World Council of Churches

News

Tveit: We need an international solution to the refugee crisis

Olav Fykse Tveit, and members of the delegation and the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary with Bence Retvari, parliamentary state secretary of the Ministry of Human Resources. © WCC/Paul Jeffrey

29 September 2015

Representatives of major international ecumenical organizations visited Hungary 25-29 September to strengthen efforts in support of refugees in Europe and the Middle East.

The head of the WCC delegation, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, stated: "This is much more than a refugee crisis in Europe. We need an international solution to the refugee crisis. We call for an international solution now!"

The delegation also included Dr Audeh Quawas, member of the WCC central and executive committees and the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs; Doris Peschke, general secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME); Rev. Alfredo Abad, vice-moderator of the CCME; Marianne Ejdersten, director of WCC Communication; and Paul Jeffrey, photo-journalist for the WCC and ACT Alliance. The WCC solidarity visit was hosted by the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary.

In Hungary, the delegates met Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation; Dr Bence Rétvári, parliamentary state secretary, Ministry of Human Resources; Bishop Dr András Veres, president of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference; Bishop Dr István Szabó, ministerial president of the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary; Prof. Dr György Nógrádi of Corvinus University of Budapest; Dóra Kanizsai, director of the Refugee Ministry of the Reformed Church in Hungary; Dr Tamás Szűcs, head of the representation of the European Commission in Hungary; as well as Rev. Aaron Stevens, pastor at the St. Columba's Church of Scotland in Budapest; Dr Vilmos Fischl, general secretary of Ecumenical Council of Churches, Budapest; and Balàzs Odór, Ecumenical Officer in the Reformed Church in Hungary.

Tveit addressed the basic humanitarian needs of the refugees in the meeting with Secretary Rétvári.

The state secretary expressed appreciation for the visit and stressed the importance of listening also to Hungarian perspectives.

Tveit said: “Taking responsibility for human beings in desperate need must be done without discrimination on any criteria other than their needs. With more than 2,000 refugees each day, it is really challenging and it is not easy to find the right solutions. But it is crucial to always treat human beings with human dignity and with great respect for human rights law. The international laws must be respected. There are no alternatives.”

Dr Quawas of the WCC Central Committee said: “We have to address international collaboration and look at the root of the problem, especially the situation in the Middle East. This is not only Europe’s problem. We have to find a solution to the war in Syria and in Iraq. We have to treat all as human beings and follow international law.”

In meetings with church leaders, Tveit said: “We can see the pastoral care. Be proud of what people are doing in Hungary and around the world. They are showing hospitality and care. For the politicians, the situation presents many responsibilities to deal with. We understand the critical situation and that those problems must be solved day by day. We need a more humanitarian approach. What is happening in Hungary is an alert to the European Union and the rest of the world. “

Doris Peschke, general secretary of the CCME, said, “The basic fact is of human beings in need. Hungary and the EU were not mentally prepared. We have to prepare for next 10 to 15 years and discuss the role of the churches. How do we work integrating refugees into European society? How can we learn from others?”

Tveit added after the meetings: “As the WCC we are worried about the humanitairian situation. We are worried about the tensions between different religions. We have to be aware of the relations between religions in different regions. We would like to encourage the churches to work together in solidarity, and we have to build bridges to other religions. We are facing lots of challenges as human beings. Can we find ways to live together?”

In their discussion with church leaders, the delegation expressed their interest in sharing experience with other churches in Europe. Local churches said they sometimes felt that they were left alone, even though a special volunteer movement was and still growing in Hungary. People have been mobilized through social media, often seeking Arabic interpreters or food supplies or water or clothes. Thousands of volunteers gathered at the main station, Kelti, in Budapest. The delegation also visited St Columba's Church of Scotland in Budapest to witness their local refugee work.

The WCC is planning to initiate a special consultation on the refugee crisis in collaboration with the EKD at the end of October in Munich, Germany.

The WCC and its member churches' commitment to supporting refugees and displaced people is part of its origin and calling. When the World Council of Churches came into existence in 1948, the disastrous humanitarian impact of the Second World War was still a very present reality. The international community was still struggling to cope with the massive population displacements caused by conflict and crimes against humanity. Churches and their specialized ministries were key actors in the humanitarian response to the unprecedented suffering, and they have continued to be in the forefront of assisting refugees and immigrants, from emergency relief to long-term support.

For more information and interview requests, please contact:

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High resolution photos from the visit are available at ***Photos Oikoumene***

Video interviews from ecumenical delegation's visit to Hungary

Read full text of the WCC statement on refugees in Europe

WCC statement on responses to migrant crises

European churches encouraged to work together to address refugee crisis (WCC news release of 10 September 2015)

Migration and social justice

The World Council of Churches promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. An ecumenical fellowship of churches founded in 1948, today the WCC brings together 345 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 550 million Christians in over 120 countries, and works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church. The WCC general secretary is the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, from the [Lutheran] Church of Norway.

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