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Orlando stadium, Soweto 11.06.2016
Commemoration and prayer, 40 years after the Student Uprising in Soweto
16.06.1976

Dear sisters and brothers!

Mr Mayor of Johannesburg and all distinguished guests!

I greet you on behalf of the World Council of Churches. Churches in more than 120 countries are with you this morning. Some of them are represented here with me, as you have heard in the words of welcome. Thank you for welcoming us to be with you on this solemn moment, to let us remember, pray and cry with you.

We are all gathered here in the name of God who has created each one of us in the image of God; in the name of Jesus Christ, who through his cross and resurrection has brought reconciliation and hope to all of us; and in the name of the Holy Spirit who accompany us and bring new life and hope into our lives and our communities, as we see it today.

We have walked together to Orlando stadium today. The walk started 40 years ago. The walk was not finished then, they never arrived here. The walk was started by young women and men, boys and girls, who had a vision for another South Africa, with justice and equal rights for all, rights to proper education, to dignity, to a future together.

This time we arrived well, and we arrived here together. Together with you who represent those who started the walk then - and you who represent those who were then ordered to stop the walk.

Together we are with you from people and churches around the world that celebrated the new South Africa in 1994. The leadership of the late Nelson Mandela and the constitution you got became a sign of hope for this land and for the whole world. Freedom from oppression is possible, freedom from a violent state abusing power is possible, freedom to tell the truth and to live in reconciliation is possible.

Together we are with you today acknowledging that the walk towards the South Africa you hoped for and still pray for is not finished.

Together we see today a new sign of hope. We see today that there are new ways forward towards what you all can share as a land of freedom, trust, justice and peace. The process of reconciliation continues and has to continue - and we see today that it can continue and include many more. God who created all of us can create new possibilities for all of us, through sharing the truth about what was wrong and correct the damages. The healing power of God is still with you today.

The world got a wake up call June 16, 1976. So did many churches around the world. The violence that stopped the walk that day - and particularly the wounds and even deaths of so many children - made the world understand that something was really wrong in this country. And the world started to see that the young people of South Africa said it is enough.

For those of you who were injured on your body and your soul it was a day of loss and a day of pain, and again we want to be with you in our prayers and sympathy.

For those of you who have carried the burden of guilt and the wounds of being asked to do what you know is wrong, we are with you in our prayers as you are on your way of repentance together - towards another day of a reconciled South Africa.

You are all vulnerable and brave.
God is with you on this route.

The World Council of Churches started to work even more intensively and intentionally together with the South African Council in the Program to Combat Racism. We visited, we supported, we prayed, we sang your songs, we argued, we protested, we called the mighty states in the world to listen to the call for justice from South Africa, we asked them to stop making business with your apartheid government. Mandela's word to us after he was released was that without the churches around the world he could not have been a free man. These words continue to inspire us today, and particularly on a day like this, when the churches here in South Africa commit themselves to a renewed and continued walk for freedom for the many, freedom from the burden of guilt, and broken relations.

The South Africa Council of Churches is becoming revitalized by sharing this vision and action of reconciliation as hard work, with a potential blessing to all involved.

This is a moment of finding new expressions of our Christian unity. One of them is that the Dutch Reformed Church again becomes a member of the WCC next week. You show us a sign of transformation. And hope.

I am here together with representatives of churches in many countries where the walk for justice and peace are going on or even sometimes are forced to make stops. From Palestine, Colombia, Burundi, Sudan, South Sudan, DRC, Nigeria, We are here at a moment of truth for your country, and for many other countries in the world. We see new upheavals of racism in other continents like in the USA, actions of exclusion and ignorance of the need of the other in Europe. We see that many countries suffering from corruption, internal violence and growing economic divides.

Dear sisters and brothers: you have many rights as citizens of South Africa. As human beings we share a very basic right today, given through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ: We have the right to hope. We have the right to hope that sin, violence, death, destruction, separation, exclusion, discrimination and abuse of power shall not have the last word. We have the right to hope that something new is possible. Not only in 1976 or in 1994 you have this right to hope. You have this right today.

Therefore: You know, you dare, you can. Together: We know. We dare. We can.

As Christians our life is a pilgrimage of justice and peace with one another and God in our common home, in this world. We search for transformation of ourselves and of

the world in which we live. We pray the kingdom of God to come, with its justice, peace and joy.

Today we walked for the South Africa we pray for. You will continue to do so.

May God be with you, every day, every step.