



The child drowned on the shores of the Mediterranean, 2.9.2015.; REUTERS/Nilufer Demir/DHA.

THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE of MIGRATION

*A position paper issued by the European Muslim Network (EMN)**

The concept of migration, which encompasses the search for asylum out of political and non-political reasons, is integral to the creation of the Islamic development and an integral part of the Islamic concept of Human Rights. In 621 AD, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) finally decided to leave his birthplace Makkah and sought safety in the city of Madinah. This led to bringing about peace to a society lost in a state of internal division. This event called “hijrah”, or migration, came to symbolize the movement of Muslims from lands of oppression to those of safety and peace. Moreover, the hospitable treatment of Muhammad (PBUH) and the young Muslim community by the people of Madinah embodies the Islamic understanding of refugee protection contained in the Qur’an. Migration and the concept of seeking protection and safety from persecution is expressed comprehensively in the Islamic idea of “*amaanah*”, and is recognized as an individual human right.

Migration is a human right! Every migrant is a human being irrespective of his political or economic status. We recognize that migration is a global challenge and quite contrary to the political discourse not confined to Europe alone. Migrants tend to remain close to their countries of origin, as is proven by the migrants from Syria who have chosen to leave the life-threatening situation in their homeland and

decided to migrate to their immediate neighbours. The case of Syrian migrants belies the public narrative of millions of migrants allegedly knocking at the doors of Europe and is testimony to the fact that countries with much lesser economic means than Europe are primary destinations for migrants. It is these countries and not Europe that are offering safe haven and are responding effectively to the major waves of current migration. According to the UN, the major refugee/migrant-hosting countries in the world are all in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Indeed, 86 % of the world's refugee/migrants are hosted by developing countries. And in 2013 nearly half of the refugees under UNHCR mandate lived in countries where the GDP per capita was less than USD \$5.000. Modern migration demonstrates once again the basic truth that interdependence is a fact of life and that countries and continents are interdependent with regard to the relationship of cause and effect.

EMN feels that there is an urgent need for a new narrative with regard to migration in order to demonstrate to an unsettled European public that a proper, sensible management of migration is beneficial for everybody. This is a fact which is substantiated by reputable studies, while there is a paramount need for simultaneously addressing the underlying causes of mass-migration from outside of Europe. The majority of European economists have acknowledged the need for this new narrative, while the majority of European politicians are still reluctant to follow suit.

EMN perceives the current nature of debate on migration as highly emotional with strong racist undertones. The European public is unaware of the facts on the ground. For example, migrants from France live in more countries than migrants from any other nation. The poorest countries of the world have the lowest share of emigrants. While Europeans appropriate for themselves the right to migrate to any country, almost exclusively for economic reasons, Africans for instance are confronted with extremely high levels of restrictions to their movement.

EMN is addressing the global challenge of migration out of a moral duty and in consistency with Islamic teachings, out of respect for human dignity and from a global citizen's point of view that recognizes and accepts the common ground defined by mutual universal values, which oblige human beings to share the common responsibility for mankind and creation. It is for this reason that the obvious attempts of fascist and semi-fascist parties, movements and their supporters in mainstream politics to closely link the immigration debate to a rejectionist analysis of Islam and Muslims in Europe are outrightly dismissed by EMN. Religion is not an impediment to inclusion.

While acknowledging the fact, that Europe, like any other continent or country, is incapable of receiving all migrants from all over the world, the EMN intends to draw with this position paper the attention of policy-makers to the following issues for a comprehensive contemplation and consideration of the issue at hand:

EMN recognizes migration, which embodies the right of free movement, as a human being's individual right and a voluntary expression of his nature-given dignity in his pursuit to strive for better living conditions and his individual birthright in his pursuit to happiness in life.

We strongly object to the immigration policies practiced by Australia, which concentrates migrants in permanent and degrading arrest camps far off mainland Australia and within foreign countries with low living standards that are being bribed by the Australian government into the acceptance of migrants in order to provide them with rudimentary shelter and basic necessities of life. The Australian position can only be judged as anti-human, non-ethical example for Europe.

