

Keynote address
**“REFUGEES, MIGRATION and SWITZERLAND:
A CRISIS OF VALUES; A CALL TO WITNESS and SOLIDARITY”**
**for Switzerland Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends**
Herzberg, Aarau
14 May 2016
By **Patrick Taran**, President, GMPA

The “refugee crisis,” interchangeably called the “migrant crisis,” has been relentless fodder for news media, political debate and public attention in Switzerland as in the rest of Europe over the last year. But the “crisis” is much more one of perception –and of values—than of reality. Refugee arrivals and migration are permanent features of the European story, and certainly the Swiss story. Switzerland has long been a *Mecca* calling for migrants as well as receiving refugees.

I would like to speak to three dimensions: the context reality of migration to and in Europe and Switzerland, some specifics of the Swiss case, and the challenges today's situation poses for Quaker witness and service.

The context

First of all, the context.

In 2015, Europe countries indeed faced a dramatic increase in the number of **refugees** arriving in irregular situations, over one million persons. European countries¹ registered 1,392,610 applications for asylum – some arrived in regular situations—more than double the 626,000 asylum applications registered in 2014. The figures for Switzerland were in fact quite different, about the same in 2015 as 2014.

However, let's put these figures in perspective! Annual **immigration arrivals** to EU member countries have been consistently above **3 million** over the last decade; 3.4 million in 2013², the last year for which data is available. Overall, more than half now originate from outside the EU; a large proportion are immigrants from other EU states. While net immigration is less –about one million a year (accounting for emigration departures)—the reality is that migration has been a substantial, long and constant feature of Europe. Today, perhaps more than ever, Europe needs migrants for economic, skills, labour and demographic reasons. Even more so Switzerland!

The reality is that 10 to 20% of work forces of Western Europe are “*issue de l'immigration*” as the French put it.

Let's zero in on this country, Switzerland. 30% of the work force is foreign born. No less than 40% in the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud. Those figures are from SECO. The proportion of foreign-born overall in this country is about 22%.

What former mayor Ken Livingston said about his city “London wouldn't make it to breakfast without migrants” is even more true here in Switzerland. That's assuming the Swiss would have housing to wake up

¹ Countries of the European Union + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

² “During 2013, there were an estimated 1.7 million immigrants to the EU-28 from non-member countries. In addition, 1.7 million people previously residing in one EU Member State migrated to another Member State.” See: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migration_flows

in without its army of foreign construction workers.

Figures for some cities in Europe are dramatic. Take quintessentially Austrian Vienna, where 49 and a half percent of the population is foreign born, or has at least one foreign born parent. The figure is fully 50% for Rotterdam. Which would be similar to Geneva and Lausanne, while Basel would not be far behind.

In 2013, 71% of non-EU nationals in EU Member States were engaged in economic activities.³ The rate of labor market participation was higher for non-citizens than citizens in the Mediterranean and Eastern European Member States as well as Luxembourg. That is contrary to contemporary European mythology.

Migration is maintaining the viability of Swiss –and European—construction, health care, hotel, restaurant and tourism, agriculture and other sectors. Even watch-making in this country. Immigration meets growing demand for skills. Remittances, skills transfers, investments, and trade are enhancing development here in Switzerland as elsewhere. Migration is key to the very survival of Europe's economies, particularly the Swiss one.

Value to global economy

Migrant remittances today add up to some 600 billion dollars annually. But remittances represent only about 20% of migrants take home pay. That nonetheless offers a basis to extrapolate a very rough estimate of the value of migration to the global economy. About 3 trillion dollars per year, measured by take home pay for migrant workers, economically active migrants. For comparison, an amount greater than global annual trade in petroleum, gas and derivatives.

But we ain't seen nothin' yet.

Within 15 years, the majority of the world's countries and populations will be in serious work force decline. Many already are.⁴ Fertility rates in some 122 of 224 recognized countries and political territories are at or well below zero population growth; this includes all of Europe.⁵ Germany will lose 5 million members of its work force in the next fifteen years. Italy's work force will decline by some 3 million by 2030. The Russian Federation has lost 10 million since 2000. Most dramatic is anticipated decline of China's workforce by some 100 million people over the next 30 years.

These countries face increasing departures from the work force uncompensated by decreasing numbers of youth entrants. This means increasingly 'globalized' demand – and competition—for the most crucial economic resource of all: trained skills at all levels. No country today can train workers with the entire range and number of evolving professional, technical and vocational skills needed to perform the ever more complex work done on its territory. This drives a constantly increasing international mobility of talent, competencies and labour at all skill levels.

