

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE SHAPE OF WOCATI. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

*from ETE/WCC in cooperation with president of WOCATI
(final version)*

The World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI) was inaugurated during the Yogyakarta consultation of in 16-19th June 1989 in which – funded and enabled via PTE and EMW – more than 20 Associations of theological education were represented.

The aim of WOCATI was

- to create a global network of theological institutions and their associations;
- to facilitate exchange and mutual learning between its member organizations
- to contribute both to contextualization and to globalization in theological education.
- To facilitate dialogue on issues like accreditation and mutual recognition of academy institutions of theological education
- To lobby for solidarity for theological education worldwide
(cf. The first report in Ministerial Formation 47 (1989), p. 32ff)

The WOCATI Congress according to its constitution until now met every four years, heavily dependent in its funds from contributions from the Lilly and Pew US Foundations and the administrative assistance of ATS and recently also from EMW. The WOCATI network until now has not established its own office and is not employing its own staff – thereby remaining dependent on the services of its officers and others (like ETE).

The functioning as well as the inner working mechanism of WOCATI need serious reconsideration to be viable for the future. The following suggestions are shared therefore with the hope that Thessaloniki conference will not be the funeral but the resurrection and revitalization of WOCATI to enter in a new period with strengthened perspectives:

Eight aspects might be considered in this line by the new WOCATI Executive Committee:

- 1) There is a legitimate and justified need for a *global and regular meeting of representatives from all regions and associations of theological schools*, but funds and infrastructure might not allow for a meeting each fourth year.

It is therefore proposed to consider a rhythm of meetings which would either harmonize the WCC plannings for assemblies with full WOCATI conferences or with other important international ecumenical events and processes like the Edinburgh 2010 process. A full assembly of WOCATI could either be envisaged to take place prior or after each main assembly of WCC in order to allow for better synergies between the networks of theological education and the networks of ecumenical work in WCC. It could also be envisaged to hold a next WOCATI assembly earlier – allowing for the recommended constitutional changes to come into effect - and plan

for it related to the Edinburgh 2010 process in South Africa in 2010, following a tentative invitation from the university of Pietermaritzburg. This could also underline the interrelatedness of the global ecumenical mission movement and ecumenical networks of ecumenical theological education which WOCATI and ETE have been part of from the very beginning.

2) There is a need for a regular, *smaller international working group on strategic issues and global solidarity in ecumenical theological education* which could meet every year.

In the light of recent processes around Global Christian Forum initiated by WCC it is therefore proposed to constitute a smaller International Working Group on Ecumenical Theological Education or an enlarged Executive Committee of WOCATI which would bring together

- at least five representatives from five major regions represented in WOCATI and in its Executive Committee
- two or three major representatives from major Evangelical and Pentecostal networks in theological education
- two or three representatives from major funding agencies promoting global solidarity in theological education
- ETE office/WCC

3) There is a serious need and legitimate concern to *strengthen the role and visibility of institutions of theological education in regional councils of churches (REOs)* as it is mainly within the regions that important processes can achieve something together.

It is therefore proposed to envisage a system by which more close cooperation is secured between regional ecumenical organizations (REOs), regional desks or consultancies of theological education (in further developing the concept which is applied by ETE already now on regional consultancies for theological education in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa) and forums of regional associations of theological education in the different continents (like existing already in Latin America) .

4) There are serious needs and legitimate concerns for a *common platform and journal for the ongoing international dialogue on ecumenical formation*, for sharing innovative developments, bibliographies and models in theological education both within WOCATI and beyond with some 2.500 theological institutions around the world. As the WCC sees itself unable to continue this on its own with the journal on Ministerial Formation which has served this purpose for some 30 years now one should explore a new scenario of a strategic partnership between WCC and outside partners like WOCATI (and/or other bodies) which could cooperate more intensely in order to prepare a new journal on ecumenical formation in theological education with two issues each (to be available in print and in electronic form) year to answer the needs for global exchange and information in this regard.

It is proposed therefore to nominate a project group of WOCATI executive to develop a common concept for a future common journal on ecumenical formation in

theological education between WOCATI and ETE/WCC (and also others) and to share this with WCC Publications.

5) There is a serious need to further develop and to bring together the *various websites of associations of theological schools and their member lists* in an attempt to strengthen the visibility and interconnectivity of ecumenical theological education in the web.

It is proposed therefore to positively consider the offer of WCC to host the future website on WOCATI, to engage in a project for a new layout of WOCATI website and to make available the lists of theological member institutions of the associations to both WCC website on partners in theological education (part of WCC website)= and the WOCATI website.

6) There is a need for a new system of *global sharing of the financial responsibilities of promoting ecumenical theological education for churches in the global South*, particularly with areas and churches with weaker infrastructures for theological education and rapid growth of churches and congregations. New partners and donors need to be found to contribute to the global sharing as we cannot rely any more on just a very few partners contributing.

The occasion of ETE celebrating its 50th anniversary in conjunction with the WOCATI consultation in Greece in June this year could be used to launch a campaign for a *global fund on ecumenical theological education*. The global fund for ecumenical theological education should be a visible expression of new commitment to promote and strengthen highly qualified programs and research in ecumenical theological education over against growing tendencies to denominationalism, fragmentation, provincialism and even fundamentalism sustained by ill-equipped theological education programs. A project group exploring the feasibility of proposals in this direction should be called together by the WOCATI congress.

7) There is a growing need for *innovative ways of electronic sharing of curricula, bibliographies and teaching models for teaching Ecumenics* in many colleges around the world which is vital for securing the continuation of the ecumenical movement and ecumenical formation of future church leadership.

It should be explored whether initiatives for building up an *Global Electronic Library on Ecumenics* could be supported by WOCATI and a group interested in joining the development of a consolidated project outline could be appointed.

8) There is a lack of *proper teaching resources for courses on the ecumenical movement, ecumenism and models of ecumenical and interfaith-work* in several regions.

It is proposed and explored with a number of associations of theological schools to produce an Asian Handbook on Teaching of Ecumenism and an Eastern European Handbook on Teaching Ecumenism within the next two years.

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