We strongly object to the immigration policies, that allow for the subhuman treatment of migrants in the countries of the Arab Gulf region that have been blessed by nature with vast natural resources, an act of ill-treatment of labourers that is in blatant contravention of Islamic teachings.

We strongly object to the immigration policies of the Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh, which has started to copy Australia's shameful and inhuman practices towards migrants, and Indonesia and Malaysia, that are more than reluctant to offer safety to their Muslim brethren who are persecuted in their home country on account of their religion, an act of rejection of suffering humanity that is in complete contravention of Islamic teachings.

We strongly object to the immigration policies epitomized in the mentality of what has been rightly called "Fortress Europe" - most markedly demonstrated on the ground by the high-tech aggressive fencing in place in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. This type of policies only fosters xenophobia, treats the issue of migration from a solely security perspective and intends to absolve Europe of its co-shared responsibility for its colonial past, that needs to be acknowledged in its moral, economic and historical dimension.

Having concluded the above the EMN states that:

- Europe must acknowledge flight from poverty, political injustice and dictatorship as legitimate reasons for migration to be on par with one another, in order to stop the ill-intended and misleading public and political discourse about migrants and segregating migrants into "good migrants" and "bad migrants".
- current migration to Europe is largely driven by economy and economic inequalities. From an economic perspective Europe is highly dependent on migration. Politicians and economists need to become more ethical and rational in their reflections on migration, so that the discussion centering on the issue of migration is put into its proper context and that Europe's economic need for migration is acknowledged. Therefore the subject has to be de-linked from issues of security and perceived threats to European societies, which nurture racism towards ethnicities, minorities and religious groups in Europe, (admittedly not only in Europe).

The EMN does not fail to recognize the responsibilities of the sending countries, i.e. the countries where the migrants originate from, where bad governance, gross administrative incompetence, wide-spread and extremely high levels of public corruption destroy the future of people, where the well-being of people is not in the focus of economic development, where governments serve the interests of the ruling elites only,

where respect for the people's aspiration with regard to access to resources, health-care, education and decent livelihood is not practiced.

It is for this reason that EMN considers it necessary that:

- the potential and legally required limits in accepting non-European migration have to be defined by Europe from an ethical perspective in the interest of the natural need to prevent the overburdening of receiving communities.
- the acceptance of responsibility by Europe for modern migration which is also rooted in Europe's colonial past needs to be expressed in a substantial, fair, just and forward-looking new neighbourhood policy and economic cooperation especially vis-a-vis its immediate non-European neighbours.
- there is an immediate need for consistency and balance between the political discourse on migration. On the one hand in essence and spirit it is markedly negative and stigmatizing to the migrant and heavily security driven. On the other hand the obvious economic needs of Europe, which expresses itself in Europe's high demand for supportive migration required for the survival of its societies on account of the faltering intergenerational contract that has to come to terms with the demographic slide caused by aging societies. A consistent political discourse is pivotal which considers European interests but also the dignity of migrating human beings.
- Europe and the West in general need to question – on the basis of its propagated set of values and human norms – its high living standards based on the over-proportional consumptions of resources on a global scale which at this point in time is realized at the expense of the majority of people in developing regions.

The EMN acknowledges the specific role that Muslim Communities in Europe have to play regarding their duty to support migrants in general and especially Muslim migrants, based on the shared European values and their faith, the existing and developing Muslim-oriented infrastructure and social networks while appreciating the Islamic rights of the arriving new members of society and the duties of the new members of society. Muslims can reach deep into their specific history, (e.g. cross-continental migration from Al Andalus to the Maghreb and within the Ottoman Empire, with regard to the individual and the collective duties of modern Muslims as “*Ansars*”, an Islamic term for those offering a safe haven). Muslim communities in Europe are already highly challenged in dealing adequately with migrants, e.g. in Turkey and in Italy. There is a strong need for Muslim communities to prepare themselves in accepting, integrating and hosting migrants.

