

Switzerland Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Meeting at Herzberg, Aarau, Switzerland, 13-16 May 2016

Epistle on refugees and Switzerland: a declarative message expressing our concerns, our witness and our commitment to ministry and action

OUR QUAKER WITNESS

A central tenet of our Quaker Faith witness is that God is in all people and, thus, all people are created equal before God and each other. In recognizing the many refugees and other migrants among us, in our communities, in our country, we cannot and must not discriminate between *us* and *them*. Rather, we recognize that we are *all* migrants, no one is or can be “illegal.” Moreover, when people seek refuge from warfare, human rights abuse and conditions that do not sustain human life in dignity and safety, expressing solidarity with and helping refugees and migrants among us is a moral imperative.

We express our will and intent to show solidarity with refugees, in Europe and Switzerland in particular, and to contribute to resolving the root causes of refugee displacement.

We Quakers recognize that many refugees are fleeing situations in which arms exports from our own countries, foreign military interventions, man-made climate change, unjust economic conditions and unsustainable resource exploitation are contributing to human misery, death, destruction and displacement.

We further recognize that refugees and migrants bring opportunities, human resources and ultimately benefits to Switzerland, although at the cost of tragic loss to the communities and countries they have been compelled to leave.

We, the Swiss Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers), are called to speak out in public witness on these concerns. Addressing these concerns will contribute to eliminating warfare as well as economic, social and environmental causes of human displacement and coerced migration.

Firstly, the current refugee situation highlights the imperative for peacemaking first and foremost in all armed conflict situations, and for peace conversion – shifting away from military economies – to be central to the agendas of the governments of Europe and Switzerland.

Secondly, we call for intensified efforts by the government and the economic actors of Switzerland to phase out the export of arms and military supplies.

Contributing to conflict situations by facilitating trade in arms, producing and directly selling arms, and providing financing to companies that make or deal in arms not only associates Switzerland with morally repugnant practice. It also contributes to the warfare and use of those weapons that directly generating streams of refugees as well as destabilizing politically volatile situations all the more. The only truth military support activity has achieved is best reflected by an adapted Biblical testimony: Those who sow weapons shall harvest refugees (adapted from: Hosea 8,7).

Thirdly, we ask that social responsibility for sustainable societies and for development be a prime and regulated regime for Swiss banking and for Swiss companies wherever they are operating. We believe that the responsibilities of Swiss Banks and Swiss companies will be encouraged by further restrictions on money laundering, and by asking their accountability to realizing decent working conditions, sustainable development and respectful environmental policies wherever they are doing business.

Fourthly, we propose realization of the notions of peace tax and allocating taxes for peace; we invite the people of Switzerland to encourage these initiatives and the Swiss government to implement them. A peace tax would allow taxpayers to designate payments or portions of their payments to be used in pursuit of peacemaking, peace conversion support and other non-military purposes. Tax payers should be able to decide themselves if their tax payment is allocated towards military uses or peaceful activities, including projects done by community services.

OUR QUAKER MINISTRY AND ACTION

We Quakers in Switzerland through this Yearly Meeting have considered what we can do in ministry and action for and with refugees and migrants.

To further encourage a welcoming and fully humanitarian refugee reception and resettlement in Switzerland, we shall seek to

Firstly, endorse the call for Switzerland to accept for resettlement 50,000 refugees.

Secondly, give support to the Déclaration de Berne/Public Eye.

Thirdly, commit as individuals, worship groups and monthly meeting – in accordance with our means – to enhance our own ministry alongside and in solidarity with refugees and migrants in our local communities.

Fourthly, consider allocating from our modest funding resources, support where most needed for refugee service activities of our members and of partner entities.

Fifthly, sustain and expand as possible our support for the work of our Quaker international organizations – QUNO and QCEA – addressing peace-making, peace conversion, ending arms trade and advocating refugee protection and assistance in accord with international law.

Sixthly, expand our contacts and cooperation with other groups and organizations in our communities welcoming and helping refugees and arriving migrants.

Seventh, invite and convene dialogue and coordination with and among other interested groups, faith communities, and non-religious organizations¹ in order to support successful integration of refugees and to advocate together for welcoming policies and practices by our local and national governments.

Eighth, commit as individuals to enhance our own efforts to lead a simple, peaceful, sustainable, low-carbon-footprint lifestyles.

MAKING OUR WITNESS AND SERVICE VISIBLE

We Swiss Quakers desire to enhance the visibility and the impact of our witness, service and action. We intend to

Issue statements and messages to the communications media, and particularly to the news and communications media of other faith communities and institutions

Encourage political participation of our members and others, including resident migrants, to become eligible, register and vote in Switzerland

Wear and display pin, buttons, posters with messages such as “Nobody is Illegal”

¹ Among those we may approach are such groups as e.g. Haus der Religionen (Bern), Plateforme Interreligieuse (Geneva), Menonnites, etc. Salvation Army, Stopexclusion (Geneva), Centre Social Protestant, etc.