

ERM 2016 – Statement on the Refugee Crisis in Europe

The ERM 2016 recognises the refugee and migrant crisis to be a significant and urgent humanitarian catastrophe as the biggest mass migration in European history, surpassing even the numbers displaced by World War II. We believe that as a collective movement of women and girls we can be a powerful voice for peace and justice and the upholding of human rights in the context of this crisis.

We recognise that Europe is in a position to support those in need, and note that currently where Canada has relocated over 32,000 refugees and the European Justice and Home Affairs Council has committed to relocating 160,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy, so far only a tiny number have been offered relocation.

We are compelled to act by our Christian and human moral principles. We are reminded of Leviticus 19 (33 -34): *When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.*

We recognise the particular vulnerability of women and girls to sexual assault, rape and coercion into sexual acts from fellow asylum seekers and people in positions of authority and to human trafficking. We recognise that it is often those who are most able to travel who are arriving in Europe and many of the most vulnerable are left behind and facing the ongoing horror of war.

We oppose communication that promotes fear and racism towards refugees and asylum seekers. We promote intercultural understanding and exchange to support a more inclusive Europe; with safe passages for people to seek refuge unhindered by closed borders.

As a worldwide movement of women and girls committed to upholding peace and human rights, we believe that the YWCA movement should stand in solidarity with those seeking refuge in our home countries and oppose the discrimination that they face.

We call for cooperation between the governments of Europe in responding to the crisis and we urge our national associations and the European YWCA together with the World YWCA to advocate for this.

We call for gender sensitive and rights-based response to the crisis and for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in peace negotiations.

Further, we call for international political focus on the resolution of the root causes of the crisis and the resourcing of peace-building.