



"Death boats" is proof of desperate situations refugees are in, says Bishop Angaelos of the UK Coptic Orthodox Church

Bishop Angaelos was speaking after European nations, with the exception of the UK, agreed to take in a number of refugees in each country.

Slovakia's prime minister has said that his country will challenge the EU decision to redistribute 120,000 asylum seekers throughout the continent.

Romania's president said while his country can cope with the extra people it has been asked to receive, he disagrees with the way the matter was decided.

Bishop Angaelos continued: "The Middle East crisis has been contained in that part of the world, and has, for some, become somewhat of a distant reality.

"If we have occasionally been moved by what we have seen or heard in reports, we have also had the relative comfort of being several steps removed from the situation.

"Now however, we are witnessing the movement of tens of thousands of desperate people fleeing that crisis and approaching the shores of Europe to seek refuge, and so the issue has become much more immediate and closer to home."

The Bishop said that he had visited refugee camps in Erbil, Iraq, and transit camps on the Greece-Macedonia border and witnessed "humanitarian tragedy from both sides."

He recalled a conversation with a young Syrian who said: "In Syria we are now used to quick deaths that come with bombs or shootings, but what we are experiencing in these journeys is a slow death."

"The fact that these refugees willingly travel, sometimes with their children, in what they themselves call 'death boats' is proof of the desperate situations they are fleeing, and their struggle should not be belittled."

He also stressed that: "Along these journeys, vulnerable refugees, many of whom are children and minors, become easy prey for trafficking and organised crime gangs that exploit this vulnerability in a way that shames our humanity."

