

## PARTNERPLAN

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Dear friends

“How good it is and how lovely to live together in unity:  
Love and faith come together; justice and peace join hands”

These words, paraphrasing Psalms, form part of the liturgy used by the Iona Community to facilitate daily worship. They may seem entirely out of tune in an era seemingly characterised by disunity, indifference, cynicism, injustice and war. Yet unity, and the coming together of love, faith, justice and peace do exist.

For me, that was much in evidence in Ethiopia, where I recently spent time as part of a delegation from the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), a body to which both the Church of Scotland and the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy belong. We were there at the invitation of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) to participate in the second Africa Europe Ecumenical Forum on Migration.

Although I have been to other African countries, I had not previously set foot in Ethiopia, a country known more for its ethnic conflict and famine than for being the fastest-growing economy in sub-Saharan Africa or for its key role in founding the African Union (the EU equivalent for Africa). Although currently too dangerous to travel to the north, where the earliest Christian churches are hewn out of the rock, there is much to see in Addis Ababa, which lies at the foot of the eucalyptus forests of Mount Entoto.



Not that there was much time for sight-seeing! A carefully thought-out programme saw us tackling themes such as climate change, externalisation, and bilateral agreements between European and African countries, and meeting formally with those developing labour migration policy for the African Union.

Mid-week, we were given the opportunity to see projects relating to migration which are being run by churches and by IOM<sup>1</sup> in Addis Ababa. I was able to visit two of these, both run by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission. We went first to Addis Ketema Sub-City, an extremely poor area, close to the city's short- and long-distance bus stations. Its General Secondary School provides an education to over 2,300 students and it is well-known that people-smugglers circulate in that area, looking to exploit the desperation

<sup>1</sup> The International Organisation on Migration, a UN agency

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of young people equipped with an education but with little prospect of local employment. In that context the “Safe From Irregular Migration” campaign is working to raise awareness among young people of the dangers of entrusting their lives to human traffickers.



Using poetry, song and drama, a small group captivated the young folk – and us – as we watched from the playground and the balconies of each floor of the school. The message was simple but powerful, the role - plays focusing on exploitation and death in a manner which no one watching could have failed to understand.



From there we moved to a project in another area where the church is working with women who have returned to Ethiopia, victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse at the hands of employers abroad. Lack of opportunity leads to many signing on with often unscrupulous agencies arranging “employment” in other countries. These are victims of what many would describe as “legal” (regular) rather than “illegal” (irregular) migration. Notwithstanding the proper permit to work or reside in another country, lack of safeguards and oversight leave these employees entirely vulnerable, often deprived of their travel documents or any means of contacting the outside world. If they do make it back, the trauma suffered by these victims is often compounded by stigmatization and by a deep sense of failure, the victim being aware that any money earned might well have been needed to support family at home. The project we visited therefore not only provides psycho-social support to these women but also seed funding and micro-loans to enable them to start their own businesses in Addis Ababa.



For that reason, our visit took place in “Mothers’ Restaurant”, a business owned and operated by four such women, one of whom courageously told us her own desperate story. The women, who began by baking “injira”, the local bread eaten with stew, now supply other businesses and cater for events such as weddings, as well as providing lunch for 150 people a day. It was humbling to

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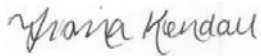
be received there, grass strewn on the wooden floor, to be welcomed with a typical Ethiopian coffee ceremony and eat the delicious food on offer.

Whilst both projects were a stark reminder of just how close to the margins some people are living, they were, in equal measure, inspiring examples of the direct impact that the church can have in turning lives around. The high-level themes we were discussing do not exist in a vacuum: migration is about individuals, not concepts, and it is important never to lose sight of that.

For Forum participants, this was an opportunity to deepen understanding as well as to strengthen relations between the AACC and CCME. We all acknowledge how important it is for those working on migration to be aware of different geographical and political perspectives and, indeed, to work together to advocate for change. For more information about that, see further using the links below.<sup>2</sup>

And so, I end as I began, convinced that, despite the odds, unity, love, faith, justice and peace do indeed exist...if only we use our energy and collective will to bring them about.

Every blessing



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<sup>2</sup> [2nd Africa-Europe Ecumenical Forum on Migration- Communique.pdf](#); [Welcome | Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe](#); [About us | AACC-CETA : All Africa Conference of Churches \(AACC\)](#)