

Day of intercession in memory of those who have died at the borders of the EU

2011

Information, Intercessions and Ideas
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Refugee boats in front of the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin. Sculpture by Kalliopi Lemos

Foreword

We say to all European churches:
Respond to this call!

Let us in caring for our own future
and the future of our countries
not forget those who are fleeing,
on their way to us, on the way to Europe.

Let us in the face of huge changes in the Arab countries
find a new policy that takes human rights seriously
and does not do deals with dictatorships for our own economic interests
and does not raise up fences and security measures.

Let us remember those who
have perished while fleeing,
and those who die from despair in our own countries because of the coldness and the
indifference of others.

There will be a future in Europe only when we learn to share with each other,
and with the stranger among us.
This is the promise of the Old and the New Testament.

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

Let us prepare acts of worship, pray and light candles for the victims
who are among us and for the many who have no name.

Let us not forget those who have died as victims of our border security systems
victims of our prosperity and egoism.

Let us remember together,
that we too have been refugees since time immemorial,
that in many of our countries, our own fate as migrants and refugees
has not been forgotten.

And let us measure the depths of our Christian faith
by how we remember, commemorate and take action.

This is not an action or a campaign. This is a moment to pause and reflect.
Herein lies the power.
This is an act of worship.

A place where we struggle to hear the Word.
If we take this seriously,
Our words will have the power to heal.

German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, April 2011

As a date we suggest each year a Sunday around 20 June, World Refugee Day
(in 2011, **Sunday 26 June**). There are also other possible opportunities: during the
intercultural week in Germany, which includes Refugee Day in October; on
Human Rights Day, 10 December; during Lent; or in November, when many
churches hold peace weeks.

Day of intercession in memory of those who have died at the borders of the EU, on 26 June 2011

In July 2009 the Conference of European Churches declared in Lyon: "As churches in Europe we commit ourselves: to remember those who have died on their journey to find a dignified life in Europe, through an annual day of prayer." Churches and human rights groups in several European countries will commemorate together on the same day, 26 June 2011, the lethal consequences of the sealing off of the external borders of the EU. Such sealing off takes place through highly perfected technical border protection, through the displacement of border protection measures to neighbouring and transit states of the EU, and through legal agreements with neighbouring and transit states on refugee return, even if this violates human rights. Churches and human rights groups in the United States of America, on whose border with Mexico there are also innumerable deaths of migrants, are also joining in. Thus the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) agreed in July 2010 to join this initiative of the European churches.

Churches will remember in prayer the nameless dead who frequently disappear without trace in the sea or in the desert. Their lament, which went unheard by human beings, will be brought before God. What takes place at the borders - far from public scrutiny and control - will be brought to public awareness. Background reports will provide information about the situation of human rights at the borders. Politicians will be reminded of their responsibility to take at long last effective measures to protect human beings and human rights.

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in November 2010 called for the protection of human rights at the external borders to be further improved.

This means working towards:

- "the creation of mandatory guidelines for the operations of FRONTEX (the EU external borders agency),
- the identification of refugees and their access to international protection being part of the training of border officials,
- civil society organizations becoming more effectively consulted and involved in the development and implementation of training measures,
- the setting up of an independent monitoring system to monitor FRONTEX activities, in order to inform the EU institutions regularly about compliance with European and international law, particularly of fundamental and human rights."

Moreover, the Synod of the EKD has been critical of European Union negotiations with Libya that aim at cooperation in the area of migration control, pointing out that Libya neither grants refugee protection nor protects human rights. Together with ecumenical partners and in particular the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Synod of the EKD formulated the following demands:

- "To not transfer to Libya tasks of immigration and border control, and refugee protection;
- Libya to be urged to observe the human rights of migrants and to discontinue the practice of arbitrary detention;
- Libya to allow human rights organizations to have regular access to its territory, in particular to prisons, and to allow UNHCR to fully exercise its mandate,
- Opportunities to be created for those seeking protection to obtain access to the asylum procedure in the embassies of [EU] Member States in their countries of origin or in the region."



Refugee boat on the island of Lesbos

Ideas for worship

Read news and reports, and in between sing or speak words of the Psalms
Silently remember the dead.

In some services we have put photos of the trauma of the boat people on a long black cloth, and each of us has had an opportunity to light a candle and to place it on the cloth while saying words of intercession.

Or it could be to light small candles, placing them in a water bowl (font ...) while keeping silence or praying.

We have used Taizé liturgies and chants, to give form to our silent horror.

People have written intercessions and stuck them to a type of wailing wall.

Some people have placed rafts in their churchyards

Some have floated candles on water (rivers ...)

Some have organized funeral processions.

To give shape to shame, to name fear and to awaken consciences can be tasks in themselves.