The EMN therefore recommends that Muslims in Europe open up themselves to:

- the necessary debate on the subtle and at times open manifestations of inter-Muslim racism vs. the need to offer Islamic solidarity irrespective of the recipient's origin.
- the exchange and creation of partnerships with other faith-based organizations and NGOs, which already have experience in accepting refugees and integrating migrants in their communities.
- the expertise that can be obtained from the experience of Jewish communities in Europe in integrating Jewish migrants from the former Soviet Union.

- the development of community services catering to the specific needs of migrants with the support / sponsorship of local municipalities and NGOs
- explore and to seek legal status in order to harbour people in need inside mosques in line with the asylum offered by churches and related institutions.
- rediscover the Islamic concept of safety (*amaanah*) and the rights of the individual to offer asylum to people in need.

For the immediate alleviation of the plight of migrants the EMN calls for:

- the immediate resumption of intensive rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea and the reinstatement of Mare Nostrum.
- the creation of just, safe and fair migration application processes in Europe and the countries of origin of potential migrants, in order to prevent human beings from undertaking life- threatening travels.
- the immediate cancelation of Dublin II, which places the burden at the doorstep of a few European countries. During the past two years, five countries have accepted 72% of migrants - thus causing great damage to and erosion of the very idea of Europe, that is the exemplary concept of One Common Neighborhood with shared responsibilities.
- the provision of refugee camps in the southern Mediterranean that meet European standards of human rights so that migrants are not left at the mercy of incapable local administrations. (In the past and to the utter shame of Europe the effort to secure Europe's external borders has often been achieved at the cost of partnerships with regimes with extremely poor human rights record.)
- speedy processing of migration requests through legal commissions run by people of integrity and with sound experience.

EMN calls for the immediate initiation of long-term measures to support and stabilize neighbouring regions - A New Neighbourhood-Policy for Europe, which

- is in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and decriminalizes migration.
- recognizes the fact that continuous European/western political and military interference has destabilized the Middle East and African regions.
- recognizes the fact - according to the data collected by the UNDP - that migration does not adversely affect European job-markets.
- defines Europe's responsibility for a European-style Marshall Plan for the Middle East and Africa.
- formulates common opportunities and responsibilities to support and to develop the EMEA region.
- respects the economic rights of neighbouring countries with regard to its natural resources and which develops and applies instruments to preserve these rights.
- stops the destructive flooding of foreign/African markets with subsidized products from Europe.
- institutes a broad, inclusive system of micro-crediting for people in need, so that they are afforded the opportunity to create a livelihood for themselves and a perspective in life for their families in the country of origin.

- opens up to the established fact that migration itself is contributing substantially to the development of the sending countries through remittances produced by legal labour, to an extent that cannot be matched by development assistance given to the sending countries by Europe.

Europe is not under siege. Europe is in need to demonstrate at this moment in time that human dignity, justice and solidarity are not hollow words but form the very basis of a consolidated European approach to the challenges of our times. A value-oriented Europe has the unique opportunity to demonstrate to humanity that the wealth of mankind has to be shared by all human beings.

While we at EMN understand the need for action, we deplore the fact that Europe seeks pointless military actions manifested by its intention to destroy the boats of facilitators, as this action will not solve the problem of migrants at all.

EMN considers the introduction of a quota distribution system as a first and positive step, however, this quota system has to be expanded and generalized and should not be confined to the migrants who are already present in EU , especially the southern member states.

The EMN appeals to the decision makers at the European and national levels not to fall into the trap of limiting solidarity while discussing migration, but to find ways in the management of solidarity through means which are in line with established and universally binding ethical norms.

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*** The European Muslim Network is a Think Tank that gathers European Muslims intellectuals and activists throughout Europe. They aim at fostering communication, views and expert analysis on the key issues related to the Muslim presence in Europe and issues related to Europe in general.**