

Press Release 37 / 2016

## **Idomeni: Access to asylum is a “lottery”**

### **High-level Protestant church representatives urge European aid**

Darmstadt/Düsseldorf/Hannover, 12<sup>th</sup> of April. In face of the latest escalation in the Greek refugee camp Idomeni high-ranking representatives of Protestant churches on Tuesday (12<sup>th</sup> of April) have called for a humane treatment of people seeking protection at the Greek-Macedonian border. This weekend clashes between refugees and security forces left numerous persons injured. The Präses (President) of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland Manfred Rekowski, the President of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau Dr. Volker Jung and the Reformed Moderator Martin Engels renewed their call for European help in Idomeni: “Such circumstances must not exist in Europe.”

### **Facilitate family reunification**

During a visit to the refugee camp Rekowski, Jung and Engels could get a picture themselves about the situation in Greece. They were horrified by the on-site conditions, which fall far short of humanitarian standards. In addition, the possibility of being able to lodge an asylum application is close to a “lottery”. Currently there was hardly any possibility to do so. Persons seeking protection would also not trust the Greek authorities. In their joint statement “Idomeni must not remain like this”, Rekowski, Jung and Engels therefore underline that persons seeking protection should have speedy access to relocation programmes in Idomeni, so that applicants can have an asylum determination procedure in other European countries. This is especially important for women travelling alone and women with children. The churches’ representatives asked in particular the German federal government to make family reunification possible for separated families quickly and unbureaucratically.

### **Protestant churches will increase their aid for Greece**

Furthermore, Rekowski and Jung announced to provide financial support for the refugee work of churches and church institutions in Greece. In addition to the local humanitarian assistance the support for family reunification shall be strengthened.

*Translated from German original*



EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE  
IN HESSEN UND NASSAU



EVANGELISCHE  
KIRCHE  
IM RHEINLAND



## **Statement of 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2016:**

### **Idomeni must not remain like this**

#### Joint statement

after a solidarity visit of representatives of the Protestant Churches in the Rhineland, in Hesse and Nassau and the Reformed Federation to Idomeni and to the Evangelical Church in Greece engaged in the refugee work.

In Idomeni between 12.000 and 14.000 people currently endure pitiful circumstances in the fields close to the meanwhile closed Greek-Macedonian border. 40% are children, many of them under the age of 14. The situation is devastating. There is lack of humane shelter, regular provision of food and security. This falls short of any humanitarian standard. As there are reports also from official camps in Greece that provisions are insufficient and there is uncertainty about possible procedures, refugees do not trust the calls to move to the other camps.

The camp inhabitants are almost exclusively supported by volunteers of churches and initiatives who show impressive dedication. Although the Greek population is suffering from the economic crisis, many Greeks are helping to relieve suffering with their own means.

It is almost impossible for persons seeking protection to lodge an asylum application, as an asylum application can exclusively be registered online during limited time periods. During these small windows of opportunity people can rarely be registered, therefore this amounts to an asylum lottery. Thus the persons are denied a fundamental human right.

Such circumstances must not exist in Europe. It is the common task of the European Union and the Member States to ensure that persons seeking protection are sheltered humanely, are registered and have a quick access to a regular asylum procedure.

As this apparently cannot be guaranteed at the moment, and as in view of closed borders the number of refugees in a precarious situation is continuously rising and as the humanitarian crisis in Greece is aggravating, we regard it as urgently necessary to grant persons seeking protection access to relocation programmes also at Idomeni to have their asylum procedures in other European countries.

Therefore, EU Member States and the competent agencies in cooperation with Greek authorities should facilitate the quick and unbureaucratic relocation, especially of unaccompanied women and women with children. At the same time access to asylum procedures in Greece should be made fast and reliable. With joint efforts of European States it

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should be possible to end this shameful situation within two to three months and to finally provide refugees with protection.

Most of the stranded persons at Idomeni come from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and are most probably entitled to international protection. Many have family members in Germany or in other European countries. We urgently request especially the German Government to make family reunification possible for separated families quickly and unbureaucratically in such cases.

The Protestant Church in the Rhineland and the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau will to strengthen their support, also financially, for the refugee work of churches and churches' institutions in Greece. This should consolidate the urgently needed local humanitarian aid as well as the counselling structures, in order to guarantee protection seeking persons the access to their rights, especially for the reunification of families.

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