The global skills crisis is critical. A forecasting study by the McKenzie Global Institute estimated that the global shortage of high skilled and trained technical skills may reach 85 million by 2020.⁶ 38 to 40 million

³ Eurostat, Migrant integration statistics. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migrant_integration_statistics_-_employment

⁴ For a corporate view on the phenomena, see Ernst & Young online report: "Six global trends shaping the business world: Demographic shifts transform the global workforce"

⁵ This and following figures drawn from the on-line *CIA World Factbook, Country Comparison: Total Fertility Rate(s)* at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html>. Note: 2.1 to 2.2 children per woman is considered the 'replacement rate' of zero population growth, below which population will decline.

⁶ McKenzie Global Institute: 2012. *The World at Work: Jobs, Pay and Skills for 3.5 Billion People*. See http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/employment_and_growth/the_world_at_work. Download summary and full text from that page.

skilled workers with tertiary education will be lacking, especially in developed countries notably across Europe. Another 45 million will be missing with technical, vocational and scientific skills needed by employers –this within five years. Already employers around the world complain that they cannot fill one in three jobs on offer with the needed level of skills. You have read that both the CFF-SSB national railway and the association of Swiss watchmakers decry a critical shortage of qualified engineers and specialists and are stepping up recruitment abroad.

Supply side pressures

Pressures for displacement and emigration from countries North and South remain intense; in some situations they significantly intensified in the last five years. The war and conflict driven exodus of millions from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen have overshadowed the bigger, long term mobility trends, particularly because of the more than a million persons in refugee circumstances arrived in Europe over the last year.

However, a main factor in countries across Africa and Asia remains the absence of jobs and decent work in countries with growing youth populations. Job creation remains flat while youthful populations are increasing. Meanwhile, financial crises and austerity measures have devastated national economies as well as social protection systems in Europe too, and have resulted in youth unemployment rates of 50% in several countries. New waves of emigration, especially of young skilled workers, have departed from Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain – a significant number to elsewhere in Europe, including Switzerland.

The refugee challenge in Switzerland.

Yes, there was last year a large increase in refugee arrivals in several European countries. But *where's the beef* here in Switzerland?

I confess to being angered this morning when I did a bit more research on the Swiss response to refugees. How many of you are aware that the government of this country is applying concentration camp policies of stripping Syrian refugees of money and valuables when they arrive at reception centres? Just like Denmark and Germany are doing. I suppose they can keep wedding rings and gold teeth fillings. But as reported in the press, any cash or valuables worth more than 1000 francs have to be given to the authorities.⁷

Well, fear of foreigners the Swiss depend on wins referendums. And keeps migrants in their place, for many that means as cheap, docile, flexible workers.

I find amusing if it weren't so tragic the Swiss response to the perceived bogeyman threat. You've all read the Federal Council's announced contingency planning. Send army troops to the borders. To do what? Put up barbed wire fences, as done around Basel and Geneva in WWII to keep out Jews fleeing Nazi butchers?

Yes, additional refugee arrivals result in additional challenges for all levels of government. But, I wish to remind, the challenges of refugee displacement and migration are also opportunities for a dynamic and viable future for this country. A forecasting study indicated that Switzerland will need 400,000 additional workers by 2030. That study was endorsed by the national employers confederation and by national unions including UNIA.

I borrow a quote from my keynote address at UNESCO last Monday. “The twin forces of urbanisation and global migration have created a rich field of action and experimentation in cities around the world on

⁷ See for example <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/15/switzerland-joins-denmark-in-seizing-assets-from-refugees-to-cover-costs>

integration strategies for migrants. The success of many of these cities is to a large extent tied to their success in actualising the hopes and dreams of the thousands of migrants... When they succeed, the result can be a strong economy and a vibrant ‘*cosmopolis*’, when they fail, the result can be poverty, segregation and social tension.”⁸

I said at the outset that the 'refugee crisis' is not a crisis of refugees, but of values. And indeed, it is now a battlefield for the soul of Europe, and for Switzerland's soul. It is also a test of Europe's Christianity, since both values and religion are so frequently evoked.

On the face of it, we see European armies pointing automatic rifles at desperate women and children, building fences and even shooting at people who try to cross, we see tens of thousands of people herded into camps with no shelter. When I then hear politicians calling for mass deportations, somehow my mind conjurs up associations with names like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, etc.

We see a NATO armada stationed off Europe's shores, with express purpose of a blockade. Blockading what? Desperate refugees fleeing a war. Mostly from a country in which every city now looks like Dresden in 1944.

The EU went to the Security Council last fall to ask authorization to sink boats on the high seas. To “destroy traffickers means of criminal exploitation” they said. So which smuggler boats on the high seas won't have refugees on board?

And we now have a pact with the devil. In which the EU agreed to flagrantly violate basic principles of international law that its member states have adhered to, with mass expulsion of refugees and denial of rights and due process to claim refugee protection. Amnesty referred to it as a trade deal, on *trade in human beings*. Indeed it is literally. Both the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the High Commissioner for Human Rights judged its features in violation of international refugee and human rights conventions.