Proposal for a prayer of intercession for those who have died at the borders of the European Union

Lord,
we bring to you the weeping and wailing of the mothers of this world,
waiting for their children, whose traces have disappeared in the sea,
in the desert, in uncertainty:

Refugees,
men, women and children,
from the war zones of this world,
who are fleeing hunger and poverty,
in the hope of a better, more secure life.

We bring to you our lament for those who have died
stranded at our borders,
those who have died fleeing
through deserts, mountains and seas.

We call upon you and we join in the cry of those who
have died seeking justice and a better world.

Lord, we bring to you our shame
For turning away and remaining silent.

We have enough to eat in Europe - and do not see
that we also create the causes of hunger.

We are insatiable - and do not see that this is the cause of many wars.

We are silent, where we need to take action.

Lord, we bring before you political leaders,
who are not making decisions about mere numbers,
but about the fate of many real human beings.

Sharpen their awareness of how things are interrelated.
Keep their consciences alert,
Let them develop rules that are guided by humanity and vision.

Lord, give us the strength to bear witness
to the suffering of your children on the run,
on their way to us,
at our borders,
in refugee camps and among us,
in detention, waiting to be deported,
in fear of the dangers that lie ahead,
in mourning for those who have died.
Help us, Lord.

Proposal for a prayer of intercession for those who assist

Lord, there is a terrible injustice that is happening
and help is far away.
We who are helping often feel helpless and do not know
how to deal with what we encounter day after day.

Some of us have grown up in protected environments.
Never have we felt so close to misery and suffering
and we are afraid.

No concept, no solution, no political proposals in our country; in Europe,
nothing that could be there and convince us that the suffering will have an end.
A huge void, given that so many have died. Shame and fine homilies. No end to
the lack of imagination.

We burn out at work and are afraid.
Many look away, do not allow themselves to be touched by what's happening.
There's hardly anything in the media - and what is there only stokes new fears.
Help us to remain open, to allow ourselves to be touched, and to remain
steadfast.
Because we are witnesses to what is happening.

We are witnesses to the injustice experienced by the people who tell us their
stories.

Lord, support us and help us
To maintain our stance in our society
Help us to provide support and sanctuary to people who are fleeing.
Help us and them to live with their stories and to remain near to them.

Lord, be near to us.



The remains of a refugee boat on Lesbos

Instead of a sermon: personal testimonies

My name is Muamed. I'm 23 and I'm from Somalia. You can find me in the Marsa Open Centre, on Malta. Three times I have been sent back from other European countries to Malta. But what should I do here? I arrived five years ago by boat. My mother died in Uganda, and after that I was with an uncle in a refugee camp in Kenya. There I went to school. I just want to be given a chance. I just want to learn something, have an education. My dream is to go to university. That's why I made the long journey here. I've crossed deserts, I was beaten up in Libya. I worked my guts out for the crossing. I was imprisoned and beaten again. Then I got away in a boat. It was unimaginably awful. Even today, I can't talk about it. My friend died.

And the first thing I saw when I thought I had made it, were people who laughed at me when I said "Bon Giorno", because I had landed not in Italy but in Malta. Then they put us in a warehouse, locked up with 40 people in one room.

The freedom got even worse. In the heat of the summer in a tent camp. Even in Kenya we lived better. When I complained, they said that I should swim back.

I don't know what to do now. Recently a friend took his own life. Now I hope for a resettlement place in the USA. Each year they take 500 people from Malta, because Malta is not a place for refugees. When will someone in Europe wake up? All we want to do is to learn and to have a place.

My name is Hamid and I'm 17. It's already three years since I fled. I'm from Afghanistan. Don't ask me how I did it. I was 14 when I had to get away, otherwise I would have been recruited by the Taliban. You Europeans want to bring peace, but there is war in my country and if we run away, you don't want us. I fled through Iran and Turkey, it was often dangerous. Often I didn't have enough to eat. We were always part of a group. From time to time, we worked. We slept anywhere when we were tired. It was worst in Greece. We didn't find anyone who was friendly. The police shouted at us and beat us with sticks. We were still young. Somehow two of us managed to get to Italy. I was often afraid. Do you know what it's like to be so afraid that you get sick, and then you flop out? Now I'm here in Germany. You say I look

older. Of course I look old, after what I experienced. I want to go to school, but they tell me I can't. It's up to me to see what I can do here. You've banished me to a place far away from any town or city. There's nothing here at all. How am I supposed to learn anything? Is there no one there who can help me?

