

Europe needs more humane treatment of refugees, says expert

by [Jonathan Luxmoore](#)

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Warsaw, June 21 (ENInews)--The European Union risks "undermining its core values" unless it treats refugees and asylum-seekers more humanely, according to a senior Protestant expert.

"Two decades ago, most Europeans would never have believed people would be dying on Europe's borders simply trying to get in," said Torsten Moritz, executive secretary of the ecumenical Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). "Yet thousands have died doing just that, especially in the Mediterranean, this year alone. This is really undermining our core values and having a de-humanizing effect on European society."

The German Protestant was speaking after a 16-19 June CCME assembly in the Romanian capital, Bucharest, which was addressed by Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, Orthodox president of the Conference of European Churches.

In an ENInews interview on 21 June, Moritz said the CCME had demanded fairer EU procedures and protection mechanisms, as well as minimum standards of accommodation and support in all 27 member-countries. "Some barely have any functioning asylum system - there's an urgent need for harmonization," Moritz told ENInews.

European church groups have repeatedly urged fairer treatment for refugees and asylum-seekers, who have faced tighter restrictions in most EU countries over the past decade.

In a joint April statement, the World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches and CCME expressed particular concern over the humanitarian situation created by the conflict in Libya.

A CCME news release on 20 June said church representatives from Britain, Greece, Hungary and Spain had described current effects of migration at the Bucharest assembly, as well as "the shortcomings of politicians to respond appropriately and the rise of populist responses."

In his ENInews interview, Torsten Moritz said Europeans had been "very concerned" about the recent death of several dozen victims of a new e-coli bacteria outbreak, but had paid little notice to the deaths of thousands of refugees over the same period in the Mediterranean.

He added that Europe's Christian churches would continue offering practical help to refugees and asylum-seekers, and building bridges with communities with "very mixed feelings" about them.

"The Bible says all are created in the image of God - it doesn't talk about residence papers, race and nationality," he told ENInews. "The voice of churches is being heard, but only as part of wider discussion, where some voices are louder and shriller, and some debates becoming increasingly hostile."

In a separate 19 June statement, the CCME assembly said churches would demand that European governments enforce protection measures set out the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and other documents.

"It is an ongoing task of societies, as well as churches, to defend the common space of freedom and justice against efforts to implement security measures which undermine the core values of Europe," said the CCME, which includes Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant churches and ecumenical church agencies. "This includes also a responsible use of language and images which avoid terms such as 'invasion', 'migrant flows' or even 'human tsunamis.'"