

ACUP Communiqué

Catalan universities, with refugees

Barcelona, 13 October 2015

By the end of 2014, over 60 million people around the world had had to abandon their homes because of war or persecution due to gender, race or religion, according to the ACNUR report 'World at War. Global Trends. Forced displacement in 2014'.

There are many causes but the threat of violence the common denominator. Movement, both within the country and to other states, occurs with the aim of finding a place to live where there are minimal conditions of respect for human rights and access to food, education, health and employment. In the case of Syria, since 2012 almost half of the population has had to leave their homes. Nearly 7 million people have fled the country and are scattered between Lebanon (where 1 out of every 5 people is a Syrian refugee), Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Living conditions gradually deteriorate and access to decent living conditions is restricted. The vulnerability of people and families increases with time and has extreme effects on families headed by women. Also in this conflict, it is precisely women, children and the elderly that suffer violence most intensely.

Since 2014, the access routes to Europe via Italy and Greece have literally been flooded with people fleeing an extremely violent conflict in Syria, but also with Afghans (1 out of every 4 refugees is Afghan), and with people fleeing the violence of Yemen, Somalia, etc. Thousands of people who are victims of mafias cross the maritime routes, and some – the lucky ones -reach Europe alive. Almost 500,000 Syrians have come to Europe fleeing the extreme violence and the lack of opportunities for access to decent living conditions. **The universities feel compelled to react to this situation with solidarity and ethics and respond, using our skills, experience and means, to a humanitarian crisis of dimensions that had not been seen in Europe since the Second World War.**

Human development, sustainability, human rights and their defence are a crucial aspect of the universities' social mission. As places for analysis and reflection, proposals and training, research, innovation, the creation and the dissemination of knowledge, universities have a responsibility that we can and must exercise with the firm conviction that the respect for human rights and people's dignity are part of the path towards a global society, enriched by diversity and capable of living together in peace.

And with the firm conviction that human rights are based on knowledge and mutual respect, solidarity and cooperation, **we hereby manifest that:**

- 1) The Catalan public universities belonging to the ACUP condemn the acts of violence suffered by the Syrian population, both within and without Syrian territory. These acts are committed by both state political and armed actors as well as those who claim the legitimacy or the control of the territory and, therefore, of the population, but also by those states and institutions that by defect or omission violate human rights and international humanitarian law.**

- 2) **We reject violence in general**, and especially that which affects women and children, as well as ethnic, religious or political minorities occurring both within the territorial framework of the conflict, and in the countries that play host to refugees.
- 3) Given that the conflict has a domestic but also regional and international reach, and that any peace proposal must include these three dimensions, we ask those involved in the conflict and those who are directly or indirectly participating in it, **immediately to establish the necessary conditions to revive peace talks** and to ensure the participation of the Syrian civil society as a whole and specifically of women, as actors in the talks and negotiations, taking into account their needs and demands in possible agreements.
- 4) **We urge international donors to assume fundamental responsibility** in the support for international organizations (especially United Nations agencies) in terms of humanitarian aid, a key element to ensure the living conditions and the dignity of the people.
- 5) **We urge governments and public administrations to assume the legal responsibility to receive people** fleeing violence, articulating channels and promoting dialogue and coordination with society for the welfare of the people seeking refuge and asylum.
- 6) We express our firm commitment to the monitoring, enforcement and **defence of human rights** and we are in full solidarity with the suffering of the Syrian people and that of all those currently living in situations of violence.
- 7) We choose to work in a coordinated manner with the civil society and the relevant public authorities towards a comprehensive, effective and coherent action programme with the maximum respect for human rights and that promotes the short-, medium- and long-term social and economic development, education, personal and professional progress of those people seeking asylum and refuge. **We shall promote and make provision for the active involvement of our respective university communities** in the initiatives and actions related with the intake of refugees coming to Catalonia or already here.
- 8) We reaffirm the commitment of the University as an institution and social actor in **the analysis, reflection and dissemination** of the causes, actors, consequences, actions of the civil society, challenges for the future and proposals for action concerning migration and, in particular, with the movements of people caused by violence.
- 9) We reaffirm the need to effectively promote, disseminate and defend people's human rights and fundamental freedoms with a comprehensive perspective that necessarily incorporates the gender perspective and that takes into special consideration **young people's right to education**. To make this possible, we shall organize **specific and integral spaces and services** to respond to the needs identified in coordination with the other bodies and administrations.
- 10) **In keeping with the above, we promise to make the skills and resources available to the Comitè Operatiu de Suport als Refugiats (Operational Support Committee for Refugees) and to all administrations and entities that will take charge of the reception and integration of refugees in Catalonia.** We undertake, within the bounds of the current legislation, to help the newcomers gain access to academic activities and we ask the competent authorities to speed up the process of official recognition and certification of academic qualifications in order to ensure their access to university studies.