I call myself Dora. I'm in my mid twenties, even if no one believes me. I came here through Italy. Every time I told a different story. I don't believe anyone any more. Not the authorities in my country who wanted to put me in prison, just because I was aware of my rights as a woman. Certainly not you, you who have destroyed my dream of human rights and women's rights in Europe. The man in my country, whom I wanted to accuse, was more powerful. They wanted to kill me, but I needed to have evidence. How should I prove it? I ran away. They beat me up as I was escaping. I was raped. To earn money I slept with other men. I'm completely done in. And now you ask me why I'm here and say that I should tell you everything. I can't. I hear voices at night, I'm afraid. You have put me here, in the psychiatric ward. Maybe I will tell the nice black nurse who looks at me and remembers home. I won't say anything to the rest of you. I just can't go on.

I'm Noor. My family is still in Iran. They want to join me. You have granted me a humanitarian permit. Thanks! I can't visit them or I would lose my status here. They can't come here because the law doesn't allow it. What sort of laws are these that are so deadly. I was an engineer. I'm able to work but no one gives me a chance.

I'm Hanna. I'm in my early twenties and am already studying. At home I learned to play the flute and the violin, and now I hear these stories. I can't bear it. I was born in Germany and I cannot hear it again. I started to work in a refugee camp. Again and again these stories: of death and grief, torture and murder, of war and destruction. Why are you all so silent and leave us to deal by ourselves with what we hear?

I'm Martin and I'm a bit older. I hear the same stories and hear what is healing in them – as someone is listening. It happens to the woman who weeps for her children - and someone is touched by it. Healing, quietly and softly, like the beating of wings, gentle and tender. Just because someone else is there. Of course, there needs to be proper legal advice, medical, social and psychological help, it takes experience and strength. But it also needs this: simple compassion. Day by day towards what is new. And then you can see how it is heals this person and that person. You see how the children laugh again after a while, and the tears of others that dissolve all that is petrified. This is an experience of God, when we enter into the truth. Is our sheltered life often not only deception and illusion? And are not our own lives healed, because it makes sense to do something and get involved?

What can we do

To say what is happening and to think about it with others is always the first step.

Small groups can work together to collect information and reflect on how to be better informed about the situation.

Reading the Bible helps! There are many stories in it that are related to migration; it's good to know the movement of people has always been there. God is a God on the move whom we can meet in the stranger.

We can write to Members of the European Parliament, invite them for a discussion.

Groups involved in "One World" work, and partnership groups that have projects, can exchange experiences with those involved in migration and refugee issues.

The situation in North Africa is new and affects all of us very directly.

What alternatives are there to refugee deterrence measures and what needs to be done to deal with the reasons that lead to people fleeing?

There are many church pronouncements and statements. It makes sense to fetch them out and to exchange views about them together.

You can make joint investigations, if you don't know of the situation of refugees in your own local church, or church district. Open days and mutual invitations help to build bridges. To invite refugees and give them an opportunity to speak heals our own society.

A summary for newsletters or for the church notices

Together with Christians in other European countries, in our intercessions on 26 June 2011 we are remembering in particular migrants and refugees who have died on their way to seek a life of human dignity in Europe. We deplore the lethal consequences of sealing off the external borders of the European Union. This is taking place at a time when technical systems of border protection are ever more perfect, by transfer of border protection measures to neighbouring and transit states of the EU in Africa and Eastern Europe, and through readmission agreements with neighbouring and transit states even if these violate human rights. There are no exact figures on the number of people who have died en route to Europe. After examining media reports the human rights organization "Fortress Europe" came to the conclusion that by the end of 2010, at least 15 656 people died at the borders of Europe.

Further information and resources

- Continuous list of known deaths at European borders:
UNITED for Intercultural Action:
<http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/pdfs/listofdeaths.pdf>
- Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org
- Borderline Europe: http://www.borderline-europe.de/downloads/borderline-europe_english.pdf
- Charter of the new sanctuary movement in Europe, Berlin, 10.10.2010 (in English):
http://www.kirchenasyl.de/1_start/Kasten%20Aktuelles/Charta%20-%20englisch.pdf
- EKD, experiences at the external border of the EU:
<http://www.ekd.de/bevollmaechtigter/newsletter/63227.html>
- CCME, EKD and NGOs: Emergency in the South Mediterranean – towards a true policy of addressing humanitarian assistance, protection, cooperation and solidarity: http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/75_PRESS/2011/2011-04-06-NGO_statement_Libya_response_FINAL.pdf
- Fortress Europe: http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2006/02/immigrants-dead-at-frontiers-of-europe_16.html [English-language entry point]
- Frontexwatch (in German): <http://frontex.antira.info/frontexwatch>
- Pro Asyl, "Stop the Death" campaign (in German):
<http://www.proasyl.de/de/themen/stoppt-das-sterben>
- UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: <http://www.unhcr.org>
- DVD "Like a man on earth", a moving documentary film about refugees who have come to Italy through Libya. Italian and English with subtitles in German, French, English, Spanish and Italian. May be ordered from:
<http://likeamanonearth.blogspot.com> .

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This resource guide is also available in French and German at: www.ccme.be



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