



Refugees Digest 15 **March 2017**

Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons

As I write this, we have just celebrated St Patrick's Day. People of Irish descent the world over, would have celebrated in style. Amidst the festivities, Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh reminded his country persons that St Patrick described himself as an 'unlearned refugee' and was first brought to Ireland by traffickers. He challenged the Irish to be more sympathetic and active in efforts to resolve the refugee situation internationally. The first link connects to this historical precedent.

Reaction to President Trump's recent revised executive order regarding issues of migration and refugees, has continued to draw strong criticism especially from the faith community in the USA. This order would prevent the entry of refugees into the USA for 120 days beginning 6 March, would allow an entry for only 50,000 in the 2017 fiscal year and put a ban for 90 days on peoples from 6 predominantly Muslim countries. Unlike the earlier executive order, Iraq no longer features in the order. The actions and utterances of President Trump has continued to have the effect of stimulating a more reflective discussion on the topic of refugees, migrants and displaced persons and appropriate policies pertaining to those vulnerable groups.

There is also continued outrage in the UK as unaccompanied minors are increasingly at risk or abandoned. It is estimated that there are approximately 90,000 such children in Europe. 2016 also saw an increase in unaccompanied minors and families with children fleeing from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. From October 2016 to January 2017 54,147 families travelling with children arrived at the US/Mexico border. Most are fleeing violence, criminals acting with impunity and danger to children especially girl children who are subject to forced prostitution, gang rape, domestic violence and other forms of violence. 88% of these families passed 'credible fear screenings' which determines if an asylum seeker has a credible fear of persecution.

The EU has indicated that 2016 saw a slight drop in the number of first time asylum seekers in Europe. About 1.2 million asylum seekers were registered, about 50,000 fewer than 2015. Most were from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Even though 2016's numbers were fewer than 2015 it was still more than 2014.

A few days ago, the Hungarian parliament overwhelmingly passed legislation to tighten asylum laws and to force all asylum seekers into detention camps while awaiting adjudication of their claims. This has met with strong criticisms from many voices including churches outside of Hungary.

It is now also a year since the EU/Turkey deal to prevent migrants from reaching Europe. Two of the links speak to the politics of the deal and the consequences for the refugee community. *Caritas Internationalis* pointed out that Europe cannot continue to externalise the management of migrants, nor can it continue to emphasise deterrence and internal security in this management. This approach has led to the criminalisation of migration with great detriment to the dignity of migrants. Instead it has called upon EU member states:

- To provide fair and transparent asylum procedures and dignified reception centres.
- To ensure that respect for the persons dignity I at the heart of any bilateral or multilateral agreement.
- Open more safe and legal ways to enter Europe such as the provision of safe humanitarian corridors, resettlement programs and the provision of family reunification and humanitarian visas.
- Not to use official development aid as a means to stem migration flows. This aid should be used to tackle poverty in non-EU countries.

It is worth noting that these arguments are exactly the same as those raised by the SACBCPLO in its submission on The Green Paper on International Migration. It points to the similarities around policy positions being taken by governments around the world. It points to the similar objections and concerns raised by civil society to these positions and its weak values base. It also points to the need to find common positions with regard to interrogating such policies. Also on the home front the failure to respect and promote the dignity and rights of refugees and migrants is seen as questioning the integrity of our Human Rights Day celebrations.’

The desperation and extreme vulnerability which pervades refugee life was shown dramatically on Thursday 16th March when 33 refugees on a refugee ship were killed when fired at from a gun boat off the coast of Yemen. The desperation is underlined by the fact that Yemen is embroiled in a war that since 2015 has taken 7000 lives and is on the brink of famine and despite that Somali refugees are desperate enough to seek transit through the region.

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