Having done an extensive study on the subject, I wonder to what extent the denial of protection and rejection of refugees is a denial of responsibility for complicity in producing refugees.⁹ Europe's arms exports to the Middle East increased 40% in the last five years. Some 60 countries are part of a belligerent coalition involved in bombarding Iraq and Syria, many of them also intervening in Afghanistan. The death toll in Syria continues to increase every day by the number of people killed in the Paris attacks last November. The latest figure is 270,000. Evidently not too many, the USA has just flown a squadron of B-52s to Qatar. For operations in Syria.

Few dare say the obvious, although the Pope has spoken out magnificently in recent weeks. European arms, military operations, and direct support for warring belligerents within countries feed the warfare producing ever more death, destruction and human displacement. Switzerland has also exported arms and other goods with military applications to countries involved directly or indirectly in the warfare.

This is a call to Quaker testimony and peace pursuit if there ever was one.

Both for ensuring refuge for refugees, and for stopping the wars, the interventions and the arms supplying that fuels the warfare.

⁸ Cities of Migration. <http://citiesofmigration.ca/>

⁹ “**Migrants and refugees have rights! Impact of EU policies on accessing protection**” Caritas Europa. See: <http://www.caritas.eu/news/report-migrants-and-refugees-have-rights> Full text available at: http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/160317_migration_report_migrants_have_rights.pdf

My sense is that what to do is clear for Quakers in the humanitarian dimension. First question for discussion is:

What is –or should be—Quakers ministry with refugees?

Answering that may also lead us to ask, *what do we request of the government –and of the people of Switzerland*

– in access to protection for refugees in Switzerland?

– in support locally for arriving refugees/asylum seekers, and access to employment and integration?

But it is more than that.

We are experiencing purposefully driven changes in public attitudes and opinion. Concerted campaigns through Swiss democracy and media diabolize the other, especially the other of another color and religion. Banning minarets, stopping “mass immigration,” white sheep kicking out black sheep. And people following the signs of the times and burning refugee homes, and beating up foreigners. I myself have been screamed and sworn at in downtown Carouge by a presumably patriotic Swiss man.

That campaigning is not only personal. It is also explicitly aimed at disassociating Switzerland from respect for and accountability to fundamental international human rights norms, legal standards, particularly human rights applying to the 'others' in Switzerland. Such as in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Yes, the peoples and States of Europe, of Switzerland, have critical responsibilities to address the challenges of arriving refugees and migrants. The challenges of meeting human rights and public services obligations mean providing adequate shelter, food, health care, education, water, sanitation, public safety, transportation and other facilities for all newcomers and residents, as well as providing skills assessment and employment services to assist refugees and other migrants in becoming self-supporting.

But the service ministry must go hand in hand with addressing 'root causes,' in particular the fuelling of war without end in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, not to mention shoring up murderous military or dictatorial regimes such as in Egypt and Eritrea. From these countries came some 90% of the refugees arrived in Europe last year via irregular entry.

That brings me to a second question for discussion.

What is Quaker witness concerning refugees?

In other words,

How do we witness, speak and act to ensure that our society, and the State, fully respect everyone, everyone bearing that of God in each of us?

What do we say what to whom? With what evidence and based on which values?

How do we Quakers speak truth to power in the here and now? Truth about causes of war and displacement when our own powers are involved in aiding and abetting military solutions to political and social crises?

I have some sense of what can be said, we elaborated some demands in the Caritas Europa report on EU law and policy regarding protection for refugees and migrants in Europe.¹⁰ I've also heard indeed similar urgings from Pope Francis in recent weeks.

¹⁰ See footnote 9

What can Swiss Yearly Meeting call for? What can our monthly meetings articulate in letters to authorities, to fellow Christians, to all faith communities –to speak in concert to the people and to power?

Root Causes

I believe it imperative for Quakers to speak out loud and clear on the application of the principles of our faith to the real world today, to crises that are only getting worse because they are as unconstrained as they are uncontested.

As the Director General of the International Organization for Migration pointed out in a speech at an ILO conference some weeks ago, this may be the first time in recent history when there is not a single viable peace process or initiative underway resolving any of the dozen international conflicts or internal conflicts in which international actors are intervening. These would include Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Nigeria, Palestine, South Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen...

The call to peacemaking must be repeated, and must be more strident. It needs to include a coherent discourse challenging the just war doctrine that terrorism can only be fought with terror, with carpet bombing, with killing women and children as necessary because they are all complicit or in the way.

In sum

The future of migration has arrived in Switzerland as elsewhere, with refugees as well as other migrants. It brings complex challenges for all concerned. Especially those of Faith communities, and certainly for Quakers.

These challenges and opportunities can be met justly and effectively. Doing so requires putting our values into practice. It also requires applying proper knowledge, humanitarian and human rights commitment, respect for the rule of law, engaging the best principles of solidarity and public administration, and implementing effective practices.

* * *

Patrick Taran,
President, Global Migration Policy Associates
taran@globalmigrationpolicy.org
www.globalmigrationpolicy.org