Freedom of Religion and Belief
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Public Statements and Issues
of the
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs

Edited by
Semegnish Asfaw and Mutua Kobia
Foreword

For centuries, communities around the world have struggled for religious liberty, that is, for the ability to express and live freely their faith – or lack thereof – without fear of being persecuted or even killed. The lack of religious liberty has been – and sadly still is – the reason for countless conflicts in some parts of the world. The codification of human rights in international instruments that marked the 20th century has been a turning point in the history of humankind, for it affirmed that human rights were inherent to all individuals simply by virtue of being human. Religious liberty was not left out during the process: article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is one of the many international provisions which upholds and established freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) as a fundamental human right:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his [her] choice.

In ecumenical circles, freedom of religion or belief has been at the heart of preoccupations of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since its creation in 1946. Indeed, the CCIA was founded two years prior to the WCC in order to contribute in the drafting and codification of modern-day human rights. The first CCIA Director, Frederick O. Nolde, was particularly instrumental in the wording of article 18 of UDHR, which affirms the inherent right of any individual to retain, adopt, change or renounce a religion without fearing persecution.

As we mark this year the 70th anniversary of the CCIA, this document is an attempt to compile major statements, messages, letters, background reports and other expressions of public issues on the topic of on freedom of religion or belief.

Semegnish Asfaw

Programme Executive
World Council of Churches
Preface

Since establishment of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) in 1946, the CCIA has continued to give special attention to and particularly to promote the full implementation of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

In the early 20th century, the ecumenical movement was formed to break down barriers among churches and between people and to unite people everywhere in one human family in justice and peace. The World Council of Churches (WCC), a chief instrument of that movement, was established in 1948 to carry on that work and, through the CCIA, was influential in the formulation of human rights declarations by the newly established United Nations. That work has continued and also encompasses inter-religious dialogue, religious tolerance, religious liberty and religious coexistence, all vital to the realization of peace.

This publication is a compilation of public issues and statements on, and related to, freedom of religion or belief by the CCIA since 1968. It incorporates matters related to freedom of thought and conscience and is aligned with Article 181 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Public statements by the WCC are a form of action that is taken seriously and issued only when considered necessary and likely to be effective in addressing critical public situations in a timely and appropriate manner. A public statement “provides assessments of national and international events and political trends, recommends actions to member churches, communicates pastoral concern, expresses ecumenical solidarity, and makes representations and issues appeals to particular governments and inter-governmental bodies.” It should be noted, however, that issuing public statements is not the WCC’s entire role in international affairs, and they are not statements on the behalf of any one particular church.2 The public issues and statements on freedom of religion or belief have been issued for condemning acts and threats of violence, offering letters of condolence, inviting and advocating inter-religious dialogues, promoting freedom of religion, calling out misuses and abuses of religion, and making appeals for religious persons to engage in issues of peace and justice.

The role of churches and religious communities has been a key issue since the inception of the CCIA. It will continue to be a significant part of the ecumenical agenda, in large part due to emerging issues and new challenges. Around the globe, religion is being misused as an excuse to commit and continue acts of violence, to divide and disenfranchise people (especially women, indigenous peoples, and people in minority communities), and even to wage wars. The documents here attest also to increasing concerns for the rights of indigenous peoples, the use of blasphemy laws, religious intolerance, and the politicization of religion.

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1 Article 18 - Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

This publication is a reflection of CCIA’s stance and commitment toward peoples’ right to freedom of religion and belief. It also illustrates the desire for peace among and within diverse religions and highlights the WCC’s involvement in international affairs. Freedom of religion can serve to empower the disenfranchised, to bring about dignity, and to foster peace by recognizing and respecting different opinions, diverse cultures, and people of faith (and of no faith) through dialogue.

The resource is being made available in PDF form to enable searchability. The documents themselves are arranged in reverse chronological order, with the newest first. To use the resource by topic rather than chronologically, use the search function in the PDF to locate all the mentions of the search term, for example, conscientious objection or blasphemy laws or Pakistan.

Mutua Kobia

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
Muslim scholars release declaration on rights of religious minorities

World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit commended the release of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities. 01 February 2016

“This is a very timely and significant text with an important message for us all,” said Tveit. The document was released by hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from more than 120 countries, along with representatives of Islamic and international organizations, as well as leaders from diverse religious groups and nationalities who attended a conference on 25-27 January in Marrakesh, Morocco.

“With this declaration, Muslim leaders are showing the way toward a future of living together on a shared platform of equal rights, mutual care and respect,” Tveit added.

The conference marked the 1,400th anniversary of the Charter of Medina, a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad and the people of Medina which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith.

The Marrakesh Declaration voices the participants’ “firm commitment to the principles articulated in the Charter of Medina, whose provisions contained a number of the principles of constitutional contractual citizenship, such as freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defense, as well as principles of justice and equality before the law.”

The conference was held under the auspices of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, and organized jointly by the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates.

The Relationship between Religion and the Public Square: Freedom of Religion in the Public Space. 01 February 2016

By Dr Clare Amos
Programme executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

The title I was asked to speak to is: The Relationship between Religion and the Public Square: Freedom of Religion in the Public Space. I found it quite challenging, for it seems to be raising two distinct though related issues. The first is as it suggests: what is the relationship between religion and the public square – in other words does and should religion as a phenomenon and religious institutions as an expression of it, have a role to play in the public civil and political life of a society? It might be considered the debate between religion and secularism. But then what is meant by Freedom of Religion in the Public Space – how does it relate to the first half of the sentence? Should I explore ways in which control of the public space can guarantee or suppress freedom of religion? And how far does any guarantee need to go – to enable adherents of religions to live freely and to follow their religious beliefs as individuals, or are we speaking of the right of religious communities, perhaps particularly minority religious communities, to have the freedom to influence law making and governmental processes: in other words to have space themselves within the public space? And how do both of these threads fit within the overall framework of this meeting exploring the theme of religion and violence? In some contexts does dominance of the public space by one religion lead to apparently state-sanctioned violence?

I speak as a British Anglican Christian currently working for the World Council of Churches in Switzerland in the field of interreligious dialogue. So I bring to the table my own context in which in England my church, the Church of England, has the position of being the
‘established’ church in the country, with a structural relationship with the state which means, for example, that 26 bishops still sit by right in the Upper House of Parliament, and whose Head of State has, up to the present queen, assumed their role in a ceremony in which the Archbishop of Canterbury has played the key part. Within continental Europe where I now live, in a number of countries there is a privileged role for a particular historic church or churches even if the word ‘establishment’ is not necessarily used. In Germany or parts of Switzerland for example Christian clergy or particular denominations are funded by the public purse, even though they do not necessarily have a constitutional or governmental role.

Of course the situation is very different here in the USA, though I learned recently that in the earliest days of the European settlement in North America in several of the individual states there was in fact a religion or rather denomination (for they were all Christian) which was formally established.

The other context I bring to this discussion is my work in interreligious dialogue for the World Council of Churches, in particular our relationships with Jews and Muslims: the question of the relationship between religion and the public square and a place for the religious other in political and social life is an essential part of our dialogue with representatives of these religions. There is certainly no lack of contemporary examples to illustrate the complexities of the topic. Here are just five – the point however being that they are all taken from media reports which have appeared in the last ten days, suggesting the ‘liveness’ of the issue.

☐ The New York City school system has just announced that in future school holidays will include one linked to the Muslim faith, and one marking Chinese New Year. The news site includes the comment by the children’s book author Fawzia Gilani-Williams “By leaving out some children’s heritage while others are visible, presents youngsters with an image of being undervalued or unimportant.” It went on to suggest that “By enacting these school holiday closings, we help our schools to create safe spaces for our children to ask questions and learn from one another, and counter the stereotypes perpetuated by the media; we give our teachers tools to create a nurturing environment where Arab, Muslim and South Asian students feel safe, and to teach all children to stand against intolerance. These holidays are teachable moments that can help turn curious children into thoughtful, respectful adults.”

☐ Last week between 25 - 27 January there was a very significant conference in Marrakesh organised by the King of Morocco. It brought together over 200 Muslim religious leaders, largely Sunni, but from a wide spectrum of the Muslim world, as well as about 50 leaders from other faith traditions. It produced a declaration on the ‘Rights of Religious Minorities in predominantly Muslim Majority Communities.’ To date, as far as I can see, only an Executive Summary of the final declaration has been published, but it is striking stuff. Commenting on the current gravity of the situation in various parts of the Muslim world, which as the declaration puts it, ‘has allowed criminal groups to issue edicts attributed to Islam but which in fact alarmingly distort its fundamental principles and goals’, and taking the historic Charter of Medina as a fundamental principle, it suggests inter alia that ‘Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world’ need to develop ‘a jurisprudence of the concept of citizenship which is inclusive of diverse groups,’ that it is important to ‘support all formulations and initiatives that aim to fortify relations and understanding among the various religious groups in the Muslim World… and that it is unconscionable to employ religion for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries.’ I have over the years read a number of well-meaning declarations about religion and peace which have not
necessarily had much impact, but on the face of it, this particular one does have at least some potential to make a difference.

A recently published interview with the American Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf about his book *Defining Islamic Statehood* offers some intriguing insights. Two in particular are relevant to our discussion:

first his comment that it is important to differentiate between the separation of church and state on the one hand and religion and politics on the other. Taking the United Kingdom as an example he suggests that because of the role of the monarch as governor of the Church of England we don’t have separation of church and state in England, but we do have separation of religion and politics. Conversely in India there is an official separation between church and state or temple and state, but there is, at least currently, in reality no separation between religion and politics. His implicit argument is that whatever the exact nature of a Muslim majority country, whether or not it seeks to define itself as a Muslim state, the real and key question is ‘the right institutional role and involvement between religion and politics’. His other comment which I found fascinating is that until the late 19th century the key question in the Muslim world was not about state and religion, but about the role and competencies of the Islamic ruler, and the need for such a ruler to abide by the divine laws. It is as he hints, perhaps one of the areas where Sunni and Shia Islam today have differing emphases.

Moving from what feels like the sublime to the slightly ridiculous there is the news that during the recent visit of President Rouhani to France the official banquet originally proposed was substituted by a low key event of orange juice and nibbles, due to the Iranian President’s refusal to participate in a formal meal at which wine was served. Conversely there was the covering up of the naked classical statues to spare the President’s blushes during his visit to Rome.

Back to my own country of the UK there have been two linked news items that have provoked extensive media coverage and comment over the last few days: the first was Prime Minister Cameron’s comment that women living in Muslim communities in Britain needed to have strong encouragement, perhaps reinforced by financial or legal sanctions, to learn English. The second was the comment by Trevor Phillips the former chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and himself a black Briton, that Muslims are ‘not like us’ and that it is a mistake and insulting to think that they are ever going to integrate.

All of these examples in some way or other interface with our question of religion and the public square or space, and the theme of the freedom of religion. It is telling that most of these have some connection with Islam and Christianity, or at least the so called Christian and so called Muslim world.

To spread my net a bit wider there are a two earlier media reports I want to refer to which also offer interesting perspectives. One is an article published by the *Washington Post* on December 21 2015 by two American Muslim women Asra Q. Nomani and Hala Arafa speaking out against the practice in some interfaith circles here in the United States of non-Muslim women wearing the so-called hijab for a public event as a gesture of solidarity with Muslim women. Their opposition was on various grounds but particularly because the widespread use of head scarves was a recent phenomenon in Islam which was being imposed upon Muslim women in a number of countries in a way that could be oppressive.

Secondly there is the fascinating research by Hossein Askari, an Iranian-born professor of International Business and International Affairs at George Washington University which was publicised in 2014 which argues that the Qur’an’s teachings are better represented in Western societies than in Islamic countries. Looking at an index of what he calls Economic Islamicity, or how closely the policies and achievements of countries reflect Islamic economic teachings, he
came to the conclusion that Ireland led the world in Islamic values. The highest rated Muslim
majority nation was Malaysia at No. 33.

And one other topic that at least from my European perspective cannot be dissociated
from our wider concern – that of the migrant and refugee crisis in Europe at the moment, which
has taken on an even more difficult nature in the last few weeks. There was a high level meeting
held at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, in partnership with various UN agencies, on
this topic exactly two weeks ago. From my perspective what was fascinating and quite telling was
how the conference almost skated around the interreligious dimension, largely afraid to name the
question of religion and the public space, and the tension between Muslims and Christians as a
contributory aspect of the crisis both in the Middle East and in Europe – although this did
eventually get in a fairly oblique reference in the final communiqué. Perhaps tellingly it was a
Sikh speaker at the conference, as far as I am aware the only speaker present overtly from a non-
Christian faith tradition, who was most explicitly prepared to focus on the need to address this
aspect.

What are some key underlying themes in relation to these and similar concrete stories?

The first is the question of identity, and in particular how religious identity interfaces with
ethnic and national identity. Do these different facets of our identity complement or challenge or
compete with each other? One of the profound reasons for the founding of the WCC after the
Second World War was the determination of a number of Christian leaders of that time to give
substance to their belief that their common identity as Christians overrode their differing
national identities which must never be allowed to compete with each other in such a destructive
way ever again. The implication of this is that my identity as a Christian needs to take precedence
over my identity as British.

There is the line from Paul’s letter to the Philippians which is often drawn on to reinforce
such a view: our citizenship is in heaven. But I suspect that the issue is not quite as neat as many
western Christians would like to make out.

I remember my shock when some colleagues and I visited a group of Palestinian Christians
in Jerusalem back in 2011 and we were told forcefully by one of them, ‘I am a Palestinian first
and a Christian second.’

My highminded reaction then was to feel that this was heresy. Now though I wouldn’t
totally disown that earlier view, I would be prepared to acknowledge that the situation is
considerably more complicated. Indeed religious and other identities do overlap: what for
example is the relationship between ‘Jewish’ as a religious identity and ‘Jewish’ as an ethnic or
even national identity? And in spite of my reaction to my Palestinian acquaintance it is not an
issue that Christianity itself can avoid, for we can take the case of a number of Orthodox
churches, in which the identities overlap. Is being an Armenian Christian an ethnic identity or a
religious one, or these days a political one for example?

