

Motorised Mobility, Climate Change and Globalisation

Memorandum of the Project Team to the World Council of Churches

For several years the WCC has conducted a study project on the future of motorised mobility. What are present trends and developments? How does the rapid expansion of motorised mobility on the road and in the air affect societies in different parts of the world? How can this expansion be kept within sustainable limits?

A study paper listing the main issues was shared with the member churches. A good number of responses were received. In some countries churches or church groups have already addressed the issue and even developed proposals for more responsible approaches to motorised mobility. In other countries the study paper served as catalyst for new initiatives. Time has come to reflect on the lessons learned in this process. To start this reflection, a consultation was convened in May 2000 at the Evangelical Academy Bad Boll. The papers, together with a summary of the discussion, will soon be available.

The present paper is an attempt to draw attention to some implications of the study project and to reflect on its relevance for the overall witness of the World Council of Churches in the coming years. On the whole, the implications of motorised mobility for the future tend to be overlooked. In this memo, we should like to alert the WCC to the significance of the theme and to the consequences for other study themes and issues which are today on its agenda.

A more general report on the findings of the study project is in preparation.

Summary

1. The present expansion of motorised mobility is clearly *not* sustainable; nevertheless transport of persons and goods on the road and in the air continues to grow by leaps and bounds.
2. The climate change negotiations are in an impasse. At the Conference in The Hague no agreement was reached even on the insufficient targets of the Kyoto Protocol; and this despite the fact that the scientific community has become much more affirmative in its predictions. An important opportunity has been lost. We must now reckon with increasing climate anomalies and therefore also with increasing numbers of victims. The churches need to re-direct their witness in the face of this new situation.
3. Why does the industrialised world react so slowly? Motorised Mobility has become part of our life style. Changing location and consuming goods from distant countries have become accepted patterns of life. At the same time huge economic interests are at stake. Realistic reflection on climate change and consequently on motorised mobility inevitably leads to the quest of an alternative society.
4. The present project of global trade points in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of recognising the need for scales and re-valuing the significance of regional and local communities, it is based on the assumption of constant economic growth. Motorised mobility is an essential factor in the process of globalisation.
5. The churches are called to resist. If their resistance is to be credible, an overall alternative needs to be developed. The present WCC programme priorities provide a solid basis for such a vision. Decisive is the recognition of the intimate relationship between justice and ecological degradation. There is the constant temptation to lose sight of the need to pursue both concerns at the same time. In fact, they are ultimately one and the same.
6. In face of the process of globalisation the churches need to witness to governments and other 'powers' in society. At the same time they need to side with NGO's and seek to strengthen the coherence of their resistance. Ultimately, the witness of each individual person is called for. Reducing energy consumption, even if it does at first sight 'not seem to make any difference', is an act of love and concern for the victims.
7. The project of a 'Decade to overcome violence' can make a powerful contribution to the resistance movement. Both climate change and motorised mobility show to what extent today's project of society is prepared to accept violence and to ignore its victims. In responding to, and seeking to prevent, forms of violence, the need will arise to reflect on an order of society which does not further increase injustice and consequently violence. The Decade to Overcome Violence must include a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly in motorised mobility.

1. The WCC study project on 'Motorised Mobility'

The need for a study project on motorised mobility arose in the context of the WCC climate change activities.

The WCC is engaged in the issue of climate change since the early 1990's. Responding to initiatives taken by several member churches in the 1980s (cf. Churches on Climate Change, Berne 1992), it became active in various ways. It sought to understand the findings of the

scientific community and to interpret it in a Christian perspective. It followed closely, and sought to influence, the negotiations on climate change in the framework of the United Nations, and also initiated a number of regional programmes on climate change in various parts of the world. In 1994 the WCC Central Committee issued a strong statement on need for immediate action by the nations of the world, in particular the industrialised world.

