



Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

We address you with reference to the Churches' Global Week for Justice that we are celebrating in Sweden between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> of November. During this week, churches and organizations representing the Lutheran churches, the Free churches, the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church gather in a joint initiative to focus on the important issues of migration and- refugees.

This year, the Christian Council of Sweden has launched a campaign called "Make Space!" The campaign encourages us to understand, reflect and respond to various situations that migrants experience and to discuss them around our kitchen tables at home, or in our churches, municipalities or country. One important issue that the campaign aims to highlight is the great need for Europe to expand the scope of refugee resettlement to the EU.<sup>1</sup>

The ecumenical agency, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) claims that it is possible and necessary to increase the number of quota refugees in Europe to at least 20,000 people per year from 2020 onwards. The CCME considers that Europe has sufficient space to accept more quota refugees. Although 2020 is somewhat distant, it is appropriate to take action right now for long-term political decisions that can enable people trapped in the refugee camps of the world without a durable solution to have a future.<sup>2</sup>

The need to increase the numbers of resettled refugees to the EU is even more urgent because of the internal armed conflict in Syria. Many EU-countries are experiencing economic hardship and this is sometimes advanced as a reason not to take responsibility for those in need of protection. However, the challenges of the European countries are relatively small when seen in relation to the situation in the countries neighbouring Syria. Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have so far admitted about 350,000 Syrian refugees. Europe has to help share this burden.

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<sup>1</sup> Make Space!

<sup>2</sup> CCME Policy Paper

The treatment of Syrian asylum applicants varies considerably across the EU. This is clear from a joint letter from Amnesty International, CCME and the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) to the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union.<sup>3</sup> This creates an unequal situation where Syrian nationals in similar circumstances receive different levels of protection depending on which EU country they are in. So far only Sweden and Germany have made the decision to give at least short-term residence permits to Syrian refugees.

The European Union and its member states must continue sharing responsibility with and demonstrating support for the affected countries by facilitating access to protection in Europe for people fleeing Syria. We, the churches, can accelerate this process. As the Secretary Generals of the Christian Council of Sweden and the Swedish Mission Council we encourage you to seek dialogue with your government to this end, and to stress the great needs of the Syrian people.

Greetings in Christ,

Karin Wiborn  
Secretary General  
Christian Council of Sweden

Eva Christina Nilsson  
Secretary General  
Swedish Mission Council

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<sup>3</sup> The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Role of the European Union