



Charta of the New Sanctuary Movement in Europe

Because we want to welcome strangers we have agreed this Charta of the New Sanctuary Movement in Europe.¹

Europe a Fortress

The situation of migrants seeking asylum in Europe is alarming. The continent has been turned into a fortress to keep out people fleeing political, ethnic or religious persecution, wars and civil unrest, environmental destruction, hunger and poverty. The militarizing of Europe's outer borders, the practically unfulfillable conditions for legal entry and repulsive living conditions for immigrants continue to be a system abhorrent toward refugees. The attempt to find protection in our countries has cost the lives of thousands. In our society, however, reports of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, suffocating in containers, or taking their own lives in deportation detention centers are met by what Hanna Arendt has called "the curse of indifference"

Humanitarian Traditions in Europe

Although Europe contributes greatly to the causes of flight and migration – by delivering weapons to areas of crisis, for example, by supporting governments which violate human rights, by its agricultural and fishing policies, and by forcing climate change through its CO2 emission, – the European contribution to a solution of the worldwide refugee problem is shamefully miniscule. The predominant practice of safeguarding affluence at any cost betrays Europe's best humanitarian traditions – its commitment to universal human dignity and human rights, to freedom, Equality and solidarity. The failure to uphold these values undermines Europe's credibility and endangers peaceful cohabitation on our globe.

Taking Sides with People in Need

¹ This charta is intended to renew and adapt the Charta of Groningen to the new conditions of asylum seekers in Europe. The Charta of Groningen issued from a conference held in 1987 in the Dutch city of Groningen, in which churches and faith groups pledged to "take in and protect" refugees threatened with deportation, if it is expected that they will not receive humane treatment and that the quality of their lives will be seriously impaired.

As Christians, we are unwilling to put up with this way of dealing with people in need. We stand together with them. They are made in God's image, as we are. Therefore we as members of churches, parishes, cloisters, communities and solidarity groups are called to accept responsibility and to take sides, not only with the refugees and asylum seekers living among us, but also with those stranded on Europe's outer borders, whom we don't get to see. The right to asylum is worthless, if those seeking protection are denied entry.

Our Pledge

Therefore we pledge

- to use every opportunity to help refugees in need,
- where deportation looms and human dignity and lives are threatened, to grant refugees sanctuary in our churches until an acceptable solution is found for them. Not to shrink back, should open confrontation with civil authorities become necessary,
- to publicize persistently in order to raise social consciousness of the scandalous practices by which refugees are repulsed at Europe's outer borders and harassed within, such as deportation detention and discrimination in almost all areas of life,
- to strive for policies of asylum and immigration which are oriented on human dignity and human rights, and this at all levels, from the local to the European level,
- to help make refugees feel welcome and be able to participate with equal rights in our society,
- to promote this self-commitment and its goals in our churches and among our fellow Christians,
- to seek cooperation with like-minded people, whatever faith community or world view they adhere to,
- to form European and worldwide networks and work together in solidarity to fulfil these commitments.

All of Europe must become a safe haven, a "sanctuary" for migrant men and women. To this we commit ourselves – in the conviction that God loves the strangers and that in them we encounter God herself/himself (Matt. 25, 31ff.)

Resolution of the Annual Meeting of the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, Inc.,
Berlin, 10th October 2010.