

The World Council of Churches' Central Committee (on the recommendation of the Public Issues Committee, Item 7.) adopted the following memorandum and recommendations on uprooted people:

## **Practising hospitality in an era of new forms of migration**

### **Memorandum and Recommendations on Practising Hospitality in an Era of New Forms of Migration**

Ten years ago, in September 1995, the WCC Central Committee adopted a statement on uprooted people called "A Moment to Choose: Risking to be with Uprooted People." The term "uprooted people" was used to refer to all those who are compelled by severe political, economic, and social conditions to leave their lands, including refugees, internally displaced people and forced migrants. In fact, the reasons why people are compelled to leave their communities are often mixed. People flee wars because their lives are threatened, but also often because their livelihoods are destroyed. Those fleeing persecution may use the same migratory routes as those who leave their communities in search of jobs.

While the difficulties encountered by those seeking security and survival in other communities are not new and have been addressed in previous WCC statements, there have been disturbing developments over the past decade. This statement focuses on two of these developments: new patterns of migration as a result of globalization and the effects of the events of 11 September 2001 on the movement of people.

In this context of new patterns of migration, it is important to state that migration is normal and that it is a part of our history. But many people are forced to migrate because of dramatic events. Christ calls us to offer hospitality towards migrants and refugees. The theme of hospitality was highlighted at the 2004 Plenary Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC around the text: "Receive one another, therefore, as Christ has received you for the glory of God" (Romans, 15:7). The daily challenges faced by today's migrants and refugees demonstrate that we have much to do to translate this call to hospitality into reality.

### **Globalization of economies**

As the integration of national economies into the global economy has intensified disparities between rich and poor, more people seek to leave their home countries in search of better economic opportunities - or survival. According to the International Organization for Migration, there are 175 million migrants in the world today. The revolution in communication and transportation, also a consequence of globalization, increases the possibilities for people both to know that living standards are better elsewhere and to find means of moving toward other countries. While economic migration was dominated by young single men in the past, today more than 50 % are women migrating to other countries for employment.

While globalization has meant that the movement of some people has become easier, governments of countries in both the North and South have generally pursued policies to keep out those migrants who seek to enter their countries outside of legal channels. As it becomes harder to reach the borders of some wealthy countries, new destination countries for migrants are emerging. Thus Central and Eastern European countries have received many more migrants as the routes to Western European countries have become more difficult, or asylum seekers are returned to these countries. Secondly, as entry into rich countries becomes more difficult, migrants resort to increasingly dangerous routes, whether by boarding rickety boats across the Mediterranean or crossing inhospitable land borders into the US. The number of deaths of people seeking to enter rich countries is rising. Thirdly, would-be migrants increasingly turn to smugglers and traffickers to cross borders. Another consequence is that many refugees no longer seek asylum, but rather stay in irregular situations for fear that their justified claim would lead to deportation to a third country.

### **Emerging trends in migration**

Trafficking involves recruiting and/or transporting people using violence, other forms of coercion, or providing misleading information in order to exploit them economically or sexually (through for example, forced prostitution and bonded labour). Trafficked persons are often in conditions of slavery and are no longer free to move or to decide on their destinies. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. UNICEF reports that child trafficking doubled in the decade between 1989 and 1999.

Trafficking has now become big business. It is estimated that 600,000-800,000 human beings are trafficked every year with annual profits of US\$8-10 billion.

Given demographic trends of low fertility rates and ageing populations, developed countries need migrants to maintain their standards of living and provide tax revenues to pay pensions to their elderly

populations. This widely shared analysis stands in sharp contradiction to the actual design of migration policies - where they exist at all.

Indeed, for the host countries, migration poses many challenges. In developed countries, migrants, particularly undocumented migrants, are working at jobs which are often disdained by the local population. In many countries, some politicians have found it easier to blame immigrants than to admit their own inability to develop and implement necessary social programmes. Migration also leads to increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith societies which raise questions about national identity. Instead of tolerance and mutual respect, however, migrants are often subjected to xenophobic and racist attitudes and behaviour. In fact, racism is increasing dramatically in developing countries while employment and social conditions are deteriorating, also due to the liberalization of economic markets.

