



Conference of
European Churches



Churches' Commission for
Migrants in Europe

To CEC and CCME Member Churches
and Associated Organisations

14 May 2013

**Commemorate Persons dying on their way to seek safety –
Recommended date: 16 or 23 June 2013**

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

The plight of the Syrian people as a consequence of the civil war is reported quite regularly in the media. More than 1,2 million Syrian refugees have been registered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees by May 2013, the majority leaves in neighbouring countries Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In Europe, Sweden and Germany have the highest rate of Syrian refugees; however, reaching Europe has become very difficult for refugees. While neighbouring countries are requested to keep their borders open, the EU is investing in more security to guard the borders. As a consequence, refugees and migrants opt for extremely high risks and resort to smugglers hoping to find a way towards safety.

Between 1988 and 2012, 18.567 people have lost their lives on their way to Europe, drowning in the sea or in rivers, suffocated in containers on trucks or ships. As the numbers have declined since summer 2011, also public attention is drifting away. And yet, reports particularly from Greece indicate that loss of lives remain reality. A joint delegation of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches visited Greece in November 2012. The country and its people face immense challenges following the financial crisis. At the same time, as the Syrian conflict is in the neighbourhood, Greece remains one of the most important entry points for refugees and asylum applicants. It is fair to say that the asylum and refugee receiving system in Greece is still dysfunctional, and the rise of racist violence against migrants and refugees, as well as their supporters, is of great concern.

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The Assembly of the Conference of European Churches held in Lyon in July 2009 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."* 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 **16 or 23 June**, the Sunday before or 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/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2013-05-09_EN_Remembrance_2013_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
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Encl.