



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT & REFUGEE OFFICE

ACMRO News November 2015



UNHCR 2015 NGO Consultation

"In Pursuit of Solutions"

On 23-24 November the ACMRO was invited to attend the UNHCR Annual NGO Consultation. The theme for the meetings was 'In Pursuit of Solutions'. The two-day meeting provided an opportunity to engage with other NGO's including lawyers, religious groups, and community service providers and share ideas and experiences as well as discussing solutions to the issues which are faced.

Highlights of the meeting

included:

A panel discussion on 'Comparative Regional Refugee Arrangements and International Cooperation/Responsibility sharing'. This discussion centered around the current Syrian refugee crisis in Europe and the response from European countries. Discussion also centered on the strengths and weaknesses of the 1951 Refugee Convention in providing clear guidelines for countries and their responsibilities when providing assistance and safe passage to asylum seekers and refugees. Comparison was also drawn to the Indo-Chinese Crisis in the 1970s and 1980s at the end of the Vietnam War, where regional cooperation triumphed and allowed many refugees to flee persecution, and how a cooperative regional solution is what is needed today both in Europe and South-East Asia.

A talk by Professor Klauss

Neuman on the 'Current German Response to Asylum Seekers and Refugees'. Professor Neuman spoke about how the German population was reacting and responding to the thousands of Syrian refugees arriving in their country. He mentioned that generally refugees have been welcomed with open arms, and that any tensions which have been shown in the media are isolated incidents caused by a minority of the population. Professor Neuman also spoke of German sentiment towards its neighbouring countries, and the frustration which some feel at the inaction of their European neighbours.

The final panel on, 'Best Practice Presentation and Discussion', provided an excellent opportunity for four NGO's, the [Multicultural Development Association](#), [AMES Australia](#), the [Migration Council Australia](#) and [Centre for Multicultural](#)

[Youth](#) to inform us of grassroots level programs which they have started and the success which these have brought.

The meeting also provided time for the participants to break into small groups and to discuss solutions centered around, the fast track visa process, immigration detention, strategic advocacy, resettlement and family reunion. The results of these discussions were presented to the UNHCR for them to draw up their report for 2015.

Overall the meetings were very fruitful, informative and provided an excellent opportunity to engage with people working in the migrant and refugee sector.

ACMRO Team



Panel Discussion: European Refugee Crisis

Stepping Stones from Syria to Germany

On Thursday 26

November 2015, the ACMRO was invited to the Panel Discussion on the European Refugee Crisis: Stepping Stones from Syria to Germany, which was organised by the United Nations Information Centre, as well as the UNHCR and the ANU Centre for European Studies.

The panel included:

*Pastor Rolf Held,
Methodist Church Altstadt-
Meßstetten, Germany;
Thomas Albrecht, UNHCR
Regional Representative;
and
Geoff Winestock,
Journalist, Australian
Financial Review*

Thomas Albrecht started with a presentation on the situation in Jordanian Refugee Camps, which he

had recently visited. He noted that with 4 million refugees in the region, there were refugees who do not live in refugee camps with many living on the side of the road, that 86 per cent of refugees in Jordan are living below the poverty line and that half of the children in Jordanian camps do not go to school. However, he also mentioned some of the positive projects which the UNHCR has been able to provide, such as providing volunteer teaches to visit the camps and teach children, as well as making 2000 home visits to check up on refugees as well as introducing a call centre with about 20 staff to provide 24 hour assistance to refugees. Thomas Albrecht concluded his analysis by giving three reasons why refugees were leaving the Middle East for Europe. These were; that many people have lost hope in political solution to the conflict in Syria, as many had remained physically

close to Syria should the conflict end; most of their resources have been eaten up over the last few years; and the funding shortfall at the UNHCR, which is provided by donations from governments and private donors, has meant less resources in the camps.

Geoff Winestock spoke about his experiences in Turkey, where he was covering the G20 meeting. He decided to travel around Turkey talking to locals to see how they were coping with and gather their opinion about the situation. Geoff Winestock spoke of meeting refugees trying to set off from Turkey by boat towards Greece, and the increased difficulties for authorities to patrol and prosecute people smugglers. He also spoke of how generous the Turkish people had been towards refugees, who they saw as guests in their country.

To conclude the

discussions, Pastor Rolf Held, spoke about how his little town of Meßstetten, in south-west Germany had responded to the refugee arrivals. He spoke of initial challenges such as the doubling in size of the town, from 5000 inhabitants increasing to 8000 with refugees living in a nearby processing camp, for health and identity checks. Pastor Rolf Held mentioned that the town had welcomed the refugees with open arms and that the townspeople have been assisting the refugees to settle into Germany. They have also received many benefits from refugees living there, such as experiencing their generosity especially towards the elderly in the town by doing DIY jobs around their properties. Pastor Rolf said that as a result there had been much gratitude on the part of the refugees as well as the town.



Jubilee Year of Mercy

Merciful Like the Father

The Jubilee Year of Mercy will begin on 8 December 2015. For the Year of Mercy, the Holy Father Pope Francis has said that. 'We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it.'

"The Holy Year will open on 8 December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This liturgical feast day recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. And so he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4), choosing her to be the Mother of man's Redeemer."

We would encourage all to read the Holy Fathers Bull

of Indiction for the Holy Year of Mercy, [Misericordiae Vultus](#), as well as visit the official [website](#) which contains information, prayers and special events throughout the year.

We would also like to encourage people to discuss and bring to prayer ways in which our communities can show greater mercy and love to the most vulnerable among us, including migrants and refugees.



Human Rights Day

10 December 2015

This day marks when, in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For more information please [click here](#).

Have a story to share?

Submit your stories and photos from events and we will consider publishing in future newsletters. Send to info@acmro.catholic.org.au

Copyright © 2015 Australian Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is

GPO Box 2720

Canberra ACT 2601