And back to my Palestinian Christian interlocuter: perhaps I was wanting her to say, ‘I am
a Christian first and a Palestinian second,’ but would I also be wanting a British Muslim to say, ‘I
am a Muslim first and a Briton second.’? Fairness dictates that I should, but I suspect that the
bulk of my British Christian coreligionists would be quite uncomfortable if or when British
Muslims were to make such an assertion.
I would suggest to you that a very considerable proportion of the difficult issues about religion and the public space, and even religion and violence in our wider world are linked in some way to the ambiguous relationship between religious identity and national or ethnic identity – but that this is an issue that we find it very difficult to name and therefore confront.

Kenneth Cragg, a great Christian Islamicist, who lived long enough to become unfashionable, produced at the age of 90, an extraordinary book ‘Faith in their Pronouns: websites of identity.’ He comments in it how the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ can become quite dangerous, and that as he puts it the urgent need for those insistent pronouns is to distinguish firmly their religious use from their tribal, ethnic, racial or national currency, but that for many religions this is a difficult or highly uncongenial task, but necessary if the claims of human rights are to override the exclusives of territorial religion.

Inevitably this leads into the question of the appropriate relationship between religion and political power, which impinges also on the place given to religious minorities within the state. This is an area when Christianity and Islam have traditionally traded sharp and pithy comments between each other, Those of Kenneth Cragg included, ‘Islam is a religion continually in the process of becoming a state’, and ‘Muhammad was his own Constantine’.

Conversely there is a telling critique of so-called Christian views on the relationship between religion and power by a Muslim writer: Christianity wishes to leave unto Caesar what is Caesar’s. In the absence of Christian guidance, a Christian ruler will follow not Christ but Machiavelli, whereas Islamic guidance to a ruler is as imperative as it is to one who prays and fasts.

It is perhaps interesting to recall Machiavelli on the day of the Iowa Primary elections. All these comments have some half-truths about them. However one of the results of the way that some Muslim understandings about religion and power played out during the Ottoman era is that it created in the Middle East a patchwork of religious communities held together ultimately under the power of a Sunni Muslim ruler but with each minority holding an element of quasi-political power.

This so-called millet system, linked in to the classical concept of the dhimma has been reflected in the modern era in a settlement in which voting and political representation is allotted on a religious basis, so that for example in Lebanon the President is always a Maronite Christian and the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, or the fact that in Jordan there are reserved seats in the Parliament for the Christian minority. One of the hopes and aspirations of many Middle Eastern Christians when the Arab Spring began in 2011 was that there would be what was called a ‘common citizenship’ in which religion would not play a part in political structures: five years on we now seem to be very far from that aspiration, although the Marrakesh Declaration referred to earlier does talk about the need to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of citizenship which is inclusive of diverse groups.

Two other brief comments – almost as an aside at this point – one wonders what the increasing stress in Israeli politics on Israel as a Jewish state is going to mean for religious minorities in that country; and secondly as a Briton, even if currently an expatriate one, I am fascinated by the fact that the current front runner to be the next mayor of London is Sadiq Khan who identifies as a Muslim, but that so far at least there has not that much been made of his religious background in the run up to the May elections.
One of the important things to remember in this discussion about freedom of religion and the public space, is that religions don’t have human rights, it is human beings that do so. It is noticeable that some leaders of religious minorities, particularly in the Middle East, are often more interested the right of the religious community which they lead to exist and carry out its official religious practices than they are in the rights of particular individuals to profess any religious faith – or none.

However ultimately freedom of religion in a country such as Egypt is not about the power and security of the Coptic Church, but about the rights of all Egyptians to profess as individuals the faith that they choose, or even to profess no faith at all. What often seems to happen in the case of minority religious communities, and this is true in the Western world as well as the Middle East and Asia, is that they carve out for themselves some space within the wider state in which they control or seek to control the personal lives of their followers in regard to issues such as marriage, family life and inheritance issues.

Some of you will remember the hysteria that exploded in Britain in 2008 when the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, made a comment about the possibility of recognising Sharia courts in Britain. Although the hysteria was misplaced and malicious – there was no way that Dr Williams was advocating a widespread introduction of Sharia throughout British society – he was rather reflecting on the possible use of Sharia courts by Muslim families and communities to settle personal or family issues, I still think that Dr Williams was wrong. He is someone I deeply respect but as a male church leader I don’t think he fully grasped how vulnerable women, particularly young women, can be made to feel when religious tradition and religious leadership conspire to control their lives. It can be a denial of freedom and a sort of religiously inspired violence, or at least oppression.

I speak here from personal experience. As a young married woman in Lebanon and working alongside my husband for an Anglican church related organisation called the Church Mission Society I recall how my husband was treated very differently from me: looking back at the experience thirty years or so on, I think the examples of discrimination I was subjected to on the grounds of my sex were unbelievable. Yet it was not the discrimination itself which now still makes me angry, it was the fact that when I protested about them to the leadership of the organisation they sought to justify them on the grounds that they believed in and sought to uphold Christian marriage. The implication of course was that if I did not agree with them – and I didn’t – then I and my understanding of marriage were not really Christian. It was a sort of spiritual and emotional blackmail. If anyone said anything like that to me these days I would respond forcefully, but then I was much younger, newly married and comparatively insecure.

My fear about the use of religious courts by other faith traditions to deal with family issues is coloured by my experience; I suspect that they could be used by largely male religious leadership to browbeat women, not physically of course, but spiritually and emotionally. If you don’t allow the Imam to adjudicate in relation to family difficulties, then you are not really a proper Muslim, are you?

My experience in Lebanon, where I lived during the days of its civil war, which I do believe had a religious aspect to it, has also coloured the final point I want to make – that there is within religion, all religion, a propensity to violence, which needs to be genuinely acknowledged if it is to be overcome. It is linked in some way to the absolute claims that most religions make about themselves. It is often also linked to an ability or desire to control the public space.
There is a saying that I first heard about 15 years ago, ‘Unless religion is prepared to acknowledge that it is part of the problem as far as violence is concerned, it cannot also become part of the solution.’ Incidentally I first heard that remark made in relation to the intra-Christian violence that characterised the so-called Troubles in Northern Ireland.

I was on a work related visit to Ireland, north and south, last December, and I noticed how many of those I met still spoke in the same terms. Was it in fact the realization by significant elements of the religious leadership in the island of Ireland of the truth of that statement that has contributed to enabling the comparative peace that has been experienced for the last decade or so?

But on the interreligious plane, I would respectfully suggest that not all religious traditions find it easy at the moment to acknowledge that their own religion could be complicit in violence. There is a tendency to try and protect the religion itself from such an accusation by suggesting that those who commit acts of violence are not really authentic representatives of that particular faith tradition.

Over my years of involvement in interreligious dialogue I have been involved in too many meetings, mainly, though not exclusively Christian and Muslim, in which our topic of conversation has been the role of religious leaders in promoting peace, but in which the religious leaders who are the participants have generally refused to acknowledge the darker side of their own faith.

It takes courage to do so; it is in fact a question of spirituality. As Rowan Williams suggests, the political realm is a place of spiritual decision where souls are made and lost. Is it by their dealing with the political realm that not only souls but religions themselves are made and lost?

Letter to Nigerian president-elect Muhammadu Buhari
21 April 2015

Your Excellency

I send you my congratulations and good wishes on your recent election as President of Nigeria. I was greatly relieved that the election was able to take place without major incidents of violence, and I hope that the period of transition and your taking up your new office will remain similarly peaceful.

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches I am in regular contact with our member churches in Nigeria (Church of Nigeria [Anglican Communion]; Church of the Brethren in Nigeria; Church of the Lord Aladura; Methodist Church Nigeria; Nigerian Baptist Convention; Presbyterian Church of Nigeria; Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria; the African Church). We also work closely with the Christian Council of Nigeria, and its general secretary Rev. Yusuf Ibrahim Wushishi. I know that our member churches will strive alongside you for the good of the Nigerian people and society, particularly over issues such as fighting corruption and insecurity. I share their belief that you, as President, will work for the good of all Nigerians, irrespective of religion or tribe.
One particular issue we, at the World Council of Churches, are deeply committed to is that of freedom of religion or belief, as a basic human right. I was grateful that earlier this year you spoke specifically on this subject and talked of the importance of all Nigerians having the freedom to worship God according to their wish. You also mentioned how important it was that religion was not used as an excuse to divide or oppress the Nigerian people. I found these comments very helpful and reassuring. In 2012, along with HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan, I co-led a joint Christian-Muslim delegation to visit your country in which we saw and heard for ourselves the effect that religious-based violence was having on the lives of people.

I hope that I may have the honour of meeting you one day in the not too distant future.

I offer you my prayers and good wishes as you prepare to take up your new responsibilities.

Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Letter to Pakistani churches after Lahore bomb attacks
17 March 2015

I write these words of condolence and solidarity with a heavy heart on learning of the bombing attacks that took place in Lahore yesterday targeting two specific churches. The tragic loss of life from these deplorable acts of violence targeting the Christian community in Pakistan reveals once again the tremendous challenges and heavy sacrifice Christians bear as they strive to remain faithful to the gospel values of life, justice and peace. Further, these attacks demonstrate the worsening situation for religious freedom, human rights and dignity in Pakistan.

While the attacks themselves did not target a congregation from the Church of Pakistan, the continued violence against Christians in Pakistan is a cause of concern as they follow many similar attacks, including the suicide bombing in a church in Peshawar in 2013 which resulted in more than 80 deaths. The World Council of Churches condemns all such violence against people and communities on the basis of their religious identity, and calls upon the government of Pakistan to act swiftly in bringing the perpetrators to justice. We further call upon the government to put in place more robust measures to protect the Christian and other minority communities in Pakistan, to prevent similar acts of violence in the future, and to ensure freedom of religion and all fundamental human rights for all people in Pakistan.

As the Christian communities in Pakistan unite in this time of trial and tribulation, may your perseverance be strengthened and may you be consoled and comforted by the words of the Psalmist who declares, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all. He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken.” Psalm 34:19-20

With greetings of solidarity in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Introduction to moment of silence for Charlie Hebdo
08 January 2015
Ecumenical Centre chapel, Geneva, Switzerland
Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish justice of the United States Supreme Court, wrote an opinion on press freedom in which he observed that the appropriate remedy for offensive speech is more speech rather than enforced silence. The truth has a way of winning hearts and minds if spoken clearly and challenged peaceably. The remedy for offensive drawings is not to silence forever those who produce and publish them. Today, with our neighbours in France, we gather to observe a minute of silence for those who were murdered yesterday in Paris at the offices of Charlie Hebdo. But silence will not be the end of this story. Opinions will continue to be spoken, and debated, and illustrated, and published, and truth will be recognized…
Because this is the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre, we also will offer prayer and song to God in the coming minutes. Many connected with Charlie, leading critics of all organized religion, might not approve of our mode of remembrance. But we have an inalienable right to express our beliefs through words and the lively arts, as do they. Let us pray: Lord, have mercy in this hour, and grant all of us peace. Amen.

“God and Allah: What’s in a Name?”
Ryan McAnnally-Linz and Miroslav Volf, December 2014

In October 2013, a Malaysian appeals court ruled that the Catholic newspaper Herald could not legally use the word “Allah” in print. The court argued that the use of “Allah” in non-Muslim writings could confuse Muslims about the differences between Islam and other religions and even entice them to convert, which would violate Malay law. As news of the decision spread, many individuals and organizations voiced their opposition. Meanwhile, some Malaysian Muslims demonstrated in favour of the court, and Sultan Abdul Halim Mu’adzam, the current Malaysian head of state, proclaimed his support for the ruling. The controversy even spilled over into violence, as a church in the province of Penang was firebombed in January 2014. At the time of writing the case awaited a hearing in the Malaysian Federal Court, the country’s highest judiciary body.

Our (limited) understanding of Islam leads us to believe that there are good Muslim reasons to reject the lower court’s reasoning. But Muslims who agree with us are much better placed to elaborate them, and indeed some have. Our pluralist political commitments lead to the same conclusion. But arguments based on those commitments can do only so much when disconnected from the theological and philosophical convictions that motivate them and when delivered to the Malaysian political context from the far different American one. It might appear, then, that there is not much for Christian theologians to do in response to the Malaysian court’s ruling. That appearance would be deceiving.

The ruling in fact raises pressing theological questions for Christians. Does the Christian faith permit one to pray to Allah? And when Muslims worship Allah, might they be worshiping God? To understand the import of these and related questions, it’s helpful to consider a surprising Christian response to the Malaysian court decision. Instead of considering it a violation of the rights of Malaysian Christians, some have welcomed the ban on Christians using the word “Allah” in their texts. Representative of this response is President R. Albert Mohler Jr of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who has argued that Christians should not call upon the true God of the Bible using the word “Allah” because “Allah” refers only to the radically different god of the Qur’an.

It matters greatly whether Dr Mohler and those who agree with him are right. If they are, the prospects for respectful, trusting cooperation between Christians and Muslims diminish. The reason, however, is perhaps not what one would expect. It’s not that people have to believe in the same god in order to live together in peace and even to cooperate politically. Contemporary

3 Since the completion of this article and on 23 June 2014, the Federal Court of Malaysia ruled by majority opinion against allowing the Catholic Herald to appeal the earlier High Court judgement which prohibited its use of the word “Allah”.

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South Korea and the United States, for instance, both see relatively peaceful and cooperative political relations between Christian, Buddhist, and non-religious populations. And, clearly, it’s not that people who believe in the same god necessarily get along. Citing counter-examples here is disconcertingly easy: countless European wars both before and after the Reformation, recent conflicts among Muslims in Iraq and Syria, the American Civil War ... the list of tragedies could go on.

It’s not a question of an automatic, necessary relationship. The question of the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur’an affects the prospects for cooperation for three different reasons.