Motorised Mobility is one of the main contributors, in most industrialised countries *the* main contributor, to the emissions of greenhouse gases. ***Ultimately no adequate response to the issue of climate change is possible without reducing the emissions caused by motorised mobility.*** But how can this be achieved? Motorised mobility on the road and in the air is rapidly expanding, and all signs seem to indicate that it will continue to expand also in the coming decades. There is the hope that emissions can be substantially reduced by new technological devices. It is unlikely, however, that the gains will suffice to parry the increase of emissions caused by the increase of mobility.

A few figures to illustrate likely developments:

- If present trends continue, the number of cars worldwide will have increased by more than four by 2030 – from 500 million in 1990 to over two billion, in 2030.
- The IPCC report on ‘Aviation and the Global Atmosphere’ expects the number of aviation passenger kilometers (Pkm) to increase by 5% per year until 2015. If present trends continue, Pkm could easily increase from 7800 billion today to 50000 billion by 2050. The IPCC report also makes clear that air traffic has, per Pkm, a much higher impact on the atmosphere than any other means of transport.

Thus, we find ourselves in a highly contradictory situation. On the one hand, we know that the present developments of motorised mobility are not sustainable; on the other we allow present trends to continue unrestrained.

2. The Nature of UN Climate Change Negotiations has changed

In 1990 when the Second World Climate Conference was held in Geneva, delegates confidently challenged the nations to reduce their CO₂ emissions every year by 1% up to the year 2000. Some even spoke of a 20% reduction. In 1992, when in Rio de Janeiro an impressive number of governments signed the Convention on Climate Change expectations had already become more modest – the industrialised nations promised to stabilise their emissions by the year 2000 at 1990 levels. Soon it became clear that most countries were unable or unwilling to fulfil this promise. Most governments announced, on the contrary, considerable increases.

Nevertheless negotiations on possible reductions continued. An agreement was reached at the Conference of Parties in Kyoto (1997). The industrialised nations finally accepted the obligation to reduce their emissions by 2010 by 7 to 8% compared to 1990 levels. But in the meantime ideas had entered the negotiating process which tend to void the substance of this agreement. The industrialised countries succeeded in introducing the notion of ‘flexible

mechanisms', i.e. ways to fulfil the agreed obligation by economic action outside their own country. Instead of taking action at home they were now allowed to buy "certified emission rights" from countries which do not emit as much as they are allowed to emit; they could support 'clean' projects in the countries of the South; at the recent UN Conference in The Hague the discussion concentrated on increasing carbon sinks, i.e. planting forests both inside and outside the country. Though the percentage of reductions which can be fulfilled by action outside the country has not yet finally been fixed, the principle has been accepted. The actual reductions within industrialised countries are therefore likely to be minimal.

Meanwhile the scientific community has reached new and alarming conclusions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the scientific conscience of the negotiating process, will soon publish its third report. Recent research has shown that previous estimates of global warming were too conservative. The increase of global mean temperature could well reach 6 degrees by 2100 instead of 3 degrees as so far assumed. The scientific community emphasises the need for rapid and consistent action, no longer simply as a measure of 'precaution', but as an imperative. Generally, scientists call for a reduction of CO₂ emissions of 60% by 2050.

The Conference at the The Hague has shown that the nations are not prepared to take even the first modest step towards this goal. Even if a compromise should be reached at the additional session in Bonn at the end of May 2001, no real progress will have been achieved. Instead of engaging in longterm planning towards the ultimate goal, energy is lost in technical debates on loopholes permitting to avoid the fulfilment of even the first commitments. The targets of the Kyoto Protocol are at best a beginning – if the next stages are to be reached, reflection and action would need to begin now. In addition, as long as the industrialised world does not engage in serious action, developing countries cannot be expected to adopt measures for the stabilisation of their emissions.

