

Conference of European Provincials statement on forced migrants

The Conference of European Jesuit Provincials, holding its annual General Assembly from 18th to 20th October 2009 in Malta, brings to the attention of all European countries the continuing human tragedy of the forced migrants who make their way from Africa across the Mediterranean Sea to seek international protection and the chance to build a future with dignity. The question of migration is a priority for the Society of Jesus worldwide. In Europe the Jesuit Refugee Service has thirteen country offices, as well as a regional office in Brussels. Many Jesuits work in relation to the integration of migrants within European societies.

The increasing inaccessibility of Europe to persons who urgently need protection obliges thousands of men, women and children to risk their lives by crossing the sea on small, fragile boats, often with tragic consequences. Every year, several hundred persons taking this route towards Europe in search of asylum reach Malta, or need to be rescued and brought there. Except for the most desperate and vulnerable cases, they are then held in prolonged detention, in conditions that deepen previous suffering. If they succeed in gaining international protection, they still face untold difficulties, stemming from overcrowding, from Malta's very limited capacity to receive them, and from the scarcity of employment opportunities.

We Jesuit provincials maintain that this humanitarian issue cannot be resolved in Malta alone, or even by the states on the EU's southern borders. It is a matter that requires urgent action by the entire European Union.

We therefore urge the states most directly concerned, and also the European Union, to make asylum in Europe truly accessible, and to deal more justly and humanely with the forced migrants who reach our shores. As this tragedy, with its roots in countries of origin in our neighbouring continent of Africa, continues to unfold we make three calls to our governments and to the European Union: to show effective solidarity with persons urgently seeking protection; to share with over-burdened border states the responsibility of meeting our shared human rights obligations; and to strengthen partnerships with African states so as to create new opportunities for their peoples to sustain a life with dignity.

Equally, it is a challenge to the whole of European society to confront the fear and xenophobia that sometimes underlies the utter resistance to the claims of migrants.

The Assembly represents about 5900 Jesuits, and their colleagues, working in twenty-three member states of the European Union, as well as in Russia, Ukraine, Croatia, Switzerland, the Western Balkans, the Middle East and the Maghreb.

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