First, if Dr Mohler is wrong, then certain otherwise unavailable forms of cooperative reasoning between Christians and Muslims become possible. Among many other things, people engaging in political cooperation make arguments, offer reasons, and try to convince one another. If Christians and Muslims hold that the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur’an are one, then when reasoning with and convincing one another, they will be able to appeal to arguments about the character of God. They will be able to engage, that is, in common theological deliberation. Since theological reasons are highly important to many Christians and Muslims, being able to deliberate theologically together is a significant help to efforts and cooperation.

Second, if Dr Mohler is right, then the mutual sense of respect necessary for public cooperation becomes much harder to maintain between Christians and Muslims. This is because Christians claim that there is one and only one God. As a consequence of this claim, if Christians hold that Muslims do not worship the one God, we must hold that they worship nothing, an empty created idol, or else something demonic. Now, such a belief would not in itself be disrespectful. But Muslims also claim that there is one and only one God. Indeed, the claim to worship that God is likely the most central claim of Islam. So for Christians to deny that Muslims worship the one God is to deny the heart of their confession of faith. No matter how respectfully (or infrequently) Christians tried to communicate that denial, many Muslims would undoubtedly receive it as deeply disrespectful. Since a mutual sense of respect is an important ingredient in public cooperation, cooperation between Christians and Muslims would thus be impeded.

Third, and perhaps most unsettlingly, if the bulk of Christians held, as many do now, that Muslims actually worship a demonic force, they would have compelling reasons not to cooperate with Muslims. To do so would be to cooperate in a movement of opposition to God.

Clearly, the stakes are high when answering these questions.

Before doing our best to give our answers, we need to recognize that as Christians, we are called to follow the truth, regardless of the consequences to ourselves. If we are convinced that the god of the Qur’an is no God at all, then we cannot pretend otherwise for the sake of amiable social relations. Thankfully, there are good reasons to believe that Dr Mohler and those who agree with him are wrong about Allah. Not only should Christians feel free to use the word “Allah” in their worship of God if it’s natural to do so in their language, but Muslim speech about and worship of “Allah” is not by definition worship of a false god. But how do we know this?

The first thing to do is recognize the inadequacy of all human language about God. God is unimaginably transcendent – beyond, above, greater than any and all creatures. Our words are
the words of creatures, and so they simply cannot refer to God in any straightforward way. All of our conceptions of God fall short. All of our words fail. And yet we often don’t realize that they do – at least, we don’t act like they do. Instead, we tend to worship these ideas and words about God in place of God and so fall into idolatry ourselves. We truly worship God only when God by grace lifts up our faltering words and all-too-human thoughts and receives them as worship. We should, therefore, always maintain a stance of humility when talking about a subject like this one.

Having said this, we can turn to the question of Christian use of the word “Allah”. It is important here to note that Christianity has always been a fundamentally translatable faith. Recounting the miracle of Pentecost, the Book of Acts says: All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ... And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ (Acts 2:4-11)

From the start, the gospel is not attached to any one language—even the language of Jesus. Rather, by the power of God’s spirit, it adopts and indwells the languages of all who are there to hear. We can see the continuation of this feature of Christian faith in the New Testament, which uses common Greek words to translate Aramaic and Hebrew words referring to God. And also in the fact that the word “God”, which English-speaking Christians use in their Bibles and worship, comes from an Old English word used long before Anglo-Saxons started converting to Christianity. Using generic words for “god” from local languages is how Christians can talk about God. If “Allah” is one such word, then Christians ought to feel free to use it.

It turns out that “Allah” is just such a word. Indeed, if you want to translate the Greek ὅς (literally “the God” in English), which is found in John 20:28, Matthew 1:23, and elsewhere, there really is no good option in Arabic other than “Allah”. Unsurprisingly, then, we have evidence that Arabic-speaking Christians have used “Allah” in their worship and their scriptures at least since the 9th century. It’s very possible that they did so before the time of Muhammad.

But even if it is natural for Christians speaking certain languages to call God “Allah”, there might be good reasons for them not to use this name. Specifically, it is only prudent for Christians to pray to and worship “Allah” if the meanings associated with that word are not radically opposed to what Christians say about God. Otherwise, they do in fact unnecessarily risk confusion, as the Malaysian court claimed. Early Christians did not call God “Apollo” or “muse” after all.

Some Christians claim that the “Allah” whom Muslims worship cannot be the God of Jesus because the meanings of the word are just too different from what English-speaking Christians mean by “God” or Spanish-speaking ones mean by “Dios”. Therefore, they conclude, Christians should not refer to God as “Allah”. They usually emphasize two points: (1) Muslims reject that Jesus was and is the incarnate Son of God and (2) they deny that God is Trinity. We agree that these are two of the most important claims of Christian faith. Without them, we believe, one misses the decisive revelation of God and the very heart of who God is. Even so,
just because someone denies these claims does not by itself mean that she doesn’t believe in and worship God.

Consider the vitally important case of Judaism. Incarnation and Trinity are perhaps the two most significant differences of belief between Christians and Jews, and yet the vast majority of the Christian tradition, beginning with the New Testament, has held that the Jews believe in the same God as Christians. The gospel stories about Jesus show him assuming that the Jewish religious leaders with whom he disagreed believed in the same God he proclaimed, even though many of them failed to understand God and God’s relationship to Jesus in fundamental ways. When Jesus debates those leaders over his status as Son, he does so assuming that he and they are both talking about the God whom Jesus claimed to reveal (John 5).

Importantly, Jesus extends his assumption about common ground to people other than his fellow Jews. In John 4:1-42, Jesus discusses the right way to worship God with a Samaritan woman. He assumes that he and the woman are talking about one God, even though he affirms the superiority of the Jewish understanding of that God: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (4:22). The woman worships God, Jesus says, even if she does not understand God as well as the Jews.

In accord with Jesus’ example, Augustine extends a similar assumption to the Greek Neo-Platonist philosophers. Speaking to God in his Confessions about some Neo-Platonist books that he had read earlier in his life, Augustine writes: “The books say that before all times and above all times your only-begotten Son immutably abides eternal with you” (7.9.14, translated by Henry Chadwick). These same philosophers deny the incarnation, and so miss the saving truth of the gospel, according to Augustine. But nevertheless, he thinks their books really talk about God. The disagreement is about what Jesus reveals about God and how God is related to Jesus.

All of these examples address monotheists, people who believed that there is one and only one God. At a minimum, they would agree with one or another version of three claims that are central to Christian faith:

1. There is only one true God. Any other supposed “god” is no god at all.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is different from everything that is not God. The cosmos is not God.

Importantly, claims very much like these can be found in the Qur’an. For example:

1. “Know, therefore, that there is no god but God” (47:19).
2. “It was He who created the heavens and the earth in all truth” (6:73).
3. Allah is “the Merciful One who sits enthroned on high,” which is usually taken to mean that God is beyond the created world (2:255).

Consequently, there is good reason to treat Muslim beliefs in and claims about Allah in the same way Jesus treated Jewish and Samaritan beliefs and Augustine treated the Neo-Platonists. We may disagree about immensely important things about God, but we are disagreeing about God, not between gods, so to speak.

But even granted Christian and Muslim agreement on the claims of monotheism, some would raise the objection that the character of “Allah” in the Qur’an and Islam radically differ
from the character of God as revealed by Jesus. Monotheism aside, they would say, is it not just as misleading to treat them as the “same” in any practically important sense?

There is no way to answer an objection like this definitively in a short article (or even a rather long one), but we think that there are good reasons for rejecting this argument, and we would like to offer a very rough sketch of what those reasons are.

Let’s start by noting a common stereotype about Christianity and Islam. The Christian God – so the stereotype goes – is loving and merciful, but Muslims believe that Allah is demanding and punitive.

This stereotype mischaracterizes both Christian and Muslim understandings of God. Christians do believe that God is loving and merciful. But a robust picture of God as portrayed in the New Testament must include the recognition that God is just (e.g., Romans 3:5), makes demands of us (e.g., John 15:10), and is unavering in judgment against sin (e.g., 2 Peter 2:4-9). Muslims do believe that Allah issues commandments and punishes evil. But in the Qur’an God is consistently praised as “The Merciful,” “The Compassionate,” “The All-Forgiving,” “The Generous,” “The Benevolent,” and “The Loving.” The stereotype gives us an incomplete picture of both faiths.

There are –we emphasize this –crucial differences between how Christians and Muslims understand God’s character. But those differences do not erase the commonalities. For example, Christians emphasize that God loves unconditionally, whereas most Muslims do not. But that does not change the fact that nearly all Christians and Muslims believe that God loves.

Overlaps also exist between the commands that Christianity and Islam believe God makes for human beings. The important document A Common Word between Us and You, issued by many of the world’s leading Muslim scholars and clerics in 2007, points out that love of God and love of neighbour are central to Islam as well as to Christianity. The God of the Qur’an underwrites the commandments on which Jesus says “the law and the prophets hang” (Matthew 22:40). Again, there are substantial differences. For instance, Jesus unequivocally commands that we love our enemies. Many Muslim thinkers and leaders insist that we should be kind to all, but they tend not to include enemies among the neighbours whom we are commanded to love. But again, the differences do not erase the commonalities.

This discussion of commonalities begins to shed light on the possibility of cooperative forms of reasoning that we raised above. Exploring how Christians ought to relate to Allah has led us to see significant common ground between Christianity and Islam. This common ground does not mean that Christianity and Islam are the same faith. They are not. Nor does it mean that Christians and Muslims agree about everything important. They do not. But it does mean that our visions of the common good are likely to overlap in meaningful ways. We have somewhere solid to plant our feet as we strive to promote that good. And for that we should be thankful to the one God who is over all.

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Condemning attacks on Holy Martyrs Church of Deir Zor
14 October 2014
We in the World Council of Churches join His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, Armenian Apostolic Church Mother See of Holy Ethchmiadzin, and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia) in condemning the terrorist attack on the sacred sanctuary of the Holy Martyrs Church of Deir ez-Zor, Syria, a memorial and place of worship belonging to the Catholicosate of Cilicia which includes relics of the Martyrs, a museum and a compound for pilgrims.

We understand that the destruction in late September of this church building, museum and compound took place not only in the year leading to commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide but also on the 23rd anniversary of Armenian independence. With you, we are convinced that the perpetrators of this premeditated crime will never succeed in erasing from the minds of Armenians and the world the memory and meaning of the desert of Deir Zor.

We also share our alarm at the efforts of religious extremists in the region of Syria and Iraq to eliminate people and communities of various religious minorities along with all physical vestiges of their presence and part in the culture of the Middle East.

Members of a delegation from the World Council of Churches to northern Iraq have reported on their return concerning their interaction with Christian, Yazidi and other minority communities who felt obliged to flee for their lives from the genocidal violence of the so-called Islamic State.

The World Council of Churches categorically condemns these actions and pledges to continue standing in solidarity with the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church as well as other Christians and members of minority communities, providing support for the promotion of religious liberty and pluralistic societies throughout the region.

As part of the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide next year, the World Council of Churches will convene a symposium on the issue of impunity, focusing on tragic experiences of the past and relating them to current conflicts. The international community must acknowledge and learn from the past, taking concerted action to prevent its repetition.

The destruction of the Holy Martyrs Armenian Church in Deir Zor and the relics enshrined there is bitter evidence that genocide is not only a subject of history, but a present threat for Christians and other minorities in the Middle East.

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches, I join with you, the Armenian people and all people of faith and good-will in praying for peace, for compassion to enter the hearts of aggressors and for protection of threatened people and communities.

Yours in our common pilgrimage to justice and peace,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Statement on the state of human rights in Eritrea
08 July 2014
(as approved by the WCC Central Committee, 2-8 July 2014)
Over the past years, the ecumenical family has received various accounts of the deteriorating state of human rights in Eritrea and on-going reports of serious violations of human rights by the Eritrean authorities against their own population, as well as the alarming number of civilians, especially youth, fleeing Eritrea as a result of these violations.

There is a high level of lack of freedom in the country, aggravated by the arbitrary arrest and detention, including enforced disappearances and *incommunicado* detention of persons for suspected infractions being perceived as critical of the government.

Media is state-owned and does not leave any room for independent media. There is no independent judiciary, and individuals are detained without any due process. There are no political parties, nor any unions to protect workers’ rights. There is no right of association, or to demonstrate peacefully. No public meetings are allowed. No human rights defenders are allowed to operate within Eritrea; and most NGOs have been expelled from the country. As a result of drought and famine, food is rationed and controlled by the government.

There is no religious liberty. Authorities have stripped the Eritrean Orthodox Patriarch of his ecclesiastical authority and have placed him under house arrest since 2005, after he protested against the detention in November 2004 of three Orthodox Priests from Medhane Alem Church.

We have all sadly witnessed the death of more than 300 Eritreans in October 2013 during the Lampedusa boat tragedy. Indeed, many Eritrean refugees – both women and men – who seek to avoid forced military conscription are fleeing their country in search for a sanctuary, often at the peril of their own lives.

Over the past decade, hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have fled their country to seek sanctuary in neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan, often at great personal risk. In their journey to a better and safer place, many of them have become easy targets for traffickers, and consequently face horrifying experiences, such as torture, being held hostage against a ransom, or routine rape for women and girls. For those who take the northern route through Egypt to reach Israel, they often end up being captured by Bedouin traffickers in the Sinai desert and are daily abused and tortured while family and friends are repeatedly pressured with exorbitant ransom requests.

In view of these harsh realities in the country, the Catholic Bishops of Eritrea issued a pastoral letter on 25 May 2014 which has been fully endorsed by the Eritrean Orthodox Church in the Diaspora.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 2-8 July 2014, therefore:

A. *Expresses* deep concern over the degrading state of human rights in Eritrea and the impact on the lives of thousands of innocent Eritreans;

B. *Commends* the initiative taken by the Catholic Bishops of Eritrea for letting the world know the existing realities and the consequent tragedies;

C. *Calls* on member churches of the World Council of Churches in neighbouring countries and beyond to cooperate in dealing with issues of human trafficking in the Sinai desert that is costing the lives of many innocent persons daily;

D. *Stands* in solidarity with His Holiness Patriarch Antonios and his ideals of non-political interference in church affairs;

E. *Appeals* to the government of Eritrea to immediately release His Holiness Patriarch Antonios from house arrest and allow him to travel freely;
F. **Calls** on the Government of Eritrea to treat prisoners with dignity and to assure that they are given fair trials;

G. **Expresses** grave concern about the arbitrary arrest and detention, including forced disappearances and incommunicado detention of persons for suspected infractions being perceived as critical of the Government;


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**Statement on the current situation in Mosul, Iraq**

**07 July 2014**

The World Council of Churches is following with great concern the tragic developments of the situation in Iraq.