On the positive side, a number of countries have long-standing policies and programmes to promote "multiculturalism," which assist both migrant groups and their host communities to build mutual respect. Churches have been transformed by welcoming migrants and the establishment of growing numbers of migrant churches is enriching the ecumenical landscape in many regions.

However, programmes to promote multi-cultural approaches are under enormous pressure. While multi-cultural societies are a description of reality in most countries, policies to restrict rights, particularly social but also fundamental rights of migrants, are pursued more and more. Too often, the labour and service are welcome, but the persons are not. Restrictionist policies leave more and more migrants in insecurity, and they in turn often seek security in their own ethnic communities. It seems like a vicious circle, a self-fulfilling prophecy of failed integration, leading to ever-higher hurdles to integration and increasing fears in societies.

Migration also has an impact on the migrants' countries of origin, with the so-called "brain drain" of migrants who leave their countries. According to the International Organization for Migration, Africa has already lost one-third of its human capital. The examples are many. One-third of Ethiopia's medical doctors have left the country. In the 1980s, Ghana lost 60% of its graduating doctors.

Migrants send money home. The remittances from migrants have increased from an estimated US\$2 billion in 1970 to US\$100 billion in 2003; some research indicates that the amount flowing through informal channels is an additional US\$100 billion. This figure far surpasses the US\$68.5 billion which rich countries currently spend on official development assistance and represents a substantial portion of national GDP in many Southern countries. As the amount of remittances grows, governments are increasingly anxious to access these hard currency funds through taxation on money transfers. While some of these funds are used for development of infrastructure, there are few incentives for migrants to invest and gain pension and social security through such transfers. Migrants complain also about high bank charges - often reaching 20-30% of the total - which they must pay to send money home.

### **Security approach to migration**

Since 9/11, governments have sought to prevent the entry of "terrorists" into their territories through a host of new restrictive measures. New laws, stricter passport controls, heftier carrier sanctions, heightened visa restrictions, and increasingly militarized borders are intended to control entry into national territory. These policies have a particular impact on migrants coming from certain regions. In fact, many tourists and ecumenical visitors have experienced the consequences of tightened immigration policies and visa requirements.

Detention of asylum-seekers, already widely practised by Northern governments, has increased since 11 September 2001. In Australia, every man, woman and child who arrives without a visa to seek asylum is subject to mandatory, indefinite and non-reviewable detention. Asylum-seekers intercepted en route to Australia by the Navy are forcibly transferred to detention and processing centres in the Pacific where the responsibility and enforceability of human rights is weak and unclear.

Some European governments now wish to emulate Australia's "Pacific Solution" and are exploring new ways of shifting the responsibility for asylum-seekers to third countries by setting up camps in other regions. While officially these proposals were withdrawn from the political agenda of the European Union after a study demonstrated that the concept is not feasible, the idea continues to come up. There is a tendency to transfer the responsibility for examination of asylum claims and for refugee protection to third countries with weaker judicial guarantees for refugees and less economic potential to care for and integrate refugees.

Deportations of foreigners are becoming more common. Governments which in the past tolerated the presence of asylum-seekers whose claims had been rejected are now rounding people up and sending them back to the country of origin or a third country. In the case of Central America and the Caribbean, these deportations are having serious social consequences, particularly when those deported have a record of criminal and/or gang activity.

Security concerns in some countries have led to violations of civil liberties and reduced legal certainty of residence status or legal redress. In a context where migrants, particularly of Arabic origin or Muslim faith, are suspected of being potential criminals or "terrorists", racial/ethnic attacks are dramatically increasing.

### **Increased military involvement in humanitarian affairs**

Even as people continue to be displaced by war and civil conflicts, humanitarian assistance to refugees and the displaced is becoming more dangerous. Attacks against humanitarian workers are increasing, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya and many other places. The increasing use of humanitarian assistance as a tool of foreign policy and the growing involvement of military forces in providing humanitarian aid have blurred the lines between humanitarian assistance and political motivations. Humanitarian space is becoming more limited. Conflicts continue to displace people, but solutions are becoming more elusive. Well over half of the world's refugees have been displaced for more than 10 years, without basic prospects for repatriation, local integration or resettlement.