The conclusion is clear. If the negotiations will not be re-directed and re-focussed, current measures will be insufficient to meet the threat of climate change; and since it is highly improbable that the negotiations will be re-conceived and re-focussed, we shall have to count with more and more climate anomalies. Since the industrialised nations refuse to get prepared for drastic reductions of CO₂ emissions, they will have to face the consequences. Climate change will affect all societies. It will cause more and more victims, people not only perishing in storms, floods and avalanches but also experiencing psychological damage in the face of a more and more insecure future. But climate change will hit most seriously the countries of the South, in particular island states and low lying coastal zones. ***The conscious refusal of the industrialised world to engage in adequate action constitutes therefore an act of conscious injustice and violence.***

Confronted with this impasse the churches have a double duty. They need to denounce vigorously the irresponsibility of the industrialised world and they need to prepare themselves for a world with more and more climate victims. As long as the irresponsibility of the industrialised world continues, there is no escape from the impact of climate change. It is necessary to develop accordingly a new sense of solidarity.

Recently, various Christian relief and development agencies have decided to collaborate more closely and concentrate on certain crucial themes and issues. Social Justice and Aids were chosen as the foci of their common action. In order to make this common witness even more

realistic and credible, the environmental dimension needs to be added. Justice has both a social *and* an environmental face.

3. What are the reasons for the slow response of the industrialised world?

How is the attitude of the industrialised world to be explained? Why is it incapable to accept solutions and adopt measures which commonsense seems to call for? Why does motorised mobility, against better knowledge, expand further and further? Why is change so difficult?

Mobility, it is often said, has become part of modern life. Being mobile has always been the characteristic of human beings. Humans are not plants, they have the capacity to move from place to place. Without some degree of mobility humans cannot achieve fulfilment. But the capacity of moving has today expanded. Modern people find fulfilment in moving ever more quickly over greater and greater distances. Means of transport, particularly the car and the airplane, exercise an enormous psychological attraction. There is therefore a guts reaction against any suggestion to reduce their use. Motorised mobility has become part of modern identity. It is a life style.

But other reasons are equally important. Motorised mobility is part of the fabric of society. It is connected with vital economic interests. Large segments of society depend economically on traffic and transport: automobile industry, oil companies, road constructors, transport companies etc. Developing more responsible approaches to motorised mobility would therefore require farreaching changes in society. No less than a new vision of society is called for.

It is interesting to note that the WCC study on climate change came to exactly the same conclusion. In a first period the churches simply appealed to governments to take appropriate action. They were, of course, aware of the fact that governments depended on the goodwill of the people. The WCC addressed therefore a petition to the governments of the industrialised world in which signatories not only called for action but explicitly promised their personal and political support. But increasingly, the WCC climate change team realised that more was at stake. Targets of reduction could not be realised without a change of patterns of society. In 1996 a consultation issued a report on '*Climate Change and the Quest for Sustainable Societies*'. Two chapter titles indicate the main perspectives of this text: '*sustainable scales*' and '*for a turn to the local*'.

The issues of climate change and motorised mobility are closely connected. In both areas realistic reflection leads to the 'quest' for an alternative society which respects 'limits to economic growth' and gives priority to the need for 'viable local communities'.

4. The Critique of Globalisation

For some time churches and church organisations have been engaged in the analysis of the process of globalisation. In 1998 the WCC issued a statement drawing attention to the destructive effects of the process of globalisation. A clear distinction is made. The term 'globalisation' can simply point to the growing connections between the peoples of the world; in this sense it is a historical development which needs to be accepted. The term stands, however, also for a particular economic vision – a worldwide society which produces, trades

and consumes without being limited by national boundaries. The churches' critique concerns the second use of the term. It appears more and more clearly that the pursuit of the ideological

vision of illimited worldwide trade requires an enormous price – it causes both social injustice and ecological destruction.