We are deeply shocked and distressed by the recent events in Mosul, where hundreds of thousands of people have fled the second largest city in Iraq because of the violence and raids by the “Islamic State”, a terrorist group formerly known as the “Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham” (ISIS). This radical group is imposing its terror on the whole population, specifically targeting minority groups, including Christians, who have remained steadfast in the city after several waves of displacement.

Out of the 500,000 people who have left Mosul and the area, there are around 10,000 Christians who have been displaced and fled to the neighbouring Kurdish areas, as well as thousands of people from other religious and ethnic minorities and many who oppose the terror regime imposed by ISIS.

Credible media reports and other accounts received from the Bishops in Mosul and the neighbouring villages in the Nineveh plain confirm that Mosul has been nearly emptied of its Christian population. Christians in this city have maintained a continuous presence since the dawn of Christianity. We also mourn with those who have lost their innocent loved ones during the military offensive, and pray for a speedy recovery for the injured.

As we have previously noted, our concern is for all people affected by the indiscriminate violence and humanitarian calamity. **The WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland from 2-8 July, 2014 therefore:**

1. **Encourages** all the churches in Iraq and in the region who witness to the love of Christ for all their diaconal work and humanitarian assistance.

2. **Reiterates** its call to the international community and to the specialised United Nations Agencies to ensure that all vulnerable communities in Iraq and surrounding region, and those who have found refuge in neighbouring countries receive appropriate humanitarian assistance.

3. **Encourages** church-related agencies to redouble their efforts now, including aid for the internally displaced peoples in both Iraq and Syria, and the refugees in neighbouring countries.
4. **Affirms** the role of the churches in Iraq and the region who are committed to engage in constructive dialogue with other religious and ethnic communities so that the pluralistic heritage of their societies is protected and secured. The WCC assures those churches of the wide ecumenical support of such a process.

5. **Urges** the Iraqi authorities and encourages non-military international support for the initiation of an inclusive political process to strengthen fundamental human rights, in particular with regards to religious freedom, to urgently establish the rule of law and to ensure equal rights for all citizens.

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**Support for Malaysian churches' efforts to restore multi-religious values**

27 February 2014

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Freedom of religion and belief for all, and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation between faith communities, are essential foundations for social cohesion and human dignity and rights in all countries. The World Council of Churches has therefore been deeply concerned by recent developments that jeopardize these fundamental values and the long history of multi-religious co-existence in Malaysia.

The October 2013 Malaysian Court of Appeal’s decision forbidding the use of the word “Allah” by non-Muslims is an emblematic expression of these troubling developments. As I noted in my letter of 13 January 2010, Christians in majority Muslim countries all over the world – including in Malaysia itself, as well as in neighbouring Indonesia – have for centuries used the Arabic word “Allah” to refer to God. Indeed, the shared use of this word by Muslims and Christians alike has served as an important bridge for inter-religious dialogue when speaking of the divine, and in the ongoing dialogues between Christians and Muslims on the global level in which the WCC has been engaged, the use of the word Allah has never been contested.

As members of the family of Abrahamic faiths, Muslims and Christians share a common belief in the unity of God, and a common theological thread of love of God and love of neighbour has been central to interfaith relations in societies where these faiths co-exist. Sadly, the recognition of this shared heritage and current need is obscured by this regrettable legal precedent and the political discourse that surrounds it. I share the concern expressed by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, that this case may have far-reaching implications for religious minorities in Malaysia, and the region.

I am therefore writing to express the World Council of Churches’ solidarity and support in your efforts to address this challenge and to restore the example of Malaysia’s multi-religious society, through an application for leave to appeal against the court’s decision, due to be heard on 5 March. The constructive resolution of this matter will be an important signpost along the way of our ‘pilgrimage of justice and peace’ in the wider world.

I pray that the application and the arguments supporting it will find favour with the court, and that your efforts and ongoing witness for justice and human dignity will help secure the common future of all Malaysians.
Call from WCC general secretary to pray for the safe return of persons recently abducted and kidnapped, 21 December 2013

Press release:

The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary is calling on the council's 345 member churches and churches around the world to continue to pray for the safe return of the twelve abducted nuns from the Monastery of St Thecla in the historical town of Maaloula on 2 December 2013, as well as the two Archbishops of Aleppo in Syria Mar Yohanna Gregorios Ibrahim from the Syriac Orthodox Church and Archbishop Paul Yazigi from the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch who were kidnapped in April 2013 near Aleppo, Syria on their way back from a humanitarian mission.

“As the Christmas season is upon us, it is important to remember in our prayers and thoughts that the 12 nuns and Archbishop Ibrahim and Archbishop Yazigi remain missing,” Tveit said on Friday.

“The nuns and both archbishops are deeply missed by their church communities and families,” Tveit said. “The pain of this separation has added to the ongoing suffering inflicted upon all people of Syria because of the conflict. It is very sad and tragic that thousands of Syrian peoples have disappeared in prisons.”

The WCC calls on all the actors in the Syrian conflict to spare all civilians including religious people and not take them as human shields. The WCC calls also on the international community to stand in solidarity with all victims of kidnappings and forced disappearances and mobilize all their efforts in order to release them and prevent such events from taking place again.

“We continue to pray that God will bring peace to Syria and an end to the suffering of millions of people throughout Syria who have lost their beloved ones, who have been disabled and injured, who have been internally displaced or have become refugees, who have lost their homes, their properties and their places of worship,” Tveit said.

WCC calls for a “Mandela moment” in South Sudan, 17 December 2013

The newly elected moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee has called on the government of South Sudan to have a “Mandela moment” as it confronts the aftermath of violence on Monday.

Speaking from Geneva where she was at the WCC headquarters for weekend meetings and to attend a Monday morning Mandela memorial, Dr Agnes Abuom, a Kenyan, said “this is really a Mandela moment” for South Sudan.

“Just when we have laid Mandela to rest and we are celebrating his life of forgiveness and reconciliation, of justice, of freedom, of the capacity to be content and to be inclusive: this is really a lesson for South Sudan”, she said.
WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has sent a letter to South Sudanese president Salva Kiir Mayardit, expressing profound concern for the people of the nation. He wrote in part, “The people of South Sudan have suffered for several decades and are now longing for peace and justice. We pray that the situation will quickly normalize and that peace will prevail again soon.”

According to news reports, South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir announced Monday that an attempted coup by soldiers loyal to his former deputy, Riek Machar, had been quashed. Machar and others involved have apparently fled to the UN Mission in the capital Juba.

Abuom stressed concern for the churches in South Sudan which through the Sudan Council of Churches and the WCC were deeply involved in reaching a peace agreement between Sudan and South Sudan, and in helping to facilitate the formation of South Sudan as the youngest nation in the world.

She said the churches there have already responded and called for calm. She added that South Sudan, as a young nation, “needs a lot of latitude for different voices given its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious composition.”

“It is unfortunate that there has been an attempted coup, and we would want to say to those people that there is no space again in Africa for armed rebellion,” she said. “We believe in dialogue, in the power of the vote and election to change leadership peacefully and to transit from one leadership to another.”

Echoing Abuom’s comments, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit also called on the government of South Sudan to reach out to all within the country in a way that reflects the highest ideals of Mandela.

“Mandela has helped us see the worst and best in humanity,” Tveit said, restating his comments from the Mandela memorial held at the Ecumenical Centre Monday, 16 December. “He helped us to be realistic; even more important, he helped us believe in the one humanity and to love that one humanity.”

Tveit met with Kiir in April 2013, when Kiir said “After the independence of South Sudan, it is the churches that have the capability to bring people together and help rebuild the country.”

“South Sudan is a state where all religious communities, including Christians, can work freely, and their contributions for the social betterment, regardless of their religious associations, are welcomed,” Kiir told Tveit.

“South Sudan needs now, and it is called, to develop a culture of democracy that supports different opinions even when they are not congruent with what the leadership expects, because that is a democracy,” Abuom said.

Statement affirming the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013

Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom.”
(Luke 12:32)
“Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.”

1. Christians still keep hope
The profound political changes that have swept the Middle East and North Africa, since early 2011 following popular uprisings, have carried with them hopes for political systems based on human rights and the rule of law. The seeds of an irreversible transformation have been sown. However, in several countries the efforts towards political transformation have been rejected, which has undermined the demands for peaceful reform. Quite rapidly, large areas of the Middle East and North Africa have succumbed to violent sectarian, ethnic, and tribal animosities, and the reform movement has been distracted by political radicalism and religious intolerance. This has led to a widespread humanitarian catastrophe. In this critical situation, the worldwide Christian community is enjoined to manifest its solidarity with all peoples in the Middle East who are struggling for just and peaceful societies, and, at the same time, affirms that the continued presence of Christians in this region is indispensable for plural and diverse communities, and commits itself to accompany all in the building of democratic civil societies.

1.1. The circumstances throughout the Middle East present the churches with a new kairos moment as in the “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth” document of 2009, when Palestinian Christians joined in a common reading of the situation, and challenged the churches to prophetic action.

1.1.1. In May 2013, in Lebanon, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) convened an ecumenical gathering of Christian leaders and representatives from churches and organizations in the region and from 34 other countries, to explore ways to strengthen the Christian presence and witness. They observed that: “This is a time of crisis with special intensity here in the Middle East, but affects all of humankind. The elements of this crisis include an intensification of religious tribalism, increasing fundamentalism in many of the world’s religions, dispersion of the influence of radicalized Islamist groups, widespread violence and insecurity, a deficit in democratic legitimacy and credibility, poverty and lack of opportunity, especially for women and youth, Christian emigration from the region, and a generalized sense of abandonment following decades of unhelpful intervention. Christians, Muslims and Jews all experience the destructive effects of these trends.”

2. Vibrant Christian churches

Christians are rooted in the soil of the Middle East. From the manger of Bethlehem of Judea, the refuge of Egypt, the waters of the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee, and the road to the Cross in Jerusalem itself, Christians are as rooted in the soil of the Middle East as are olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane and cedars in Lebanon. It was on the road to Damascus that Paul was converted (Acts 9) and in Antioch that the disciples first were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

2.1 Despite the ups and downs of harsh and testing historical, as well as present circumstances, Christians have continued and will continue to live together with those with whom this soil is shared. The Christians living in this region are an essential part of their lands, contributing to the rich traditions, plural societies and cultural diversity. In the 19th century, Christians in the region struggled to change their status to one where they would be equal with all other citizens in their societies. Christians today are aware that the guarantee of their free, engaged and meaningful existence in these societies is not by protection, nor a bequest given by political powers, but is acquired by forthright participation as citizens, and by persistent patience in encouraging mentalities and structures that enhance the free participation of all. Today, they do not see themselves as minorities. Rather, they view themselves as equal citizens contributing to the wellbeing of their nations. Their mission and witness in society is evident in multiple spheres of public life such as in culture, politics, education, health services, women and youth development, child protection, social services, relief and development. Numerical proportion historically has not limited the contribution and role of Christians in the Middle East.
2.2. Christians in the region have contributed to the idea that plurality is a gift of God, and that respect for diversity in plural societies is an affirmation that all peoples are created equal in the eyes of God.

2.2.1. In addition to the diversity of religions, diversity also exists within the rich and varied traditions among Christian churches in the Middle East. This has prompted forms of ecumenism that are particular to the region. Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Anglican churches, have together participate in the MECC as an instrument for joint witness and diakonia. But ecumenism in the region goes beyond this institutional context to reach the everyday lives of Christians.

2.3. Christian spirituality and witness are revealed by the vibrant monastic communities and parishes, theological faculties, hospitals, schools and humanitarian services. These are essential parts of the creative and continuous witness of the Christians and the churches, offering spiritual resources to all people in the region.

3. Christians in the regional turmoil are called to work for justice and peace

Yet, despite the centuries-long reality of plural communities in the Middle East, some have exploited the current turmoil to advance political radicalism and religious intolerance. Hundreds of thousands of people in the region have been killed, maimed, imprisoned and displaced. The numbers of suffering, internally displaced people, and refugees into neighbouring countries of the Middle East and beyond have created a crushing humanitarian catastrophe.

3.1 In Syria, violence and turmoil have ravaged the lives of millions of people. Abductions of civilians, including clergy, and torture, massacres and extrajudicial killings have become a daily reality. Entire communities, families and individuals, have been forced to flee their homes, to find refuge in other areas of their country, in neighbouring countries and in distant places. Humanitarian relief is unable to meet the desperate needs of dislocated people. The movement of refugees from Syria to neighbouring countries has stressed those in flight and those offering hospitality. The political turmoil within Syria threatens the unity and stability of Syria and its neighbours. This massive movement of population carries serious implications for those who remain and hope for reconciled communities once peace and stability are restored.

3.2. In Egypt, political turmoil has provided a pretext to instrumentalize and politicise religion, where again, the Christian population and places of worship have been particularly targeted. The level of violence and tensions has increased considerably and reached an alarming level. It is hoped that the young generation which struggled for freedom, human dignity and equal rights to prevail in Egypt, will continue this long struggle and most importantly, will continue this struggle in an inclusive way with all those who hold these values.

3.3. In Iraq, even after the withdrawal of foreign occupying forces, people are still not enjoying human security and dignity. Acts of violence all over the country have reached alarming levels and are affecting the entire population, including the already vulnerable Christian community. Genuine democracy, equal citizenship, the rule of law, reconciliation and impartial development are still out of reach. Under such conditions, Iraq is at great risk of being emptied of its human resources. It is hoped that Iraqis will work together, healing wounds and building a better future for themselves. It is also essential that dialogue between Christians and Muslims continues in order to promote justice and peace in the country.