While there is a substantial body of law upholding the rights of refugees to be offered protection, these international instruments have been weakened over the past decade. Governments are implementing the basic provisions of international refugee and human rights laws in more restrictive ways. It has been 15 years since the International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families was opened for signature, and two years since it came into force, the Convention has still not yet been signed by any government of a country hosting large numbers of migrants. Migration management - rather than migrants' rights or justice - has become the watchword of international discussions about migration, the focus still limited to controlling and preventing migration.

Analyzing global patterns of migration reveals an enormous gap between the Gospel imperative to practice hospitality towards strangers and the actual policies and practice of governments to close borders. We confess that there are Christians who reject those who are different from them. At the same time, thousands of individual Christians and congregations are working with refugees and migrants in increasingly difficult contexts and need to be supported. Thoughtful, researched alternative models do exist to counter harsher government policies; these need to be shared and used as a basis for common action. Churches are deeply involved in community education and advocacy at the local and national level and the need for international cooperation in advocacy for the uprooted has never been greater.

### **Recommendations**

The Central Committee, meeting in Geneva February 15-22 2005, calls upon the World Council of Churches to evaluate appropriate programmes consistent with these recommendations and calls upon its

▶ member churches and all Christians:

To **encourage** and support churches and Christians who are engaged in defence of lives and protection of all uprooted people: refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants;

▶ To **affirm** a culture of encounter, hospitality and cordial welcome for migrants, and to identify positive examples where churches have worked together effectively to offer alternatives to restrictionist policies;

▶ To **raise** awareness within church constituencies of the resources and assets which migrants and refugees bring to their communities including arranging encounters between host and uprooted people to break down prejudices, fears and stereotypes;

▶ To **organize** prayer meetings and awareness raising campaigns around International Migrants Day (18th December) or World Refugee Day (20th June) or other special days on such themes in individual countries;

▶ To **work with** churches and related organizations in regional and global ecumenical networks for uprooted people to respond to the needs of people forced to cross national borders, to advocate for the respect of their fundamental human rights, and to build capacity to implement programmes by churches in different regions;

▶ To **promote** multicultural ministry, both in training for local church staff and through exchange between churches in host countries and countries of origin and to *deepen* theological reflection on the theme of

hospitality and uprootedness;

- ▶ To **include** the concerns of uprooted people, particularly racist violence against migrants, where appropriate, in events organized around the Decade to Overcome Violence;
- ▶ To **combat** the trafficking of human beings, particularly women and children for sexual exploitation; to work with governments, churches and concerned non-governmental organizations to ensure that the victims of traffickers receive the necessary treatment and respect; and to oppose efforts by governments to use the existence of trafficking as an excuse to restrict further immigration;
- ▶ To **ensure** that both advocacy and assistance programmes are based on a recognition of the particular ways that gender, race, ethnicity and class interact to intensify the marginalization of uprooted people;
- ▶ To **take** a proactive role in inter-religious dialogue on issues of society and religious communities to overcome conflicts within society;
- ▶ To **analyse and study** the political, economic, social and environmental reasons for uprooting of people and in this context examine the role of governments in creating conditions that uproot people or place migrants in difficult situations, and develop educational material for the whole life of the church on causes which uproot people;
- ▶ To **challenge** governments who seek to introduce ever more restrictionist entry policies and to challenge the trend toward using security concerns to justify detention of all undocumented migrants and/or asylum-seekers;
- ▶ To **press** governments not to pursue actions to criminalise migrants or those who seek to protect them and to encourage governments to do more to create and facilitate welcoming societies and to foster the integration of refugees and migrants into their communities;
- ▶ To **insist**, as a matter of principle, that undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers are detained only in exceptional circumstances and that in those exceptional circumstances, to ensure that people are detained for only a limited time and can avail themselves of judicial review and legal advice. Under no circumstances should conditions of detention for migrants and asylum-seekers be lower than that for convicted criminals.
- ▶ To **seek ways** of increasing collaboration between churches and related organizations to uphold international law and international institutions established to provide protection and assistance to those who are uprooted;
- ▶ To **promote** ratification and implementation of the International Convention and Protocol relating to Refugees (1951/1967) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their families (1990); and
- ▶ To **recognize** that humanitarian laws relating to migrants, refugees and internally displaced people are under constant review and revision, because of changing international environment. Churches are called to monitor and undertake research to equip themselves to participate in these intricate issues that are likely to resolve in change of laws and legislation, on both international and national levels.