

## **WCC Global Platform for Theological Reflection and Analysis**

### **Concept Paper**

The Global Platform for Theological Reflection and Analysis is an exciting new experiment within the WCC's programmes 2007-2013. The Global Platform is an instrument for integrating theological reflection and analysis with economic, political and social analysis around commonly identified issues of concern for the ecumenical movement. The Global Platform will provide the opportunity for dialogue and for a sharing of diverse perspectives rather than aim to arrive at convergence texts. There is a commitment to make this process dynamic, consultative and participatory.

### Background

The WCC has always recognised theological reflection as essential to its nature as a fellowship of churches. Over the years, WCC assemblies have called for an emphasis on theological reflection in general and around specific areas of concern. The Global Platform builds on work that has been done and continues in many areas within the WCC. However, we also recognise that theological reflection may easily be marginalised in the quest for practical responses to issues or be confined to work related to our understanding of the nature and the mission of the church.

As we affirm diversity in the unity we seek, we need both to understand our differences and to hold one another accountable. We need to explore the ways in which we can resist fragmentation and develop coherence.

The WCC believes that the time has come for a new initiative in theological reflection and analysis which takes an issue of concern in the ecumenical movement as its starting point.

### The role of the WCC

The WCC, as a world-wide instrument of Christian unity, is mandated to facilitate common theological understanding on certain crucial issues that concern life, work and relationships among churches, Christian world communions, ecumenical partners and specialised ministries working in different fields. In its programme plans the WCC describes its role within the ecumenical movement as providing leadership, convening, coordinating, building ownership, communicating, engaging leaders and enabling witness.

### The purpose of the Global Platform

The purpose of the Global Platform is to create a space for theological reflection and analysis. It will offer a process for analysing and interpreting the implications of some carefully selected crucial challenges to the Christian witness of the churches, their ministries and the ecumenical movement. The aim is not to produce an agreed or commonly acceptable theological text around each issue but to help those most directly involved to be enabled in their own theological work by sharing theological resources and methodologies from beyond their own tradition or context.

The Global Platform should be understood as an *instrument* rather than a *programme*. It is an experiment from which we can learn how to do theology in the context of such challenges as well as how to develop specific theological resources around an issue. The outcomes of the platforms are expected to inform the deliberations and work of the churches, the WCC and ecumenical partners within their own contexts.

#### The functioning of the Global Platform

The starting point for each Global Platform will be a commonly identified issue of concern for the various actors in the ecumenical movement. This will be brought into dialogue with the theological resources of Bible, Christian traditions and academic theological disciplines. It will be an opportunity for discussion and for a sharing of diverse perspectives around issues that may be theologically and ethically ambiguous, controversial or even divisive.

It will provide a space to analyse and interpret the implications of some major challenges to the Christian witness of the churches, their ministries and the ecumenical movement in the world today. The aim is not to produce an agreed or commonly acceptable theological text around the issue but to help those most directly involved to be enabled in their own theological work by sharing theological resources and methodologies from beyond their own tradition or context. Theological reflection and analysis on the one hand, and ecumenical partnership on the other, constitute its two primary poles of interest.

The Global Platform process for each issue will begin by identifying those individuals, institutions and organisations which have done or are currently doing relevant theological reflection and analysis. The issue of each Global Platform will be posted on the WCC website and input solicited. It is hoped that people will create opportunities for contextual reflection around the chosen theme. Seminaries and theological institutions will be encouraged to pick up the issue and provide input into the process.

The meeting of the Global Platform will undertake its reflection and analysis using the work already done across the ecumenical movement as well as the knowledge of those who attend the meeting. The outcome of each meeting will be an account of the whole process together with conceptual and methodological texts. The collection of texts may present very different styles and content of theological reflection so as to enable greater understanding of conflictual points of view on issues and to encourage people to do their own contextual theological reflection.

Part of the process of each meeting will be plan how to enable and encourage the use of the outcomes of the meeting across the ecumenical movement. The work of each Global Platform will be followed up in the wider ecumenical movement and, where appropriate, in the WCC's programmes.

The Global Platform will involve a wide range of church leaders, theologians, ethicists, social scientists and activists from many parts of the world. A special effort will be made to ensure youth participation in and contribution to the process. The meeting of each Global Platform will be composed of those who can contribute to the reflection and analysis on the identified issue from their own knowledge, experience

and analytical skills.. They will be drawn from the life of the churches, specialised ministries, agencies, activist networks, academic theology and social and political science. Apart from the Core Group, the meeting will not have a permanent membership

Depending on the chosen issue, specific WCC programmes and projects will share in the process.

### The role of the Core Group

A Core Group drawn from a variety of contexts has been appointed to work with WCC staff on developing the concept of the Global Platform and planning its implementation. The Core Group has the responsibility of considering criteria for the choice of the issue for each year and then proposing a specific theme. Based on the experience of the meeting of the 2007 Global Platform, the choice of themes for 2008 and 2009 will be made in November 2007.

The Core Group will advise on appropriate methodologies and processes, help to identify where relevant theological reflection is being done or might be encouraged and propose participants for each meeting.

The Core Group will monitor the development of the concept and the practice of the Global Platform. They will meet at the end of each Global Platform meeting to make proposals for the next on the basis of their evaluation.

### Timetable

The first period of the work of the Global Platform is 2007-2009. One Global Platform will be held each year. At the end of the period there will be a formal evaluation of the concept and the implementation of the Global Platform. This evaluation will allow the governing bodies to take appropriate decisions on the way the platform may continue in the future.