3.4. Christians in Iran have been living in the country for centuries, contributing to its rich culture and civilization. They constitute an integral part of the society and, along with the rest of
Iranians, are suffering from the international sanctions that have a harmful impact on them much more than on the government. Lifting the sanctions will encourage the present government to persevere with the undertaken reforms and to abide by its international obligations under the terms of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

3.5. This tension and violence around the Middle East and in North Africa is taking place in the midst of the on-going and longstanding Palestine/Israel conflict in the region, and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories since 1967. This remains a central issue and a major source of concern for all who are working for peace with justice and for reconciliation. It also remains the core problem that is fueling the logic underlying many of the conflicts in the region, putting at risk international relations and peace. Resolving once and for all the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians in accordance with United Nations resolutions and international law, addressing all final status issues, including the right of return, can only help in resolving the other conflicts in the region.

3.6. In Jerusalem today Palestinians, Christians and Muslims alike, face discriminatory Israeli policies. “Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity” (Kairos Palestine document). Jews, Christians and Muslims alike look to Jerusalem as a place God blessed with the significance of His presence. As a city of two nations revered by the faithful of three religions, it needs to be the place that models for the world the possibilities of living together peacefully in mutual respect.

4. The Gospel imperative for costly ecumenical solidarity

Christians reject on principle governance that diminishes and disenfranchises the people’s right to express opinion or to fully participate in the formulation of public policy. The popular uprisings and subsequent unrest across the region, however chaotic and dangerous, nonetheless reflect the urgency and capacity of people to claim their right to good governance and protection under the law. These historic events demonstrate the public’s repudiation of insecurity in the region, including the manipulation of religious teachings, economic inequalities, failing political alliances, and the imbalances of power that threaten all the people of the region, and humankind. Despite the current turmoil in the region, the long commitment of the Church must remain steadfast to sow seeds of peace and justice and build on the progress that is being made.

4.1. The WCC has consistently expressed its deep concern for all peoples in this region where the history of our faith was born and grew. More particularly, the Christian presence and witness in the land of the Bible has been of vital significance for the ecumenical family, from its inception up until the present day. The central committee, meeting in Geneva in February 2011, grounded theologically the importance of this presence by stating that “the WCC has viewed the Middle East as a region of special interest, being the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam... Our living faith has its roots in this land, and is nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots from the apostolic times. Without this Christian presence, the conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, civilizations, which is a sign of God’s love for all humanity, will be endangered. In addition, its extinction will be a sign of failure of the ecumenical family to express the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity”. It also expressed the Council’s principles that guide its policy concerning the Middle East region: “God’s justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths”. It finally noted that “political developments in the region point to signs of hope for democratic changes, respect for human rights and the rule of law in several countries”. In this context the WCC reaffirms the principle expressed by the central committee in 2011 that “peace and reconciliation must be conditioned by justice”. The future of the
churches and the Christians in these countries is and must be a concern for the entire ecumenical family.

The 10th Assembly of the WCC, meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

A. **Reaffirms** that Christians in the Middle East hold in a unique, tangible way the legacy of the apostolic era, preserving in the footsteps of our Lord the living church. Support of these Christian communities, spiritually and materially, preserves the continuity of the Christian presence for the benefit of all Christians and all people from the region and worldwide;

B. **Regards** current events in various countries in the Middle East as an irreversible process leading to changes in systems of governance, and hopes for a future of justice, peace and stability, cultural diversity and plural communities;

C. **Prays** that Christians, especially in the region, maintain their hope even in these extremely critical situations and that these events will be an opportunity for positive change in these societies and for participatory democracy;

D. **Encourages** all peoples in the region, including Christians, to initiate actions questioning the abuse of authority and rejecting corruption, as they continue to support one another in the common effort to build democratic civil societies, based on the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights, including religious freedom and freedom of conscience;

E. **Supports** Christians in the region in their commitment to engage in constructive dialogue with other religious and ethnic communities so that their countries’ manifold heritage is protected and secured;

F. **Recommends** that the WCC reinforces programmes that enhance regional and international advocacy in partnership with Christians in the Middle East and North Africa;

G. **Calls** upon the WCC member churches to express costly solidarity with Christians and churches in the region as well as with all peoples who are struggling for justice and peace, through:

- Supporting efforts to reinvigorate the MECC, in order to enable it to continue being the voice of Middle East Christians to the world, and the trusted source of basic objective information;
- Accompanying Christians in the Middle East as they elaborate a common vision for the region;
- Facilitating responsible pilgrimage to the region;
- Organising solidarity visits in consultation with churches in the region, remaining in active fellowship with them;
- Disseminating educational materials that accurately reflect the geography and history of the Middle East and the realities of sister churches located there;
- Developing exchange programmes to facilitate the sharing of experiences, information on interfaith relations and dialogue among the churches and religions; and
- Supporting local churches in empowering women, young people and children to use and develop their capacities and providing opportunities for their meaningful participation in the churches and society;

H. **Urges** church-related agencies and all ecumenical partners to strengthen their efforts to address the humanitarian needs in Syria and in all neighbouring countries, focusing humanitarian efforts upon (1) assisting Syrians to remain in their home communities, (2) easing the burden of internally displaced persons and the communities hosting them, (3) easing the burden of host families and communities in neighbouring countries, (4) assisting refugees with the goal and intention to facilitate their resettlement into their own communities and homes in Syria, and
**insists** that all governments allow for full humanitarian access, seeking peaceful ways to exert pressure to stop actions of violence;

I. **Urges** the United Nations, and the international community, especially countries that are in positions of political power, to create policies that promote and reach comprehensive peace with justice for all peoples of the region, and to expand every effort to support cessation of violence and military activities;

J. **Reiterates** its call to the United Nations to secure and protect the integrity of the holy sites of all religions in Jerusalem and make them accessible to all as well as to end the occupation of East Jerusalem by Israel;

K. **Demands** the immediate release of the two archbishops from Aleppo, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi) Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Alexandretta and His Eminence Mor Youhanna Gregorios (Ibrahim) Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo in Syria, kidnapped on 22 April 2013 as they were on a humanitarian mission to negotiate the release of two kidnapped priests from Aleppo, as well as Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, kidnapped on 29 July 2013, and all captives and those unjustly imprisoned.

Great God,
Hear us as we cry out to you for peace and justice for the peoples and the land itself.
Grant us homelands where water, land and resources are respected and shared by all.
Help us share your love with our neighbours and plant the seeds of tolerance in our communities.
Comfort us so that our souls are heaved from the wounds of wars and conflicts.
Give us your light that we may walk out of the shadows of death and impunity.
May your justice truly course through our lands like an unstoppable torrent.
Teach us to trust in hope that one day soon all may dwell beneath their vines and fig trees in peace and happiness.
Opening Prayer, WCC 10th Assembly, 30 October 2013

Statement on the politicization of religion and rights of religious minorities, adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, Republic of Korea, 8 November 2013

As Christians we confess the dignity accorded to all human beings by God the creator. This forms the basis for a Christian understanding of human rights. We consider freedom of religion a foundational and distinctive human right of particular importance. We want to acknowledge with gratefulness that in many contexts the importance of religious freedom as expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is acknowledged and safeguarded as a right for all to experience.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), from its inception, has consistently expressed its concern regarding the freedom of religion. The WCC through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) engages member churches through various initiatives in addressing specific situations of freedom of religion and human rights. However, the WCC has never dealt with the issue of the right to religious freedom in isolation. The first WCC assembly in 1948 stated its conviction regarding “freedom of religion as an essential element in good international order” and also affirmed that in “pleading for this freedom, Christians do not ask for any privilege to be granted to Christians that is denied to others”. The Tenth Assembly meeting in Busan during the year of the 1700th anniversary of the issuance of the Edict of Milan granting tolerance to Christians and all religions reiterates its commitment to religious freedom4. The WCC has upheld these principles during the past decades of its struggle for religious freedom and human rights.

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4 The Waldensian Church delegation wished to register its dissent to the mention of the Edict of Milan, feeling that it is unhelpful to make reference in a statement on religious freedom to an historical moment when Church and State became closely aligned, resulting in an era of freedom for only one religion.
Over the years, the WCC has adopted different statements addressing questions related to freedom of religion and human rights as well as responses to specific situations of denial of the right to religious freedom. In recent years the WCC has been concerned about the alarming trend of growing instances of hatred, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief in different parts of the world where religious minorities have been forced to live in vulnerable circumstances. There have been a number of instances reported in recent years from different parts of the world on a rise in the denial of religious freedom to religious minorities. It is in this context that the WCC has taken several initiatives during the past three years specifically to address problems related to the rights of religious minorities.

**Freedom of religion: an inherent human right**

Respect for freedom of religion should be treated as an inherent human right and political virtue which is a fundamental prerequisite for the democratic and peaceful progress of human society. Freedom of religion cannot be enjoyed without equality and justice. There can be no real freedom without equality and there can be no equality without the potential inclusion and participation of all citizens in any society. An adequate Christian understanding of human rights emphasizes freedom, equality and participation as embodiments of human rights. Freedom of religion is based on the intrinsic dignity of a human being, who is endowed by God with reason and free will. The cardinal principle of right to religious freedom, besides being a natural human right and a civil right, is rooted in biblical teaching and a theological emphasis of human dignity. We reiterate our affirmation that all human beings are created in the image of God, and Jesus Christ is the one in whom true humanity is perfectly realized. The presence of the image of God in each human person and in the whole of humanity affirms the essentially relational character of human nature and emphasizes human dignity. Widespread and grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and development of any society and severely impact upon the daily lives of individuals, families and communities and the wellbeing of the society. It is therefore essential first to affirm that all people are endowed with inherent dignity. This is not only because human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), but Christians make the further assertion of this universal and inherent value of all from a Trinitarian perspective.

The WCC has always recognized the significance of international human rights regimes and standards relating to the freedom of religion and belief. During the work of the United Nations while drafting the UDHR of 1948, the CCIA took an active role in formulating Article 18 of the UDHR which articulates “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”. It contains normative core values which constitute the minimum standard that should be protected: inner freedom, external freedom including the propagation of one's religion, freedom from compulsion or coercion, freedom from discrimination, respect of the rights of parents and guardians and the right of the child to religious self-determination, as well as corporate freedom and legal status of religious bodies. This includes the right of conscientious objection as well as reasonable accommodation of employees' belief by employers.

This commitment was subsequently affirmed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both of 1966. This was further expanded in the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, of 1981. These rights also extend to those who do not profess a religion as their thought and conscience enjoy the same freedom. It is our firm conviction based on our theological underpinnings that human
rights do not constitute a goal in themselves for protecting the interests or rights of only certain
groups, but we see human rights show us the direction in which society should develop towards
peace with justice. They are a vehicle enabling the life of everybody to acquire fuller and richer
quality. It is in relation to life that all aspects of human rights must be assessed and in this
context, the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression by individuals must be
realized in every society.

We have reiterated the principles and values of freedom of religion and the duty of states
and governing authorities to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief, in all
its dimensions, for all individuals under their jurisdiction or control without regard to their
religion or belief. It is with these convictions that the WCC emphasises the need to strengthen
the existing protection mechanisms and devise effective safeguards against violations of national
and international law relating to religious freedom. We are of the opinion that there should be
concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order
to protect the right to freedom of religion. In the current context, the fear is quite real that
religious minorities may be further suppressed in certain countries by a rising wave of religious
extremism. The rights of minority religious communities to live in peace and harmony amidst
their neighbours belonging to majority religious communities is vital not only for the people
belonging to faith minority groups but also for overall stability and democratic governance,
especially in countries that are liberated from past elements of authoritarianism.

Rights of religious minorities in all contexts should be rooted in a democratic principle that
majority and minority are to be treated as equal beneficiaries of the state, and that dignity and
human rights of all people are respected and valued. Governments, religious communities,
national and international human rights institutions and civil society organizations should play
different roles in order to protect the rights of religious minorities and promote religious
tolerance, especially when politicization of religion intensifies religious hatred and violates rights
of religious minorities. Violations of freedom of religion or belief against persons belonging to
religious minorities, whether perpetrated by states or non-state actors, need to be combated, be it
in forms of disinformation, discrimination or persecution. Individual and communitarian rights
of people belonging to all religious minorities should be respected. This is what the United
Nations special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief pointed out in his recent report,
saying that, in keeping with the principle of normative universalism, “the rights of persons
belonging to religious minorities cannot be confined to the members of certain predefined
groups. Instead, they should be open to all persons who live de facto in the situation of a minority
and are in need of special protection to facilitate a free and non-discriminatory development of
their individual and communitarian identities”. The rights of persons belonging to all minority
religious groups therefore should be treated as fundamental human rights.

**Politicization of religion and religionalization of politics**

The contemporary world is witnessing a trend of politicization of religion. As religion
occupies a more and more critical space in politics and public life, the politicization of religion
and the religionalization of politics have become pervasive phenomena in many parts of the world.
The trend is that politicization of religion adds to political polarization, and hence the religious
divide manifests itself in almost every corner of the globe. When religion becomes a dividing
force in the social and political arena, in its more intensive and durable form, it can contribute to
a religious chasm. Choosing political allies with more radical positions allows a religion better to
defend its interests in the political arena so as to win a privileged position and favours from the
government. In recent history we have witnessed the multifaceted trend of politicization of
religion, but the flip side of this phenomenon, especially the impact of the religionization of politics, has not always been identified.

The religionalization of politics, which destroys communal harmony and intensifies religious hatred, is simultaneously being instrumentalized for political purposes. The religionization of politics in this context ultimately leads politics to pander to the interests of religious groups and leaders who would like to influence and control political power. Religion is being used as an effective instrument in several countries during national elections in order to create specific vote banks, especially prior to elections. The problems, by and large, persist in the assumption that parties or movements are only successful if they invoke religious identity during elections. The strategies used by certain religious groups are to devise and carve roles for themselves in politics by way of invoking religious sentiments against other, minority religious groups. At the same time they position themselves as true champions of their religion which is under threat from minority religions and their foreign affiliation. When religion is used for political gain, relations between different religious communities are increasingly impacted by changes in local and national politics which have been largely reconfigured along particular religious lines. This trend also adds reasons for people of different religions to think in narrow terms of religious sentiments and consider that their religion is more prominent than others. The rising trend of the politicization of religion thus causes serious problems not only for Christians, but it affects different religious communities who live as minorities in many areas of the world. The politicization of religion and the rise of religious extremism in many societies mutually reinforce each other. It not only poses a threat to freedom of religion of the adherents to minority religions, but the survival of religious minorities is affected.

