

Protect the dignity and rights of migrants in crises:

An ACT Alliance call to faith communities, civil society organisations, governments and intergovernmental bodies

July 2015

All humankind is created in the image and likeness of God. Hence migrants are members of the human family, born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The ACT Alliance remembers the many migrants who have died in international waters, and on land in territories of states, with too little or no protection.

ACT also remembers *inter alia*, migrants in jeopardy at sea and in transiting countries fearing for their lives, enduring sleepless nights, with no food and water; the unaccompanied children and women, and men who face abuse; the many victims and survivors of xenophobia in foreign lands; and the stateless people whose human rights are violated.

Humanity today is witnessing an unprecedented flight of people resulting from many factors across the globe, among them wars, famine, poverty, and climate change. Hundreds and thousands of people are making death-defying journeys across the seas and on land. People are daring to cross heavily secured borders. Those who make it across often face unprecedented violence and severe human rights violations. Many have been killed in xenophobic attacks.

Stories of those in distress in the Mediterranean Sea trying to cross into Europe; and those caught up in the Southeast Asia Maritime refugee and trafficking crisis are making headlines in international news.

As of 10 July 2015, refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe hit 150,000 across the Mediterranean.

In the first week of June 700 people landed in Myanmar's Rakhine state among them 120 women and children who had been at sea for at least three months. According to UNHCR, more than 120,000 Rohingyas have boarded unsafe boats over the last three years, and more than 25,000 in the first quarter of this year. In addition, smugglers' boats have also been filled with Bangladeshi migrants seeking to escape grinding poverty in their home country, who have increasingly fallen prey to trafficking rings who, after an initial charge for the sea voyage, extort migrants' families for ransom money, and subsequently abandon their human cargo at sea. About 8,000 migrants and refugees are estimated to have been stranded on abandoned vessels so far this year in the region.

A series of riots earlier this year (2015) in South Africa resulted in several migrants from other African countries murdered in cold blood and maimed, with some of their businesses set on fire. Hundreds of Dominicans of Haitian origin face deportation. The wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and other parts of the world have set many people in motion. Many are forced to leave their homes due to compelling changes in their climate and environment. The number of unaccompanied children from Central America to the hinterlands and beyond continues to rise.

The underlying factor for forced migrants and refugees: they are seeking to survive. They are heavy hearted as they leave their lands, their ancestors, brothers and sisters, parents, friends and relatives. The causes for flight are many.

Our call:

Humankind needs rebirth to embrace the fundamental ethics and values of what it means to be human. Conscience and a spirit of love must guide our actions. Our inability and delay to serve and speak makes us complicit in the outraging human rights violations against migrants.

The ACT Alliance recognises the efforts of mercy of churches and other faith communities, civil society organisations, and of governments among many; and further calls them:

Churches and other faith communities & Civil Society Organisations:

- To be hospitable to “the stranger”, and to open worship sanctuaries and spaces to engage and dialogue on migrant issues.
- To continue to seek and listen to the voices of migrants, asylum seekers, stateless people and refugees in attempts to make appropriate responses.
- To continue to seek to understand the plight of those in distress; and to pray for them and with them.
- To continue to provide support to migrants and refugees and stateless people at community level through access to shelter, information, and services.
- For churches and faith based organisations & civil society organisations in countries of origin, transit, and destination to dialogue and where possible share experiences to enlighten each other’s responses.
- To influence nation states to accede to international human rights instruments that protect the human rights of migrants, refugees and their families, and for states who are already signatories to effectively live up to their related obligations for assistance and protection; and to formulate and implement national policies and laws that advance them; and to influence policies of regional and continental bodies. The following instruments are of particular concern: 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons; the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness; 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR); the Smuggling and Trafficking Protocols of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime; and the 2003 UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

Governments and Intergovernmental bodies

- All governments to ratify and implement internationally recognised human rights instruments and international customs of protection for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in a non-discriminatory manner, and to affirm the right to life, and protection of all persons. The following instruments are of particular concern: 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons; the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness; 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR); the Smuggling and Trafficking Protocols of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime; and the 2003 UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).
- To take immediate measures to save the lives of migrants in jeopardy beyond their borders and protect those already on their territories.
- To explore humane ways of handling and dealing with migrants including exploring alternatives and financially supporting the responses.
- To listen to the voices of migrants, asylum seekers, stateless people and refugees in attempts to make appropriate responses.
- To establish legal, comprehensive, and rights-based avenues for labour migration to destination countries in order to eliminate migrants’ dependence on unsafe and undocumented migration, and to support a self-determined approach to migration and development.
- To share the reception and resettlement of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people; and treat migrants in a humane way with respect for human dignity and according to international human rights standards; and attend to specific needs of vulnerable groups and unaccompanied minors.
- To work with countries of origin to address the root and underlying causes of forced migration, and to refrain from foreign engagements and policies that set populations on the move, so that migration is an option not a necessity.