
Refugees in the World: The European Community's Response

International Conference, December 7-8, 1989

The Dutch Refugee Council and the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) will host an international conference, *Refugees in the World: The European Community's Response*, at The Hague, Netherlands, from Thursday 7 to Friday 8 December 1989. This event is sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands and NOVIB.

The Dutch Refugee Council and the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights have formed a Working Group which is in charge of the organization and the preparations concerning the content of the conference. The Working Group is assisted by a Conference Advisory Board whose members include Professors P. van Dijk (International Organizations, University of Utrecht), Th. C. van Boven (International Law, University of Maastricht), H. Meijers (International Law, University of Leiden), E. Postel-Coster (Cultural Anthropology, University of Leiden), and Doctors J. Hoeksma (UNHCR Branch, The Netherlands) and F. Florin (Head of the Protection Department of the Dutch Refugee Council).

Close to 100 participants are expected to attend, including scholars, representatives from international governmental and non-governmental organizations, national governments and parliaments of EC countries, and developing countries.

Forced mass migrations, due to situations of hunger and starvation, civil war, ethnic conflict, natural disasters and political repression, are increasingly demanding the attention of the governments and general public in the economically developed

European countries. This is not only the result of better and more sophisticated information through the media, but also of an increase in the physical arrival of victims of those situations in the countries of the West.

Victims of situations of deprivation and man-made or natural disasters are, notwithstanding the fact they are most often in real life-threatening situations, therefore not allowed a permanent stay and immigration in European countries. However, a special category of victims of threatening situations must be allowed access to European countries under the obligations of international instruments. Granting asylum to victims of repression and persecution in terms of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol and other related conventions and agreements, cannot be looked at as a matter of immigration, but rather as a matter of human rights policy, as many European governments have themselves stated time and again.

Although all European countries are of the opinion that they fulfil their obligations to those in need of international protection under the international instruments already mentioned, the right to asylum is nevertheless threatened. Against the background of increasing applications by those who are forced to migrate for other reasons than the grounds of the standing definition of asylum seekers, European governments have begun to work together in a number of different forums to develop methods of limiting the numbers of asylum applications. They take measures which are

intended both to deny access to asylum seekers and to encourage restrictive interpretations of the Convention and Protocol.

Scholars, non-governmental organizations, parliamentary bodies, including the European Parliament, have started to point out that the right answer to the increased number of applications is not the restriction of the right of asylum. Instead, the answer should be found in positive and alternative measures, linking the asylum, immigration, human rights and development policies of the European governments and institutions of the European Communities and the Council of Europe.

The main purpose of the two-day international conference is, therefore, to ascertain the various approaches to the triangle of human rights, development and migration, and the consequences they entail for the formulations of a just, but also realistic refugee policy in the framework of a human rights and development co-operation policy of the European Community. Alternative strategies in the sphere of assistance with regard to resettlement, creating a durable solution within the regions, or giving access to European countries will be the main focus of the discussions.

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For further information and registration, contact the Conference Secretariat: SIM, Boothstraat 6, 3512 BW Utrecht, The Netherlands, telephone: (011 31 30) 394033, telex: 70779 sim nl, telefax: 011 31 30 393242; or the Dutch Refugee Council, 3e Hugo de Grootstraat 7, 1052 LJ Amsterdam, telephone: (011 31 20) 881311.