**Rise in religious intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities**

We have observed with great concern several cases where the exercise of freedom of expression has been used as an excuse to violate freedom of religion for religious minorities. While the concept of “minority” is mostly a social and political construct, on a practical level these sociopolitical constructs can and do have a devastating effect on the group of people who lack the strength of numbers amid a “majority” religious community, although this situation is not restricted to religion alone.

While we recognize and indeed welcome the many positive steps taken towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in numerous contexts, we are also cognizant of the many serious violations of these rights which are of grave concern, such as the violation of the fundamental right to religious freedom by governments, individuals and majority religious groups. The continuing practices which limit the right to change one’s religious status can result in the separation of families, material and social deprivation or even criminal prosecution, imprisonment or the death penalty. Anti-conversion provisions, which are open to misuse and contribute to negative public perceptions of, and violence towards religious minority communities, as found in the legislation of a number of countries should be reconsidered.

We note with concern the tendency in recent years that the discussion on freedom of religion and belief has focussed more on issues related to defamation of religion; this negates the spirit of the universally accepted norm of an individual’s right to freedom of religion and belief. Moving to an approach that protects religions rather than people only undermines the basic human rights principles and international human rights standards as well as giving way to abuse laws in local contexts that persecute religious minorities. The provisions introduced in criminal procedures to misuse blasphemy laws in several countries are clear examples of this. Article 20 of the ICCPR lays down principles that “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that
constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law”. However, the trend is that “incitement to hatred” has been increasing, even in countries that have acceded to the ICCPR. Hence it has become a major concern that incidents which concern article 20 of the ICCPR are not being prosecuted and punished. At the same time a report of the Office of the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2012, “Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred”, observed that:

“the members of minorities are de facto persecuted, with a chilling effect on others, through the abuse of vague domestic legislation, jurisprudence and policies. This dichotomy of (1) no prosecution of “real” incitement cases and (2) persecution of minorities under the guise of domestic incitement laws seems to be pervasive. Anti-incitement laws in countries across the world may be qualified as heterogeneous, at times excessively narrow or vague; jurisprudence on incitement to hatred has been scarce and ad hoc; and while several states have adopted related policies, most of them too general and not systematically followed up, lacking focus and deprived of proper impact-assessments”.

We see the danger that, as majority religious groups use their religion as a tool to influence the political system and political rulers, religious minorities living in the same societies are persecuted and discriminated against. Often their strategies lead to violence which threatens the very existence of the religious minorities. The alarming trend we note is that there are cases where a conflict in one place, with its local causes and character, is misinterpreted and instrumentalized as part of a conflict in another place, especially when extremist groups use religion to legitimize violence. However, it is heartening to note that the key role religion plays in conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace-building is often evident and recognized. In several countries in the world, people who identify themselves as being politically and economically excluded often feel that dominant religious groups which wield power apply discriminatory standards in dealing with minority rights issues such as freedom of religion. Although the reasons for the problems have their roots in socio-economic factors, social fragmentation and communal hatred, such actions may increase even in traditionally tolerant societies when religion is mobilized for political purposes. The prevailing situations, especially in Asia, Africa and the Middle East prove that religions can impact and influence the geo-political contexts of countries and regions. The new developments in the context of the “Arab Spring” witnessed a number of groups and parties in the Middle East and North Africa ascend into dominant positions in the name of majority religion. In countries in the Middle East region such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran, religious minorities live in a situation of fear and insecurity.

There are instances that restrict or limit religious freedom of minority religious communities which have been observed in recent years in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in certain European countries. In practice, the discrimination and intolerance against religious groups in these countries are evident in discourses and regulations introduced by governments that question or ban religious dress, symbols and traditions.

Religious minorities in various countries face discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. Discriminatory legislation and state practices provide a legitimatizing framework for wider discrimination in society. Deprivation, social exclusion and violence towards minorities are the inevitable results of systematic discrimination which threatens the social fabric of society. Numerous religious communities encounter problems in obtaining the legal status necessary to function, as well as in acquiring, building or maintaining properties such as places of worship and burial grounds or facilities. In particular, religious minorities in several countries are denied their
rights in this regard. Discrimination against religious minorities is also seriously affecting their ability to access their rights to education, healthcare and employment and to participate in the political process. In many instances, educational syllabuses and text books portray negatively or under-represent the role of religious minority groups in society. This also serves to affirm existing societal prejudices and promote intolerance and discrimination. Obligatory religious education of children of minority religious backgrounds in the majority faith violates the rights of parents and children. Existing legislations and state practices with regard to mixed marriages in certain countries negatively impact the right to religious freedom in bringing up children of such marriages of people who belong to religious minorities.

The failure of states to protect religious minorities from violence threatens the survival of communities and is in violation of states’ international obligations. The culture of impunity created by failures to investigate and prosecute crimes against members of minority communities in a number of countries is evident in the politicization of religion. For example, the inaction of government and failure to implement a proper law enforcement mechanism results in gradual erosion of a long-nurtured tradition of religious tolerance. This encourages a culture of politicization of religion which threatens the very existence of religious minorities. In a country like Pakistan, the politicization of religion by military dictatorships, introduced through changes in the penal code, systematized the misuse of the Blasphemy Law which is now a major instrument used by the religious extremists against the religious minorities in the country. The politicization of religion in the Indian context constantly threatens communal harmony and peaceful co-existence of people belonging to different faiths. Constitutional guarantees of the right to religious freedom face continual threat and minority religious groups are often under attack from religious extremist groups who try to mobilize religions and religious sentiments for political gains. The politicization of religion and the religionization of politics in different African nations intensify religious hatred, communal violence and political instability. Religious extremist groups of majority religions as well as political parties are responsible for creating such situations. Northern Nigeria, Tanzania, Sudan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Myanmar among others, provide examples of continuing violence in the name of religion and the spread of religious hatred. In certain other situations, ruling governments are using religion to wield the support of majority religions with an aim to create communal vote banks and political power. Often such actions lead to conflicts and violence, especially when governments deny religious freedom as well as when social and government restrictions on religion or a minority group are imposed. Some examples of cases where the WCC has been involved: In Malaysia, where objections to using the word “Allah” by Christians have exacerbated religious hatred and tension over the years, pro-government political parties have been responsible for intensifying the controversy. The Methodist Church of Fiji has been denied its freedom to exist as a religious body and has been continuously denied permission to convene its national assembly in the country due to interference by the government. The government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has categorically denied the Orthodox Archdiocese of Ochrid the right to registration as a religious body. The interference of the government in the country's legal system resulted in the illegal detention of the head of the church. Kosovo faced in recent times systematic destruction of over 100 Orthodox Christian shrines while leading to historical revisionism with regard to their cultural patrimony, threatening the very existence of the Serbian Orthodox faithful. In Albania Orthodox churches are not always adequately protected, with regard to recent incidents of extremely violent actions that have occurred during times of living worship.

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:
A. Reaffirms the commitment of the WCC to the principle of the universal right of all persons to freedom of religion or belief;
B. Reiterates our conviction that the Church is an important element in promoting and defending religious freedom and rights of religious minorities, based on its historic values and ethos of upholding human dignity and the human rights of every individual;
C. Recognizes and reiterates that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief should be the concern and work of the churches and the ecumenical community as part of their prophetic witness;
D. Calls upon WCC member churches to engage actively in defending the rights of all religious minorities and their right to freedom of religion or belief, especially in opposing legislation or regulations that would limit religious freedom in contravention of international human rights standards;
E. Recognizes the positive steps being taken by various states towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in a number of contexts;
F. Expresses grave concern on the increasing trend of politicization of religion and religionization of politics as well as the growing trend of terrorism that threaten the social fabric of a society and the peaceful co-existence of religious communities;
G. Expresses grave concern on state interference in the decision-making processes of religious groups, and the imposition of religious law and jurisprudence through state sanctions;
H. Calls upon the ecumenical community around the world to mediate with their respective governments to develop policies of providing effective protection of persons and communities belonging to minority religions against threats or acts of violence from non-state actors;
I. Calls upon governments to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and enact legislation to protect the rights of members of religious minorities and introduce effective measures and apply universal normative status regarding freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; including the right to change religion and to manifest your belief;
J. Urges states to repeal criminal law provisions that misuse blasphemy laws, apostasy laws or anti-conversion laws to punish deviation from majority religions or to discriminate against religious minorities and violate their right to freedom of religion or belief;
K. Urges states to implement anti-discrimination legislation to protect persons and communities belonging to different religions, especially to end discrimination and persecution for their faith or belief;
L. Commends the UN for its advocacy of freedom of religion or belief and calls on the UN, especially the Human Rights Council, to give the same priority to freedom of religion or belief as is given to other fundamental human rights and to resist any attempts to weaken the principle of freedom of religion or belief;
M. Calls on the UN to strengthen the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; and
N. Calls for concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to address violations of rights of religious minorities and their freedom of religion and belief.

Speech of the general secretary of the WCC
30 October 2013
Business Plenary Hall, Bexco, Busan
Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, dear participants in the 10th Assembly of the WCC,

1. God of life

God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

Everything we are, and are called to be, is given through our faith in God, the triune God, who creates, nurtures and cares for life - our lives and the life of the whole creation.

We are bound up in the mystery of the God of life; we are in a living relationship of the God of life; we are in the life-giving ministry of the God of life.

As it is written in Acts, “In him, we live and move and have our being.”

There are many symbols of life. The most visible is the dawn of every morning. This is described in one of the most beautiful formulations we have in our Bible:

By the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 1: 78-79

The dawn from on high will break upon us.
The life of every new day is a gift of grace from God and humbles us in gratitude.

We are given a place in this dawn to bring the work of yesterday into a new time. It makes us honest; it gives us light to see and speak about life as it is, things as they are, ourselves as churches and human beings as we are.

We become hopeful: The light will shine for those who are in darkness, even in the shadow of death, and we will be guided in the way of peace.

God is creating a new day for us: for all in creation living with threats; for us, as people of different faiths or no faith, facing new and unprecedented conflicts between groups identified by religion; for those who live here in Korea as members of a divided people and families.

God is creating a new day for the worldwide ecumenical movement, building on our experience of a real but not yet full unity in our faith and life.

The dawn comes by the tender compassion of our God of life.

The Holy Bible grounds everything in the God who loves all people and all that is created. God lives with us and calls us to fellowship in the light and in the darkness, in the great moments and the most difficult, even, the shameful moments of human life and history.

The cross of Christ shows us the overwhelming love of God and points always to the resurrection when the God of life claimed victory over sin and death.

The Holy Spirit is present in our lives, in all life, giving us the courage to live, to look forward, to pray and work for the kingdom of God to come and reign among us in this world, with justice, peace and joy. It gives us a hope beyond this life.

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5 This is an abbreviated version of the general secretary’s report which was received by the WCC Assembly delegates in writing and which is available for download here.
God’s creation is more under threat than it has ever been. The globe cannot bear the sum of all the developments and the crises that are present and those which are likely to come. The poorest among us, are the most affected and are becoming increasingly poor.

Affairs cannot continue like this. We know all this from recent reports of the UN climate panel, and other reports; many of you know it from your own experiences.

Yet we also live amid signs of a new dawn and a new day of light and hope. Fully 2.1 billion people have received access to clean drinking water since 1990. Millions have been lifted out of poverty. Many diseases are being cured.

We come here from many contexts. With our diversity we bring stories, experiences, hopes, prayers and vision. We also bring our pain, challenges, and yearnings for justice and peace.

This assembly brings us to Asia, a continent of growth, with the largest share of the world’s people, great wealth and power in the global context, but it is also a continent marked with many worries and many families who do not share in the growth and hope of others.

We are in South Korea, a country where many have overcome poverty through hard work, and the WCC has played a significant role supporting the democratization processes.

Still, the peninsula and people of Korea remain divided, having lived without a peace agreement for more than 60 years. I have visited the Republic of Korea several times, and a few weeks ago I also visited the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and have now visited both sides of the demarcation line feeling the power and pain of the separation.

In the presence of God and with you, our companions on the journey, we perceive the mystery of good despite the world’s evil, and we must bear witness to the tender compassion of our God.

2. Lead us - a fellowship of churches

2.1 WHO AND WHAT IS THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES?

Let us therefore claim this moment of a new dawn by going back to basics. Our basis is that we are

…a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We - the churches - have a legacy as the WCC for which we give thanks to God. Among the dramatic events, severe injustices and crises the world had to face and be rescued from in the 20th Century, significant initiatives were born.

The ecumenical movement and the WCC have been instrumental in cultivating better and stronger, deeper and wider, and more mutually accountable relationships.

Some of us have needed the ecumenical movement and the WCC more than others.

In all of this, the fellowship has always needed you, the churches.
The greatest asset of the WCC is you, the 345 member churches with two churches well advanced in the application process. Therefore we have done our utmost to ensure that as many of the member churches as possible could be present here in Busan.

We should focus on how to emphasize the WCC’s unique “added value”. We represent authentic ecumenical connections between East and West, North and South. On the basis of our churches’ experience, we contribute to the understanding of human dignity, human rights, freedom of religion and peace between the peoples.

I trust we will have even strong governing bodies after the decisions we make about our constitution in our Assembly.

To be a fellowship of churches, we all have to contribute according to our size and our resources. What we have as churches does not belong to ourselves alone. We have, as WCC, staff and a secretariat. We have partners in the ecumenical movement who expect a lot from us. We have funding partners for our programmes, for whom we are extremely grateful, who are faithfully committing themselves to contribute to and be more involved in our projects.

2.2 SINCE THE LAST ASSEMBLY

We have had a challenging period since our last assembly, and numerous challenges which we have addressed.

