



federazione delle chiese evangeliche in italia

via firenze 38, 00184 roma  
tel. (+39) 064825120 - 06483768  
fax (+39) 064828728

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To the ecumenical partners of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI)

Dear sisters and brothers,  
Greetings from Italy!

According to official figures, from the beginning of this year 76,873 migrants arrived already to the Italian harbours, 13,42% more compared to 2016. According this rate it's predictable that in the year Italy will register more than 200,000 arrivals compared to 181,000 in 2016. At this point, unaccompanied minors amount to 10,000. In the last year the vessels of Italian Coast Guard and of the Italian Navy rescued approximately half of the total of 180,000 people; an important role has been played by the NGOs too, who rescued thousands of people. 4,733 are those who died trying to cross the Mediterranean with the smugglers.

It's evident this is a heavy burden on Italy that is facing a tremendous challenge to accommodate such a number of persons who, according to the Dublin Regulations, must stay for the long time of the legal process in the country of first arrival, even if they have families, relatives or sponsors in other countries.

We are aware of the admirable efforts of your churches and organisations to be effective to serve the needs of the migrants, the refugees and the asylum seekers. May God Bless what you are doing and give you strength and wisdom to answer to this basic Christian call.

The Italian Protestant Churches, mainly through the Federation of Protestant Churches and its program "Mediterranean Hope", are active to open doors and hearts to this people, but in a social atmosphere of increasing tension and distrust. As elsewhere, in Italy too those who assist the migrants are accused to betray the national interest in a period of persisting economic crisis and unemployment (more than 10% of the active population in our country, and 40% of the youth). As obvious, a political success of xenophobic forces would have serious consequences in Europe also because these parties adverse the Union and pursue purely nationalistic strategies. The discussion about the possibility to close Italian harbours to the vessels of NGOs is part of this picture. We criticize this menace targeting important actors in the Search and Rescue activities as the NGOs but, inviting our Government not to adopt these drastic and legally controversial policy, we want to share our concern in a broader perspective and advance practical proposals.

**To be effective in our ministry for the migrants, in fact, we need to halt the waves of nationalistic xenophobia poisoning our political debate. To be strong in this action we need the European support, and the support of our Church partners in Europe.**

To be short: “we need your help”.

Help to raise the global migrations as a strong priority, both in the sending and in the receiving countries, that must to be discussed and considered at UN level, as the World Council of Churches did in January 2016. **A strong UN action supported by other stakeholders including the churches to stabilize some countries, managing massive aids to offer appealing alternatives to global migrations is a key for any rational strategy of migration management. In this frame, a comprehensive reconsideration of the criteria for the humanitarian protection of the victims of the climate change, human trafficking and religious intolerance appears appropriate and urgent.**

We have other requests we want to raise to your attention. The peak of the new arrivals of migrants in Italy happens at the conclusion of the first experiment of the **Humanitarian Corridors** managed by the Federation of Protestant Churches, The Waldensian and Methodist churches and the Community of Sant’Egidio under the umbrella of a formal Protocol with the Italian Government signed on December 15, 2015. Thanks to this best practice, 1000 vulnerable people arrived or will arrive soon to Italy and will be assisted and sustained by our churches for a period of integration in the Italian society.

The Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy has asked to the sister churches to adapt and duplicate this model in their own contexts, with encouraging answers. In particular we congratulate with the Protestant Federation of France (FPF) that in the next days will welcome the first group of refugees from Lebanon, with a project similar to what we experienced in Italy (also in its ecumenical aspect).

But in front of the new peak of arrivals, we renew our appeal and share other possible actions:

- 1. Campaign in your countries to press your Governments to immediately implement the resettlement program agreed at EU level but refused or poorly and slowly adopted by some partners**
- 2. Press your Governments to adopt a policy of solidarity and burden sharing of the arrivals to alleviate the situation of the most exposed South European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Greece, Malta, accepting extra quotas of arrivals**
- 3. Considering the Italian experience of the Humanitarian Corridors, lobby to open “safe passages” to your countries for migrants in situation of danger and vulnerability who deserve international protection and priority ways of access**
- 4. Campaign to grant temporary visas to access in EU countries different from Italy to those who are rescued by international NGOs active in the Mediterranean sea**
- 5. Support and fund the programs of accommodation and first integration implemented by sister churches in the most exposed receiving countries such as Italy.**

To further discuss these reflections we renew the invitation to participate in the International Conference on “Living and witnessing the border – Migration, borders and reception” which will take place in Palermo and Lampedusa from September 30 to October 4, 2017. For more information and registration please contact Ms Alessia Melillo, [alessia.melillo@fcej.it](mailto:alessia.melillo@fcej.it) .

Thanking once again the churches and ecumenical bodies who generously supported our ministry in various ways, we are confident that you will consider our ideas and will sustain all the churches challenged by the ministry for the migrants. Please keep them and us in your prayer!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Luca M. Negro,  
President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luca M. Negro', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Maria Bonafede,  
Federation of Protestant Churches Board, Migration area

Prof. Paolo Naso,  
Coordinator of Mediterranean Hope, FCEI Refugees and Migrants Program