



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Office of the
General Secretary

lutheranworld.org

To the LWF Member Churches in
Europe

Geneva, 4 July 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

"Refugees may lose many things when they flee, but never their human rights."

Thus began the LWF Council's resolution "Standing with Refugees", adopted in Wittenberg on World Refugee Day, 20 June 2016.

https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/council_2016_-_resolution_on_standing_with_refugees.pdf

The Council went on to underline that "In our Christian understanding, each refugee or migrant—just like every other human being—is a child of God, created in God's image, with equal dignity and worth."

The LWF Council reaffirmed the profound concern of the Lutheran World Federation for the refugees and other forced migrants in our world and, in response, our deeply-rooted commitment to live out Jesus' call to "welcome the stranger."

In April and again in September last year I wrote to you about the refugee crisis. Today I do so again. I write to thank you for what you have done already in support of refugees, to encourage you to uphold your witness even when challenged, and to urge you to continue your churches' vital diaconic services and advocacy.

On the day the LWF Council adopted its statement, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that at the end of 2015, some 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced in our world, compared with 59.5 million one year before.

Within Europe, the refugee crisis may seem to have abated because far fewer refugees are arriving. But at what cost? It's not because there are fewer refugees in the world but because tight restrictions have been put into place to deter and prevent refugees from moving. Too many of these restrictions violate the human rights and human dignity of the refugees and migrants, and thereby violate human values that we hold dear. For example:

- There is no safe and legal way for refugees and migrants to cross the Mediterranean, so more and more desperate people turn to smugglers and criminal gangs. It is expected that there will be a record number of drownings in the Mediterranean this year. UNHCR reports on almost 3,000 drowned people during the first six months of this year; this is 1,000 more than last year at the same time.
- Several European countries have placed restrictions on family reunification, forcing refugee families to live apart for up to three years or longer, with some of those who are apart living in desperate circumstances.

- Countries widely known for blatant violence and oppression are suddenly declared to be "safe". As a consequence, refugees are sent back into life-threatening contexts.
- The detention of asylum seekers and refugees is widespread, even when there has been no suspicion of criminal activity or that those detained are dangerous.

And then in the early morning of June 28 in Reykjavik, the Icelandic Police entered Laugarnes Lutheran Church and forcibly dragged out two asylum seekers, one of them a 16-year-old minor. The two were well known to the congregation and had been granted sanctuary in the church. Both were arrested and flown to Norway, from where they had traveled to Iceland. At last word, they were being held in detention by the Norwegian authorities.

I firmly believe that the moral and theological voice is required of us in the churches. Yes, we preach God's love for all people, God's liberating grace through Jesus Christ, and our Lord's call to "welcome the stranger."

I believe we are also called to hold our governments to account. They must abide by the commitments they have undertaken under international human rights law and international refugee law. There must be no erosion of the hard-won global commitment that the victims of persecution and war must be protected.

I call upon you all to continue to engage in holistic mission as you respond to the situation of refugees in your contexts:

- Preach from the pulpit about God's unconditional love to every human being, about their dignity and worth because of being created at God's image.
- Meet refugees and migrants in service and love. Continue offering support, actions of welcoming and of inclusion, legal and medical support and all the many other activities and support you have been offering already.
- Advocate with your governments, as the LWF Council said, to recommit to protecting the rights of all refugees and migrants, to uphold the UN Refugee Convention and instruments of international humanitarian law, and to more generously support the welcome and care for people in need.

Lastly, I urge that all of you in your churches join LWF President Munib Younan and me in supporting the UNHCR #WithRefugees Campaign by signing the petition at www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/petition and calling upon world leaders to show solidarity and find solutions for people displaced by war or persecution.

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Dr Martin Junge
General Secretary