It is quite remarkable that, even with fewer resources these years have also been a time of rich harvest.

On behalf of this Assembly, I present our heartfelt thanks to the Moderator, Walter Altmann, to the vice-moderators, as well as to my predecessor Sam Kobia. I also thank the presidents, all members of the Central and Executive Committees as well as all my former and present colleagues for their many efforts since Porto Alegre.

We have worked to create efficiencies in the organization, to become more focused on the impact of programmes, better to coordinate programme and relationship-building work.

We have taken initiatives for finding new funding partners.

2.3 THE ECUMENICAL CENTRE IN GENEVA

The WCC is located wherever you are as member churches. You are the WCC. However, to be in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva is a great asset in itself. It places us in the midst of international organizations and their work for justice, peace and much more related to our call and agenda.

Our presence in Geneva for more than 65 years is an important part of church history.

We have embarked on a plan for developing the property in Geneva. I am happy to report to you that this process has advanced in a very solid way, utilizing our real estate in a way that serves us and improves the quality of that area of Geneva.

2.4 CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY

I often summarize the unique qualities of the relationships we have and are called to nurture in the WCC in one word: solidarity.

As Saint Paul writes:
“No part of the body can say to another: ‘I have no need of you.’”

Christian solidarity in the light of the cross of Christ represents a strong biblical principle which has become a foundation for all ecumenical relationships. It is in this solidarity with the groaning world that we pray.

God in Jesus Christ makes a “preferential option for the poor.” To follow Jesus Christ means to do the same. To be baptized into Christ is to share in the cross and the resurrection, giving us courage to hope in life and in death.

Christian solidarity is not exclusive, and cannot mean being against the others.

2.5 THE QUEST FOR UNITY

Unity is an expression of the life given by God and a way to live in a new solidarity. We see the significance of the gift and calling of unity in the body of Christ. Christian unity is inextricably connected with the unity of all humanity and creation.

This is profoundly expressed in several of the documents this Assembly receives and makes its own, including Faith and Order’s document *The Church and the proposed Unity Statement*.

Through sharing and discussing, we have experienced the gift of unity, but also in coming to agreement in significant matters through thoughtful processes and in particular through practicing consensus methodology in decision-making.

Yet we also find that it serves our unity to know in which issues we do not press for consensus at the moment, where we know that we have to live with and allow safe space to deal with different positions.

And among many different initiatives we have developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Global Christian Forum, affirming the different but complimentary roles of the WCC and conciliar ecumenical bodies and the relationships that can be established through the forum.

2.6 SOLIDARITY IN MISSION

A new mission statement has received broad and significant recognition, and has already become a landmark in the work on mission in our time.

The participation of missiologists and church leaders from many parts of the ecumenical family demonstrates the wide contribution to this document. The mission of the church is diakonia and evangelism; showing the love of our God to all. To be missional is to be church in solidarity with those who are marginalized. In fact, mission is defined by and comes to us from the margins.

2.7 THE WAY OF JUST PEACE

Just peace is a way, a journey – a difficult one at times – through which we must address our own complicity with injustice and violence in its many forms.

The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) held in Kingston, Jamaica, 2011, demonstrated that the work of just peace is more than an activity of the WCC but something at the very core of our Christian identity.
The search for just peace must continue as a way to understand the right dynamic between justice and peace, knowing that all contexts are different. We must see what just peace means as an alternative way forward, and contribute what we can as a fellowship.

2.8 SOLIDARITY WITH PEOPLES AND CHURCHES IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

In light of the fact that Damascus was an alternative venue for the WCC central committee as the site of this Assembly, this call to just peace comes particularly close to our hearts as we gather for our Assembly. Together with the peoples and churches of Syria we - you - have been praying for justice and peace. ACT Alliance with its many partners has been addressing the human tragedy evolving before our eyes.

Recently the WCC convened a high level meeting with church leaders from Syria, Russia, the United States of America and numerous European nations. We met in Bossey with Kofi Annan, former United Nations general secretary, and Lakdhar Brahimi, UN-Arab League joint representative for Syria. They urged that we, the churches, use the significant role we have to advocate for a peace process.

We plan a second meeting, at the beginning of the Geneva II conference. The Geneva II conference cannot fail its task to find a peaceful way forward towards a political solution of the conflict.

We are particularly called as a world community of Christians to be in solidarity with those who live where the history of our faith has its roots. We think of Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Palestine. With them, we believe that the way to peace is to move forward into a culture and practice of democracy and citizenship, with equal rights for all.

There is hardly any place where the people have been in need of a just peace longer than in Palestine Israel. We have taken many initiatives to address the occupation, to end violence and to accompany the peoples in this conflict, for example. Through the EAPPI Programme, and to coordinate your efforts and our theological reflections through the (Palestine/Israel Ecumenical Forum.

During this period we have addressed the need for Christians solidarity in many places.

In Pakistan, the churches have been deeply wounded by the killing of church members and destruction of their churches. A number of instances of rights of minorities and freedom of religion have been addressed together with the Churches Commission for International Affairs.

In Canada, the work for the rights of indigenous peoples has exposed how Christian doctrine there and in many countries has been abused to suppress others, even taking away land and culture. In spite of this legacy, the local churches of First Nations peoples are growing.

I have also met the president of South Sudan who expressed the signs of the new dawn for his people through the peace agreement of 2011. He personally thanked the WCC for its faithful solidarity and many efforts, together with many partners in the ecumenical family, for our work to secure a sustainable peace for the peoples of Sudan and the liberation of South Sudan.

In my many visits to see you as churches in all continents of the world, I have learned again and again that those who deal with the worst conditions and the heaviest cross to carry are often those who have the strongest expression of faith and solidarity with others.
Now is the time to welcome together the dawn from on high, to get up, to open windows and doors and go together into the new day.

Thus, we are not here to discuss if we can make a difference together as a fellowship of churches, we are here to discern how and with whom we can offer our contributions.

We are called to advance, to embody the image, of the servant church.

3. A pilgrimage of justice and peace

3.1 WHERE ARE WE GOING?
This is why I find that a pilgrimage of justice and peace should be the vision for what we do together in the period until the next Assembly.

We are together here in Busan to make our own mosaic, bringing together our different parts through prayer, sharing, conversations, discernment and decisions.

3.2 A JOURNEY TOGETHER
Our programmes and new initiatives should carry out an integral vision, involving one another and building relationships between us as churches and partners.

The work of the WCC must reflect the engagement and commitment of member churches. People in villages the world and in the international organizations next to us in Geneva should be able to see this uniqueness, and make use of it.

To give one example: In June 2012, we had the first official WCC meeting in the People’s Republic of China when the CCIA commission gathered in Shanghai and Nanjing. We should work more closely with the China Christian Council (CCC), our largest Asian member church, in such a significant context for the church and the world.

We need to find the points of energy for our work. We are called to share the resources we need for this work. They belong to the God of life, and we are stewards of these resources. These offerings may be financial resources and in-kind assistance, but they also may be what you can offer of your human resources for shorter or longer periods.

We go into this new day bringing the legacy and the learning, with a renewed profile and with revised priorities.

3.3 SPIRITUALITY OF PILGRIMAGE
Our ecumenical spirituality should embody this image of pilgrimage. Our prayer together should strengthen our willingness to see the new challenges and tasks together, in simplicity, not preoccupied with ourselves.

Therefore, we should try to see together how our work could be shaped accordingly, as it is divided into three main areas in our programme plans: unity and mission, public witness and diakonia, and ecumenical formation.

3.4 UNITY AND MISSION
Unity is a gift of life together. What the Spirit has given us is not to be kept as our own property.

The WCC has a special role in this work, by empowering others, ecumenical institutions, councils, all of our partners. We must bring the depth of our relationships into the next period.
We value and nurture our relationship with the whole ecumenical movement.

The identity of the church is missional. This must be the perspective through which we undertake all of what we do.

The changing religious landscape offers the opportunity to engage in creative work on being a missional church in a secular context, renewing our call to evangelism and public witness.

A Faith and Order world conference on renewal in 2017 will be a significant way to mark the 500 years since the Reformation, but it is also a way to explore how we are renewed and by which theological principles.

3.5 ADVOCACY IN PUBLIC WITNESS AND DIAKONIA

There is a role for the council to say what is true in the right time and to the right people. In our advocacy role, we must be professional, pastoral and prophetic.

We have the opportunity of being partners with other important global institutions with common goals and interests. We are ready to contribute to the renewal of the United Nations organization, to become an expression of “we the people” and not only “we the nations”, as the UN Charter itself formulates it.

We will continue to work in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council. Together with the next Churches Commission on International Affairs we shall be ready and have the capacities to be both proactive in taking new initiatives and respond to developing conflicts and crises.

Let me name some examples of new initiatives we are considering:

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the WCC is asked to make a new, substantial effort for peace and reconciliation together with that nation’s churches.
- We have initiated a new project together with the International Labour Organization to explore just peace through access to decent work in Egypt.
- Life must be sustainable for all, human beings and creatures. There is a deep connection between economy, ecology, and ecumenism. We need to develop this vision of an economy of life for all.
- We are ready to take the next steps of working with UNAIDS and churches in all continents to address HIV and AIDS.
- The huge efforts of churches and ecumenical partners for migrants should be given a proper corresponding contribution from the unique position of the WCC.
- The work to make the churches just and inclusive communities is a way to give space for the many resources represented in the diversity among us.

The WCC has played a significant role in bringing the people of the North and the South of Korea together. This Assembly should speak wisely and firmly to promote peace among all the Koreans. I am proposing new initiatives for a high level meeting in Geneva of church leaders from several of the involved countries, to continue addressing the underlying problems of this unsolved conflict. Peace is a condition of justice for all, and proper relationships require respect for one another, for human dignity and human rights.

3.6 ECUMENICAL FORMATION
Ecumenical formation ensures the ongoing strength of our institution as well as the whole ecumenical movement. The Bossey Ecumenical Institute not only educates, but offers experiential learning through the development of common life in community.

The work of Ecumenical Theological Education develops theological and ecumenical competencies in all parts of the world. The ecumenical movement must promote that legacy through ensuring that those in the North and South, East and West, for men and women, for lay and ordained, be part of the renewal, formation and education.

3.7 THE NEXT GENERATION

We are part of an ecumenical movement in which younger people and their organizations bring vibrancy and offer us potential for renewal. We want you to be with us and join in our work.

About 600 of the participants in this assembly are youth. Learning from our experiences with the ECHOS commission, we need your contributions in all dimensions of the WCC’s work. We also need to find more adequate and flexible structures for this than one commission.

3.8 COMMUNICATION

To do a lot together for justice and peace we must communicating well with one another, with the many who build public opinion, and with the people and institutions of power. This Assembly represents new methods of sharing information. We will continue to share information and publications through a variety of media.

Sharing information is not only telling about we are doing, but a very important means of undertaking what we mean by a pilgrimage of justice and peace together.

3.9 A FELLOWSHIP OF WOMEN AND MEN

One of the great legacies of the WCC to be renewed and to be carried forward is the work to improve the just and mutually supportive fellowship of women and men. The voices and contribution of women should be given even more space in our fellowship if we mean what we say about solidarity. This requires greater prominence in responsibilities and leadership in all aspects of our common life.

3.10 INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

We have to develop the quality of inter-religious relations even more. By embracing common values and by finding ways of moving forward in conversation and conviction we hold the potential to increase the work on our common goals. At the same time we want to do what is possible to reduce the impact of extremists’ violent actions.

As we embark on a pilgrimage of justice and peace, we need to work with all people of good will who share our vision and commitment to reflect the common value of life for all. We should continue to strengthen our relations with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and other peoples of faith

1. CONCLUSION: THE WCC GIVING LEADERSHIP IN THE PILGRIMAGE

The WCC has a leadership role in the ecumenical movement, and we take this responsibility seriously.

The test of fellowship is our humility, our willingness to listen to the other, to receive gifts, gifts we did not even know we needed.
It is in our honesty that we acknowledge that in our advocacy work we do not know everything, yet still we courageously make our contributions for the common good.

And it is in our hopefulness that we discover those glimpses of the new life we receive when we work together in common witness and service, when we experience greater communion, when others listen to our voices when we speak truth to power.

It is our time and task now to do even more to make visible what that means.

Our success will be measured not only by our progress, but by the experience of moving together. We are here to discern these directions forward together.

In the life of God we can face life as it is. And I believe that the God of life is now creating a new possibility for the council.

The dawn from on high is breaking upon us.

And so our pilgrimage can begin:
“*Our feet will be led into the way of peace.*”

**Letter from CCIA director to the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Argentina to the United Nations in Geneva condemning the burning of the temple of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina in Rosario, 3 October 2013**

Your Excellency,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the burning of the temple of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina-Rosario Norte, in the city of Rosario, on 27th September 2013. This is all the more so, as the building where the temple is located also served as the regional headquarters of the Rosario Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH). We strongly deplore the arson which caused serious damages to the temple and destroyed the academic library and part of the documentations related to the work of the MEDH.

Such acts of vandalism in a place of worship offend not only the religious sentiments of believers but also of all those who are fighting for the protection and promotion of human rights, as this attack not only damaged a place of worship but also an institution which enjoyed local, national and international recognition in the struggle for the defence of human rights and has played an important role in the restoration of democracy in the Republic of Argentina.

As a worldwide fellowship of churches with a long history of engagement in the defence of human rights at regional and international level, we strongly condemn such acts and we hope, your Excellency, that the authorities of your government in Argentina will take necessary actions to undertake a thorough investigation and do what is necessary to bring those responsible to justice.

Respectfully yours,
Mathews George,
Director, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA)

**Open letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, prime minister of Pakistan regarding a recent series of bomb attacks, 3 October 2013**
Your Excellency,

It is with profound distress that we received the news of the three suicide bomb attacks and deadly bomb blasts in Peshawar within a week. First in this series of attacks, a suicide blast in a heritage church killed 85 Christian worshippers on Sunday 22 September, five days later on Friday, 27 September 19 people died when a bus bomb targeted government employees returning home, and the latest on 29 September a bomb blast that ripped through a market in the same city of Peshawar killed more than 40 people. In all these attacks, precious innocent lives have been lost. The World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by the present environment of growing terrorism and religious rage and intolerance in Pakistan that has given rise to such attacks.

