council presidency, a presidency which will be instrumental in the adoption of the so-called “Stockholm programme” for the next five years. We are very happy about the various efforts the Swedish government and you Minister Billström personally have undertaken to move this issue forward in the EU and it is obvious that we hope to see a strong commitment to resettlement as part of this Stockholm programme.

Allow me last, but not least say a few words of thanks. We would not be able to hold this event here today without the support of our partners. First of all, the Sigtuna foundation, our wonderful host here – my thanks go to them and their staff for the support they have given in many ways since the beginning of the year. I am sure they will during the next few days do everything possible to make the stay of all of us a most enjoyable one, and I know that we will later on hear more about this very special place and its history. Then, I would like to thank our two CCME member organizations and co-organisers, the Church of Sweden and the Christian Council of Sweden, who were in many, many different ways instrumental in making this event happen, creating connections and taking the issue forward as part of the Swedish Churches’ priorities for the Swedish presidency. And finally, my thanks go to the Swedish government, who in many ways and through various agencies has supported this event. A particular thanks in this context goes to the colleagues of the Swedish Migration board, who have provided support and advice in ways too numerous to mention. We have tremendously appreciated this help and constructive cooperation. Last not least our thanks go to the European Commission, which through its financial support through the ERF made this event possible.
Thank you

But let me know hand over to our Swedish colleagues....