



ICCJ Statement

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE STRANGER AS YOURSELF” (LEV 19:34)

A STATEMENT ON MIGRATION AND REFUGEES IN EUROPE

Migration is a universal human phenomenon; to such an extent that it has been claimed that to be “on the move” is part of the human genome. Even though in the past many millions of Europeans left their nations to settle elsewhere, it is only in recent decades that increased numbers of people from elsewhere are coming to the “Old Continent” to live. In most cases, they are coming from places afflicted by war, poverty, or oppression in hopes of finding a better life in Europe.

Although the International Council of Christians and Jews promotes interreligious understanding throughout the world, we are headquartered in Europe and have many national member organizations either in Europe or in lands settled by Europeans. Therefore, we are particularly affected by the recent images of great numbers of refugees drowning at sea or perishing on land as they struggle to make their way to safe haven in Europe.

We are concerned and dismayed by their suffering and the hardships they are experiencing, both in their previous homes and during their desperate travels. At the same time, we are often shocked and embarrassed by the stereotypical rhetoric and the frequent expressions of prejudice that lack any constructive engagement with the plight of the refugees. The issues are complex and require complex, multifaceted solutions. How these problems will be resolved politically, economically and socially is not within the purview of our organization devoted to interreligious dialogue. However, there are religious, spiritual, societal and cultural aspects of the crisis we wish to address:

1. We condemn both the slaughter of innocents and indifference to human suffering. From the Biblical tradition of human beings having been created in the Divine Image, we learn about the uniqueness, dignity, and inestimable worth of every person.
2. We commend those voices from Europe and elsewhere, including religious and national leaders, who have spoken from a humanitarian and spiritual perspective. It is essential that our respective religious communities affirm and strengthen these voices.
3. Of crucial importance is the way we use language in discussing the crisis. For example, Europe is not only a Christian continent. Over the centuries, many Jews, Muslims and others have made significant contributions to European culture and civilization. This history should be acknowledged.
4. As Jews, Christians, and Muslims, we turn to our respective sacred scriptures and traditions for insight and guidance. Our faith traditions direct us to welcome and accept strangers and guests, regardless of their social status and ethnic and religious background. These instructions are

partially based on the understanding that some of the main characters in our holy writings, both individually and collectively, were migrants for a longer or shorter period of time.

5. More fundamentally, our traditions interpret human life as such as life in transition. The earth and everything on it belongs to God the Creator and we all are but God's guests. This perspective challenges any temptation to view our own group as the permanent, rightful residents and all others as aliens. All human life is fleeting and transitory and a gift from God.
6. Sometimes this God takes on Godself the existence of a migrant. In Judaism, God accompanies God's people in their exile. The concept of *Shekhinah* expresses the idea of God's dwelling in their midst. In Christianity, the Incarnation refers to God's Word sojourning in this world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
7. Moreover, the Torah includes many repeated commandments about protecting the stranger, the widow, and the orphan because the children of Israel know what it is like to be oppressed and victimized. Similarly in the Christian Gospels, Jesus exhorts his followers to care for those in need. The Gospel of Matthew presents a parable that describes the criteria at the Last Judgment as whether his disciples fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and cared for the sick and imprisoned (Mt. 25:31-46). Some churches call these acts the "corporal works of mercy" that are incumbent upon all the baptized.
8. In Islam, the memory of the flight of the early Muslim community from oppression in Mecca to safety in Medina, and of the Christian king of Abyssinia who gave Muslims refuge are important models for the religious significance of welcoming the stranger, even across religious boundaries. And, of course, the Prophet himself was a migrant to Medina.

In finding country-by-country solutions to the difficult problems confronting mass migrations of people, we encourage our national member organizations and all religious persons to work together with men and women of good will from other communities. Let our shared religious values shine forth and welcome all seeking refuge, irrespective of race or religion, guided by the biblical admonition:

It has been told you, oh mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

SIGNED BY
THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS (IC CJ)
AND THE CO-CHAIRS OF THE IC CJ INTERNATIONAL ABRAHAMIC FORUM (IAF)

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