Concept Note

Regional Ecumenical Workshop on Advocacy for Peace

Background

Pursuits of justice and peace are essential parts of the life and calling of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since its founding in 1948. The Decade to Overcome Violence\(^1\) (2001-2010) addressed the need to replace violence with a culture of peace, and the WCC’s 9th Assembly (Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 2006) decided that, "the conclusion of the Decade be marked by an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC),"\(^2\) which took place in Kingston, Jamaica in May 2011. The IEPC resulted in an “Ecumenical Call for Just Peace” and gave direction to the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea under the theme “God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace”. The Assembly also reiterated the key role of WCC as convener and facilitator for global ecumenical peace and advocacy work, and the WCC member churches further committed themselves to mobilize the gifts within the fellowship to raise their collective voice for peace across many countries.

The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) has been committed to promote peace in the region, from reconciliation in war-torn Lebanon to the promotion of dialogue between the Palestinians and the world. It has initiated discussions within Arab society to engage both Muslims and Christians to build a just and peaceful civil society.

In the context of the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace\(^3\), in December 2014 the WCC organized a global consultation and workshop on **Peacebuilding and Advocacy for Just Peace**. This event served as a base for an intentional process to equip the ecumenical movement to play a meaningful and effective role in advocacy for just peace. Two major outcomes emerged from this gathering:

- The launching of the **Ecumenical Peace Advocacy Network** (EPAN), with the purpose of increasing church capacity and engagement for advocacy together in international networks; and
- The establishment of a **Framework for Advocacy for Peace**, which intends to provide churches, specialized ministries, ecumenical organizations, church-related organizations and their partners with a comprehensive outline to effective and coordinated advocacy for peace.


The WCC, in cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), is planning to hold a regional workshop in 2016 to test out the framework for advocacy for peace and to assist ecumenical organizations to produce an effective and meaningful advocacy plan for peace in the region.

Rationale

The Middle East is one of most troubled regions in the world due to disputes and armed conflicts. Many countries and actors are involved in these disputes and conflicts, thus creating an internationalized conflict. There is also a complex series of issues that require an international response, ranging from refugee movements, occupation of territories, nuclear and chemical weapons issues, minorities’ rights (religious/ethnic/linguistic), to incitement to atrocity crimes, extremism and radicalism, making the region a rich context to address advocacy at different levels and on a diverse range of issues.

Church leaders and faith-based organizations play an important role in peacebuilding and are engaged in peace initiatives in the Middle East, mostly at grassroots level. However, not all actions are properly coordinated and articulated with global advocacy initiatives. Therefore, there is a need to intentionally work together to better understand the complexity of the conflict in the region and the different dimensions of advocacy required to inform and support ecumenical actions toward just peace and prevention of atrocity crimes in the Middle East.

Promoting peace and prevention of atrocity crimes require different approaches, from preventive to proactive actions oriented to bringing about positive and lasting change in the structures, systems, and policies that perpetuate conflict and injustice. It is important that church leaders and faith-based organizations promote tolerance and respect for diversity, interfaith dialogue and cooperation with the purpose of preventing extremism and challenging fundamentalist rhetoric. In particular, religious leaders play a paramount role in preventing and curbing incitement to national, racial and religious hatred that can be predominant in societies were religious tensions and violence are prevalent.

The regional workshop is an opportunity to embrace thematic issues, strategies, tactics, and tools to help church leaders and faith-based organizations to design a comprehensive plan to support advocacy actions toward just peace and prevention of atrocity crimes in the Middle East. It should consider coordinated actions at national, regional, and global levels, while promoting the interconnectivity between them.

Objectives and Outcomes

1. To strengthen ecumenical advocacy for peace by bringing key stakeholders together to share existing initiatives and best practices on advocacy for peace in the Middle East
2. To promote the prevention of atrocity crimes, and of incitement to atrocity crimes in particular, in the Middle East Region
3. To produce a joint advocacy plan for peacebuilding in the Middle East considering national, regional and international factors contributing to the conflict
4. To establish a support group to monitor and to advise on the implementation of the advocacy plan

Issues

Issues for the advocacy plan is expected to be identified in a consultative way during the workshop. However, considering the current and complex situation in the region and the internationalization of the problem, it is suggested to focus on the following major issues:

- Refugee situation (including IDP, stateless peoples, etc.)
- Occupation of territories
- Extremism/radicalism (including minorities’ rights)
- Incitement to atrocity crimes

Crosscutting issues to be considered in the preparation of strategies include:

- Inter-religion cooperation
- Women engagement in peacebuilding
- Youth engagement in peacebuilding

Assumptions

- The workshop is part of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to the Middle East (2016).
- Church leaders and faith-based organizations are willing to work together to promote lasting peace in the Middle East.
- Advocacy strategies and tools are built from existing experiences and initiatives carried out by WCC member churches, ecumenical organizations, ACT members, secular and inter-religious organizations working on advocacy for peace.
- WCC initiatives in the region (e.g. Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum, Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), MENA Forum on De-radicalization) are considered in the workshop program.
- The advocacy plan embraces actions at grassroots, national, regional and global level.
- Advocacy strategies and tools are accompanied by tools for measurement and monitoring of impact assessment.
- The workshop creates synergies with the WCC Consultation on Stateless People in Beirut, the Regional Forum on Legalization and the ACT Alliance Development Effectiveness training and the OGPRToP Global Forum with Religious Leaders.

Methodology

- The WCC UN Office in New York and the MECC office in Lebanon will take the lead for the organization of the workshop.
A 3-day workshop will be held to test out the framework for advocacy for peace and to produce proper strategies for advocacy.

The outcomes from the “The UN Regional Religious Leaders Meeting on Prevention of Atrocities” will feed into the ecumenical workshop for advocacy for peace.

The outcomes of the ecumenical workshop will improve the “Framework for Advocacy for Peace.”

An external facilitator with extensive experience in peace advocacy strategies and tools will be hired to facilitate the workshop. She/he will work on the methodology to be used during the workshop, in close consultation with the WCC UN Office.

An advocacy plan is expected to be produced by the end of the workshop, and a support group to be identified to monitor the implementation of the plan, as well as to provide technical and thematic assistance to the participating organizations.

Participants

The workshop will have the participation of approx. 35 people, representing different organizations from the region (Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan) and from global organizations.

- ACT Regional Forum (2)
- ACT Palestine Forum (2)
- ACT Staff (2)
- ACT members working on peace related initiatives in the region (4)
- MECC (3)
- WCC member churches from the region (11)
- WCC Staff (5)
- WCC Specialized Ministries engaged in advocacy for peace (4)
- WCC CCIA members (2)

- Guest speakers and special guests (UN and CSO) will be invited for specific sessions during the workshop.

Venue

Beirut, Lebanon

Dates

March 29-31, 2016

New York, April 2015
Updated: November 2015