The ideology of the worldwide free market is clearly incompatible with the vision of sustainable societies arising from the reflections on both climate change and motorised mobility. The ideology of worldwide trade pursues opposite goals. It is committed to constant economic growth while the quest for sustainable societies advocates the recognition of scales. It seeks to overcome boundaries and to treat humankind as one encompassing entity. It is based on limitless mobility, while the quest for sustainable societies seeks to maintain and to build up human community at the local and regional levels. The two visions are bound to be in conflict.

The contemporary expansion of motorised mobility is one of the foundations of the globalisation process. Mobility has always been an essential factor for the development of trade. New means of transport have as a rule led to an increase of trade. Today's globalised economy depends to a large extent on motorised mobility. To function efficiently, it requires, in addition to the new media of communication, means of transport by which geographical distances can be overcome. Roads and airports are an indispensable ingredient of globalisation. ***The critique of globalisation inevitably includes the critique of motorised mobility and vice-versa: a realistic assessment of the negative impact of motorised mobility on society and the environment inevitably leads to a critique of the global economic system.***

5. Promoting the alternative vision

The ideology of worldwide trade is today the dominating theory. The goal of sustainability is being studied and discussed. But when it comes to economic and political action it is treated as a secondary concern. Compatibility between economy and ecology is almost axiomatic. Ecological demands have, therefore, only a chance of being taken seriously if they can be fulfilled within the framework of the dominating theory. It is characteristic for the present ideological consensus that the negotiations on climate change gave rise to a debate on trading devices. Apparently, no other incentive for ecological measures can be imagined than economic interest.

Resistance against the system must be based on an overall alternative vision of society. Clearly, Christian witness needs to address particular forms and expressions of injustice and violence against God's creation. The churches need to go beyond generalities and make their voice heard in particular protests. But it is not enough to oppose particular deviations. The protest against the present destructive course needs to be rooted in an alternative vision. If not, the protest risks remaining at the surface, dealing with phenomena of injustice rather than with its causes.

In the 1980s the WCC has sought to express its commitment to an alternative society by the triad – justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The fundamental idea of this formula is that Christian witness needs to be borne in three direction *at the same time*. Christians need to

engage in the struggle for justice and peace and at the same time respect the gift of creation. The formula has been abandoned but its substance has been maintained. The three emphases also appear in the most recent formulations of WCC programme priorities. Among the priorities mentioned by the Central Committee at its meeting in August/September 1999 the following three provide a comparable framework:

Common Witness and Service amidst Globalisation
Ministry of Reconciliation
Caring for life

As the Council engages in the critique of the process of globalisation, it constantly needs to point to perspectives of both social justice and God's gift of life.

The relationship and interaction between the struggle for justice and ecological responsibility has at all times been difficult to define and maintain. The temptation is great to pursue these goals separately. Easily, in pursuing social justice, the concern for the environment can be lost sight of. In fact, they are ultimately one and must not be separated from one another. ***The struggle for human rights and social justice without the concern for the environment is incomplete. Ecological activities without concern for social justice lack fullness.***

Both themes – climate change and motorised mobility – provide striking illustrations for the intimate relationship of the struggle for justice and the care for creation. Climate change and motorised mobility constitute a threat to the integrity of the environment. But they are *at the same time* new forms of injustice.

- The emissions causing the greenhouse effect are not simply the common responsibility of the human race. The primary responsibility lies with the rich countries of the industrialised world. Their life style amounts to a new form of exploitation. By pursuing their 'way of life' they bring suffering on the rest of humanity. Climate is an environmental issue but it is at the same time a pressing social issue. It needs to be addressed in the name of both justice and respect for God's creation.
- Motorised mobility has originated in the industrialised world and has been exported to other parts of the world only in recent times. Clearly, the patterns of traffic and transport prevailing in the industrialised world cannot be universalised without causing the disruption of the environmental balance. The present expansion is not sustainable, but because it cannot be universalised it also represents an intolerable injustice.

Both climate change and motorised mobility illustrate the urgent need for alternative approaches to the ordering of society – incorporating both the respect of justice and the care for creation.

