

Proposal for an Anglican Refugee and Migrant Network

Report to Anglican Consultative Council May 2009

Introduction

Decades of continuing economic crisis and wars resulted in displacements of peoples creating a huge population of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. Government labour export policies, racial, political and religious repressions and war contingencies further increased the population of this sector practically gravitating towards more affluent and economically advanced countries.

The United Nations estimated the total immigrant population to be 186,579,300 in its World Population Policies 2005 Report. The number has grown to about 205 million in 2008. Tens of millions are undocumented while about 20 million are refugees (International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) - Founding Congress, October 2008).

The UN and its related institutions approved conventions and recommendations setting international standards on handling migration and refugees. These conventions were made possible with the active lobbying of non-governmental and grassroots organizations (e.g. the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 [revised 1967] and the Geneva Convention).

While there are such international formations that attempt to ensure the protection of rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, there are also similar levels of formations that stand otherwise.

Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) could not agree on the coverage of its General Agreement on Trades in Services (GATS) Mode 4 – the international movements of persons – regarding a proposal for standard benefits among experts sent by big businesses for the efficient use of their products, vis a vis, labour migrants. Rich countries want their experts to be assured of protection but refuse to provide them to migrant workers.

Realizing the latest economic crisis to be in the offing, a series of high level / inter-governmental meetings resulted in the creation of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The GFMD implies that migration can lead to development because of the enormous remittances being sent by international migrant workers to their families through international banks. It noted some studies made in the past ten years which included a World Bank research showing the huge remittances migrants send back to their homeland amounting to US\$2.26 trillion: an amount far more than the combined development assistance given by developed countries to underdeveloped ones. GFMD professes to embrace “development”, but this concept may be remote to the realities of peoples of poor countries who are impoverished.

At present, almost all the global regions have migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries, war-torn cities and affluent societies that result in migrants and fleeing nationals.

Rationale

The Anglican community in several independent initiatives responded to the local needs of migrants and refugees in their midst.

In 1981, in particular, the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers (now Mission For Migrant Workers) was adapted by the St. John's Cathedral with the acceptance of the then Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong & Macau (now the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui). It was meant to provide pastoral care, paralegal assistance and advocacy for migrants in Hong Kong. This form of direct services eventually expanded to cover several migrant and refugee-receiving countries in Asia and the Pacific through the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants that was established in 1983.

On a global level, in 1984, following a specific request from the 1983 Primates' Meeting, the Anglican Refugee and Migrant Network (ARMN) was established as an officially-accredited Anglican Communion Network through Resolution 39 of ACC-6.

Essentially, ARMN was set up: *"to encourage coordination, consultation and action in refugee/migration issues with the Anglican Communion, with partner communions with ecumenical agencies and governments within their respective Provinces, to alleviate human suffering, and to determine and eliminate the root causes that lead to forced migration and create refugees."* This development reflected a clear recognition of the growing scale of the global refugee and migrant problem and its challenge to the church.

However, apart from two regional consultations (*Zimbabwe 1985; Jordan 1992*); the publication of two refugee-related Family Network (IAFN) Newsletters; and the development of an informal inter-diocesan network in East Asia, little of substance has happened to establish and activate the envisaged Anglican Network despite the 2007 IAFN Regional Consultation in East Asia and the 2008 Lambeth Conference that provided further evidence of the outstanding need for the Network.

With continuing developments showing an intensified international migration process (*migrant/refugees – receiving countries come up with policies*), concrete plans in the form of responses as part of the Anglican's Christian responsibility should be in place. The creation of the NETWORK will coordinate the different initiatives and further develop possible concrete actions.

Aims and Objectives of the Network

Broadly, the Network shall provide an arena for networking, education and advocacy based on the rich experiences of the network members as a response to the growing number of issues that go with the increase in number of migrants and refugees.

Specifically, the Network will be established:

1. to share information, ideas and experience, and to provide affirmation and mutual support for front-line programme-workers and programme-managers working with refugees and migrants on behalf of the Anglican Church through the creation of an active informal network;
2. to provide, when appropriate, practice-based information and briefing to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates, other Anglican Church leaders, and the Anglican Observer to the UN, to inform and strengthen their prophetic, advocacy and pastoral work on behalf of refugees and migrants;
3. to promote awareness, concern and commitment to action within dioceses and parishes, to the benefit of local refugees and migrants;
4. to encourage and collaborate with the wider ecumenical family and other faiths in promoting active ministry to refugees and migrants;
5. to help tackle the root causes contributing to the creation of refugees and migrants through advocacy;
6. to network with other institutions working on behalf of refugees and migrants; and,
7. to develop and share theological reflection on the causes, issues and consequences relating to refugees and migrants.

Methodology

The network will set up a DESK that will basically start the communications with the different Primates: introducing the project and explaining the history that will reflect the undiminished enthusiasm of people behind ARMN.

This can be done by first gathering those who are already in the field: those with on-going programmes and activities for migrants and refugees and those that have shown interest in the Network (e.g. the participants in the Asian Migrant Ministry).

A Consultation should be called that will define more clearly and concretely goals and commitment for a strong network.

Activities

- **Newsletter**

A regular update on the development of efforts in establishing the network will be ensured through the production of a regular newsletter: an announcement of this initiative as a stir-up activity;

Same will provide current situations, concrete cases / experiences of migrants and refugees, status of government policies, local norms and national laws, existing international standards/conventions, bilateral and multi-lateral agreements.

- **Consultation**

A Consultation will be held to define the goals and commitment of the Network.

A preparatory working group will be convened to attend to the preparation of documents and materials for the invitation, Consultation Kit and for the discussions in the sessions, and other technical preparations.

Invitations will be sent to those who showed interest in the several attempts to establish a coordinated migrant ministry; existing service providers for migrants within the Anglican Community; and other interested groups to be identified by a working/preparatory group.

- **Networking**

Develop a network to gather information on the different initiatives within the Anglican Communion and establish a library of materials that has been developed along the way. Ensure the Network's growth through publications and release of documents, launching of common activities and coordinated actions for advocacy.