

To CEC and CCME Member Churches
and Associated Organisations

11 June 2014

**Commemorate Persons who lost their lives on their way to seek safety –
Recommended date: 22 June 2014**

Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, dear Friends,

The tragedy of Lampedusa in October 2013 has brought the fate of persons crossing the Mediterranean Sea and seeking safety to the attention of European societies and governments. Yet, many more tragedies occur at the Southern European borders: this year has already seen tragedies at Farmakonisi and Samos, Greece, several incidents at the fence between Morocco and the Spanish exclave of Ceuta and Melilla in addition to Lampedusa, Italy and Malta.

The civil war in Syria has already displaced millions of people. The number of refugees registered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has doubled since last year and is now close to 2,8 million persons. The majority lives in neighbouring countries Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In Europe, Sweden and Germany have the highest rate of Syrian refugees; however, reaching Europe remains very difficult for refugees.

Due to strict border controls at the EU external borders, refugees and migrants opt for extremely high risks and resort to smugglers hoping to find a way towards safety. After the tragedy of Lampedusa, the Italian government launched the Mare Nostrum operation which prioritises search and rescue. As a consequence, the figures of asylum applicants has risen and already reached 43.000 in the first five months of 2014, while the same number of refugees was registered for the whole year 2013. Germany has started a substantial ad-hoc resettlement scheme for Syrian refugees while some other states have increased their quotas only slightly. A common and meaningful European approach has yet to be developed.

Between 1988 and 2013 (October) 19.144 people are known to have lost their lives on their way to Europe, drowning in the sea or in rivers, suffocated in containers on trucks or ships. Due to higher numbers, the media attention currently focuses on Italy. The situation at the Greek and Spanish borders however requires attention, too. These countries and their people face immense challenges following the financial crisis. At the same time, as the Syrian conflict is in the neighbourhood, Greece remains an important entry point for refugees and asylum applicants. While with great efforts reception and asylum capacity have improved for the initial phase in a number of places, the asylum and refugee system in Greece is still not meeting protection needs.

The Assembly of the Conference of European Churches held in Budapest in July 2013 has renewed the call 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."* In the past years, many churches and parishes across Europe have taken up this call and held commemoration services around the 20 June, International Refugee Day. This year we wish to recommend holding services of commemoration on **22 June**, the Sunday after the International Refugee Day 20 June.

We would like to reiterate the call of the CEC Assembly and thus call on churches across Europe to commemorate the persons who have lost their lives on their way to Europe. Together with the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, supported by the Evangelical Church in Berlin, Brandenburg and Silesian Oberlausitz and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), CCME has published material which can be used for worship or intercessions during a service. This is available in English and German and can be found on the CCME website:

http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/70_DOWNLOADS/20_Publications/2014-06-11-Remembrance_2014_Resource_Guide_EN_FIN.pdf. Please find a copy attached.

We would like to request that you share this material as widely as possible in your constituency. If you were able to inform us about your activities, we would be most grateful.

Let us jointly remember the documented as well as the undocumented persons who have died at European borders, let us share our sorrow in prayer.

With our best wishes and greetings,



Rev. Dr. Guy Liagre
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches



Doris Peschke
General Secretary
Churches' Commission for
Migrants in Europe

Encl.