6. Committed to resistance

Can the alternative vision of society be realised? Given the dynamics of present developments, this seems unlikely. For some time to come, the present ideology will continue to determine economic and political decisions. The number of victims will increase. The non-

sustainability of the present course will become more and more apparent. But a change of direction is unlikely to take place in the foreseeable future.

Resistance is, however, growing. More and more people begin to realise the fallacies inherent in the present situation. More and more people are no longer prepared to accept certain consequences of the process – social injustice, loss of quality of life, destruction of cultural values, ecological damage. A movement of resistance begins to take shape. So far the conferences of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have served as the rallying target. The most publicised event were the street manifestations in Seattle 1999. The protest movement has continued since. It lacks power, and it is, above all, composed of very diverse interests and movements. It is likely to fade out if it does not succeed in developing a *common* vision for the future.

The WCC has to witness, of course, to the authorities both in the economic and the political world. But it needs, at the same time, all those calling and struggling for alternatives. The experience made through the involvement in the issues of climate change and motorised mobility is interesting in this respect. In both areas a host of non-governmental organisations and movements are active. The involvement of the WCC provided an opportunity for new relationships and alliances. The WCC can possibly serve as a rallying point in the diverse world of non-governmental organisations – giving, through an overall vision, coherence to the resistance. Ultimately, the witness of each individual person is called for. Reducing energy consumption, even it does at first sight ‘not seem to make any difference, is an act of love and concern for the victims.

The issues of climate change and motorised mobility are particularly intractable. They require patient longterm resistance.

7. Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)

One of the major decisions of the Harare Assembly was the call for a ‘Programme to overcome Violence’. In 1999 the Central Committee decided to launch a ‘Decade to Overcome Violence’ (2001-2010). Its declared aim is to work ‘towards a culture of peace’. In the Working document adopted by the Central Committee violence is referred to as ‘not only physical’, but ‘also emotional, intellectual, structural’. The decade will focus throughout ‘on the response to and the prevention of’ all kinds of forms of violence. This overall task is illustrated by a long list of such forms of violence. Priority is given to forms of social violence, though at the end of the list there is also a reference to ‘violence against creation’.

The decade to overcome violence is likely to lead to similar discoveries as the study projects on climate change and motorised mobility. The question will be what kind of society provides the best possible condition for containing violence. Violence cannot be overcome. It is part of all societies, it is even inherent in creation. But ways can be found to reduce its degree. Clearly, alternatives have to be found to the present course of society. Today’s increase of violence has its roots in the ideological concept of the worldwide market. It is an expression of the process of globalisation.

A non-sustainable society is by definition violent because it is consciously counting with victims. The struggle for sustainable societies will, therefore, at the same time create the best

possible conditions for 'a culture of peace'. It is important to denounce 'violence against creation' but more is at stake. 'Respect for creation' is the indispensable *precondition* for a meaningful struggle against violence.

The themes of climate change and motorised mobility provide striking illustration of the violence inherent in the present course of history.

- By ignoring the warnings of the scientific community the industrialised world consciously decides to accept the destruction which is likely to result from climate change – people dying in storms and floods, people losing their habitat, people being exposed to new risks and losing confidence in the future. The survival of the materially strong prevails over the values of solidarity.
- Technological advance is always connected with a high degree of violence. Innovation always calls into question people's inherited ways of life. Motorised mobility causes a high degree of violence. Every year 500.000 people die in accidents and an even higher number of persons suffer injuries. Many among them are pedestrians, old people, women and children. If in a war 500.000 civilians perish, everybody would speak of genocide. But today's society accepts the death toll on the roads as a deplorable, but inevitable side effect of progress. In addition, mobility causes enormous damage to nature – hecatombs of animals, felling of trees, sealing of soil etc.

It is essential to include these aspects in the pursuit of the 'Decade to overcome violence'.