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CCME greetings to General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches



**You Shall Be My Witnesses,
CCME greetings to General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches,
Novi Sad 2018**

Your Eminences,

Delegates, guests and participants of the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches:

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

I bring you warm greetings from the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).

It is indeed with great joy and expectations we in CCME were looking forward to this important gathering.

Founded in 1964, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is an organization of churches and ecumenical councils as well as specialised ministries or agencies of churches from currently nineteen European countries.

CCME strives to serve the churches in their commitment to promote the vision of an inclusive community through advocating for an adequate policy for migrants, refugees and minority groups at European and national level. In the fulfilment of this mandate it is responding to the message of the Bible which insists on the dignity of every human being and no distinction between strangers and natives."

CCME works on issues of migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism, xenophobia and discrimination, undertakes research, initiates, develops and implements projects in these fields. It represents the common voice of churches in Europe on the above issues vis-à-vis the European institutions and international organizations active in Europe.

CCME provides a space for churches and Christian agencies to share their experiences in the ministry among migrants, refugees, and ethnic minority persons.

We are indeed grateful for the close cooperation with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches, which are vital for CCME, and, we are convinced, are of benefit to CEC and WCC, too.

The intensive cooperation between CEC and CCME intends to "deepen the understanding of migration today and strengthen our impact", thus we appreciate that we were able to conclude a further partnership agreement in November 2017 which will help us to grow together and enhance the cooperation further.

The practical, thematic and organisational cooperation has dramatically intensified in recent years, and we are indeed thankful for this. Examples of this cooperation can be found in the

report from Budapest to Novi Sad, as well as in the CCME activity reports as presented to the CCME Assembly held in June 2017 in Prague.

CCME together with CEC has sought to build bridges between churches – for example bridges of solidarity in 2015 and the following years between churches in Northern and Western Europe and those at the Southern borders of the EU through ecumenical visits and channelling material support, as well as building bridges between churches with different responses to refugees, migrants and minority ethnic people. These ecumenical conversations between European churches are meant to help building bridges between churches of the traditional ecumenical movement in Europe, and to connect with churches of new expression through the work on “being church together”.

Now, this assembly of CEC with its biblical theme “You shall be my witness” – exploring the concepts of justice, witness and hospitality from a European Christian perspective, addresses us as European churches and societies, with a timely message. True to their calling, European Churches and Christians, together with Christians from all over the world, are called to be witnesses of the incarnated, crucified, died and risen Lord, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. We are called to declare that his sacrifice was accepted, sin was atoned for, and Jesus has won victory over death, sin, enmity and division. He has declared peace between God and the human being, indeed all humanity. Together with the Holy Spirit, we are entrusted to carry the message unto the entire world. We shall witness through our lives, works, ministry, fellowship, advocacy and worship.

Migration is the area where European Christian witness, hospitality and justice is put to test. With the rise of nationalisms, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, growing euro-scepticism, European governments’ continuous efforts to push the problem out of sight and mind, European churches find themselves in a Kairos moment. The urgent question today is, can we, dare we, shall we, welcome refugees and invite in the strangers, care for the sick, visit the prisoners, advocate for a refugee welcoming Europe?

I trust this assembly will emerge with an unequivocal message that European Churches choose to stand for what Jesus had invited them and entrusted unto them, to be witnesses for justice and hospitality. To be witness is to choose to follow the road of martyrdom, of sacrifice, of cost and consequences. I pray for God’s wisdom and grace to discern and obey the will of God for our churches and societies.

To him be glory!

Lemma Desta
Moderator of CCME