The World Council of Churches has expressed its serious concern about the safety and security of the religious minorities in Pakistan in the highly charged situation of growing religious extremism. During my visit to Pakistan in October 2011, I had opportunities to listen to stories of the plight of Christians in Pakistan and also to understand the fear of religious minorities in the country who have been living amidst insecurity and lack of adequate protection.

The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned by these acts of terror. By expressing our strong condemnation of these acts of terrorism, we express our sincere condolences to and sympathy, especially to the families of those who were killed and injured. We hold all people of Pakistan in our thoughts and prayers.

Your Excellency, we are aware of the difficulties faced by the people of Pakistan and your government as a result of the continuous bombings and growing terrorist activities that have resulted in an increasing number of civilian casualties. We urge your Excellency that all necessary measures be undertaken to provide safety and security of the vulnerable communities, especially the religious communities who are facing constant threat to their lives.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Pakistan on church bombings in Peshawar, 23 September 2013

"Jesus said… 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'…"
John 11:25-26 (NRSV)

On behalf of the WCC, I wish to express our heartfelt sorrow at the heavy loss of life from the bombing at All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan.

This deliberate targeting of a vulnerable Christian community came at the end of divine worship on Sunday, 22 September and is the single worst loss of life among Christians in Pakistan.

It is particularly tragic given that All Saints Church, Peshawar, one of the oldest Christian churches in Pakistan, witnesses by the building’s very resemblance to traditional Islamic architecture to the desire of the Christians of Pakistan to live peacefully with their Muslim neighbours and fellow citizens.
Last week in the World Council of Churches we organized a consultation on the “Politicization of religion and the rights of religious minorities” during which we heard a speaker from Pakistan describe the ongoing difficulties of the Christian community there.

It has deeply saddened us to receive the news of this terrible attack. We express our sympathy for all who have been bereaved, our prayers for those who have been injured, and we commemorate in prayer those whose lives have been lost.

We commit ourselves anew to working for the well-being of the Christian community in Pakistan, and express our solidarity with the community at this time of grief. We call for an end to the wanton violence that has been perpetrated and ask the government of Pakistan to protect all of its citizens from those who are bent on dividing the country and causing suffering to the innocent.

In the name of Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Communiqué adopted at the WCC international consultation on the crisis in Syria,
Geneva, 18 September 2013

Church leaders from Syria, Russia, United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Turkey and representatives of international organizations in Geneva gathered for a World Council of Churches consultation on the crisis in Syria together with Mr Kofi Annan and the Joint Representative for Syria, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi.

Churches worldwide have spoken out against the war in Syria. Now is the time to raise one voice for peace and work for a negotiated solution among all parties to the conflict. Blessed are the peace-makers, the Scriptures say. Churches must continue to raise their voice in their congregations and with their governments. We must strengthen the public outcry so that those in power will protect the common interest of humanity.

We believe there can be no military solution to the crisis in Syria. It is time for the international community to assume its responsibility to end the violence and initiate a political process that brings peace for all the people of Syria. Resolute action now is necessary to save lives; waiting has already cost many lives. Collective action for peace is needed to save not only the people of Syria but also the surrounding region as well.

We urge the United Nations Security Council to adopt without delay a resolution based on the 14 September agreement by the Russian and American foreign ministers. We call on the governments of Russia and the United States to exercise their major responsibility for peace, collaborating to convince national and foreign parties to the conflict to put an end to the violence and accept the multilateral compromises that are essential for peace.

The Security Council must also set a date for a second peace conference on Syria, building on the foundations agreed but not implemented after the peace conference in 2012 in Geneva. Many tens of thousands more lives have been lost since then. Many thousands more lives are at stake now. To fail to reach conclusive results at the next Geneva conference is not an option.
The current openings for negotiations also need immediate steps to de-escalate the conflict, including the adoption of an arms embargo by the Security Council and measures to stop the flow of foreign combatants into Syria.

The humanitarian situation in Syria and in neighbouring countries is precarious. Humanitarian assistance is a vital aspect of the churches’ mission and solidarity with those suffering. Such aid also contributes toward a process of reconciliation. National, regional and international church ministries are alleviating the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Syrians affected by the war. It is important for church-related agencies to redouble their efforts now, including aid for refugees. Full humanitarian access is essential, as stipulated in the 2012 Geneva conference.

Christians in Syria are an integral part of a diverse society with a rich history. They have their place in civil society and commit themselves to build a future for Syria where citizens of all faiths enjoy equal rights, freedom and social justice. They are also committed to engage in constructive dialogues with other religious and ethnic communities so that Syria’s pluralistic heritage is protected and secured. The WCC and the wider ecumenical family support such a process.

We join the people of Syria in prayer for a peaceful future for the country and the whole Middle East, and may our Lord keep them in His grace.

Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to H.E. Mr Edi Rama, prime minister of the Republic of Albania, expressing concern about violent incidents at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, in Premeti, 16 September 2013

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the leadership of the World Council of Churches and of the Conference of European Churches, please accept our congratulations for your newly elected government and our best wishes for your work in the coming years.

We are writing to express our profound concern about the violent incident that took place at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, a holy place of the Orthodox Christianity for centuries, in the town of Premeti, Albania, on 16 August and in the days that followed.

With great dismay we received the news that on the day following the celebration of the Dormition of Virgin Mary, a group of private police officers facilitated by employees of the municipality, attached and forcibly removed the clergy, removed and threw away the Christian holy scriptures and holy chalice and sealed the Church, thus preventing the faithful from accessing their place of religious worship.

These events tarnish the international image of Albania and bring to mind sad images of the past. Irrespective of any alleged legal claims on the part of the local authorities, such acts of vandalism and sacrilege are unacceptable and reprehensible in a democratic society which has an obligation to provide guarantees for the respect of the rule of law, fundamental freedom and rights, such as the right to freedom of religion, which includes the unhindered exercise of religion and the protection of the places of worship.

We strongly concur with his Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania who from the Cathedral fo the Resurrection in Tirana said that ‘we cannot allow the sacrilege of holy sites and temples in the 21st century, not in a Europe of fundamental rights and freedoms’ and called
upon your government to abide by the agreement it signed with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania for the return of the traditional holy places and archives, which as of January 2009 is a law of the Albanian State.

In October 2012, the European Commission recommended that Albania be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform. The European Union is ‘founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law’. Such acts of vandalism not only constitute a serious violation of one of the core values of the European Union and of the priorities of the United Nations, but also a grave offence to other religious sentiments of all Christians in Albania and worldwide.

We are aware that the Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief and protection for the rights and freedom of religious minorities. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory party to all the major UN human rights conventions. We hope that your new government will heal the wounds, injustices and discrimination against religious minorities of the past. There, your Excellency, we call upon your government, to guarantee the free access of all faithful to their places of worship, in this case the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, to resolve the issue in accordance to the international obligations of your country, guarantying and safeguarding freedom of religion for all the citizens of Albania and to take all necessary steps to punish those responsible for these condemnable acts of vandalism and sacrilege.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre
General secretary
World Council of Churches Conference of European Churches

Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries expressing concern about violent incidents at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, in Premeti, 28 August 2013

The letter was sent to H.E. Mr Edi Rama, prime minister of the Republic of Albania, the EU special representative for Human Rights, the UN high commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the leadership of the World Council of Churches and of the Conference of European Churches, we are writing to express our profound concern about the violent incidents that took place at the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary, a holy place of the Orthodox Christianity for centuries, in the town of Premeti, Albania, on 16 August and in the days that followed.

With great dismay we received the news that on the day following the celebration of the Dormition of Virgin Mary, a group of a private security company staff facilitated by employees of the municipality, attacked and forcibly removed the clergy, removed and threw away the Christian holy scriptures and holy chalice and sealed the church, thus preventing the faithful
from accessing their place of religious worship. Even if there was some dispute involved, a church and its holy site cannot be handled this way without a reaction from the authorities.

These events tarnish the international image of Albania and bring to mind sad images of the past. Irrespective of any alleged legal claims on the part of the local authorities, such acts of vandalism and sacrilege are unacceptable and reprehensible in a democratic society which has an obligation to provide guarantees for the respect of the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and rights, such as the right to freedom of religion, which includes the unhindered exercise of religion and the protection of the places of worship.

We strongly concur with His Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania who from the Cathedral of the resurrection in Tirana said that "we can not allow the sacrilege of holy sites and temples in the 21st century, not in a Europe of fundamental rights and freedoms" and called upon the Albanian Government, to abide by the agreement it signed with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania for the return of the traditional holy places and archives, which as of January 2009 is a law of the state.

In October 2012, the European Commission recommended that Albania be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform. The European Union is ‘founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law’. Such acts of vandalism not only constitute a serious violation of one of the core values of the European Union and of the priorities of the United Nations, but also a grave offence to the religious sentiments of all Christians in Albania and worldwide.

The Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief and protection for the rights and freedoms of religious minorities. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory party to all the major UN human rights conventions. Therefore, your Excellency, we call upon your good offices to ensure that Albania abides by its international obligations for the respect of the rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms and more particularly the right to religious freedom, for all its citizens and that it guarantees the free practice of religion and access of all faithful to their place of worship, in this case of the Orthodox Christians to the Church of the Presentation of Virgin Mary and that it takes all necessary steps to punish those responsible for these condemnable acts of vandalism and sacrilege.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr. Guy Liagre
General secretary
Conference of European Churchers

Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Egypt calling for prayers for peace and expressing concern over the burning of churches and violence following protests on 14 August, 15 August 2013

The World Council of Churches and its member churches are greatly concerned by the violent turn of events in Egypt and call for an immediate end of violence from all sides. The World Council of Churches calls for prayer for all Egyptians for healing, justice and peace. The
only way forward is for mutual recognition as equal citizens within Egypt, sharing responsibilities and authority, accepting the diversity of political opinions and religious beliefs.

We deeply regret the attacks against several churches and properties of the Christian community in different areas of the country that have occurred in the last days.

Since 25 January 2011 Egypt has been experiencing a critical moment in its history. The Egyptian people showed on different occasions their belief in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society where all parties join hands in facing the current challenges and building a better future based on social justice and human dignity. We believe that the commitment of all Egyptians to justice and peace will help them to overcome all obstacles and reach common expectations.

We are thankful to see that the churches of Egypt, even in this situation, are witnesses of God’s peace on earth. Throughout history they have offered up many sacrifices and martyrs for their beloved country.

Let us pray for all the Egyptians; may God grant them comfort, heal their wounds and accompany them on their way to justice and peace.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Open Letter of solidarity to Buddhist brothers and sisters expressing sorrow and solidarity over the blasts in the Mahabodhi temple complex in Bodh Gaya, India on 7 July 2013, 16 July 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Greetings from the World Council of Churches, Geneva!

Deeply saddened by the news of the recent blasts in the precincts of the Mahabodhi temple in the pilgrimage town of Bodh Gaya in the north Indian state of Bihar, we convey this letter as an expression of our heartfelt sorrow and solidarity following this unexpected and unjustifiable event which targeted one of your oldest and most holy shrines. What has been subjected to attack is not only an important religious site but also the moral fabric of respect for difference and diversity, which encourages and ensures the equality of people of all faiths. This makes the incident even more deplorable.

We recognize the damage that such unprovoked acts inflict on the religious sentiments of Buddhists across the world and want to let you know that you are not alone in your sense of fear and loss. Though we share the widespread relief that neither the interiors of the Mahabodhi temple nor the Bodhi tree (tree of awakening) widely believed to be a descendant of the Peepal tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment were damaged in the blasts, we acknowledge the very act of targeting a religious shrine as being hugely detrimental to peaceful relations between religious communities, and we condemn the motives behind it. We hope and pray for justice and peace to prevail at this time. May your rich spiritual tradition inspire you to prevent an escalation of events into further violence and inspire a spirit of understanding and right consciousness that will enhance peace and harmony.
This incident has opened our eyes to the fragility of interreligious relations across the world and reminds us, yet again, of the urgent need for people of all religions to commit ourselves more proactively to live in mutual trust and respect. A time such as this challenges us to demonstrate in concrete terms that the power of hospitality can overcome the power of hostility. Today this calls us to both a sensitive and perceptive recognition of the globally connected nature of religious violence, and a firm reaffirmation of our commitment to grow in our understanding of our neighbouring faiths so that we may work together in a spirit of interreligious collaboration and cooperation to further the flourishing of all life.

For Christians, transforming adversity into witness is a mark of the efficacy of the faith which is within us. In a spirit of such understanding we wish and hope that this incident, despite its traumatic and tragic dimensions, may be transformed into an opportunity to offer the world a glimpse of the best of your morality and spirituality as you discern the way forward. To this end we offer you our support and solidarity.

With best wishes,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Message of solidarity and support from WCC general secretary to member churches in Egypt on the country's political crisis, 10 July 2013

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I express my deep concern over the news coming from Egypt reporting dangerous escalation of violence in several parts of the country, which have resulted in more than fifty persons killed and hundreds more wounded. The WCC has always condemned the use of violence as a means of resolving conflicts.

We want to assure the Egyptian people of our support for their ongoing efforts to maintain their unity within the diversity of their political affiliations. Together with our member churches in Egypt, and in the wider ecumenical family, we are praying for a peaceful and inclusive transitional process, in which all parties will work together to form a government that will lead the country to stability, justice and peace.

We strongly support the efforts of the churches in Egypt, working together with their Muslim partners and all other political parties and civil society organizations and actors, to facilitate peace-building through a reconciliation and healing process on a national level. We encourage all political parties to engage in this process so that national unity is preserved.

We are confident that the Egyptian people who rose up claiming dignity, freedom and equality will find peaceful ways to reach these common goals, while respecting political and religious diversity. We are also confident that political and religious leaders in Egypt are aware that in critical historical moments of change and transformation in political systems, inclusive processes are vital for the unity of the nation, while exclusive ones lead to frustration and disappointments.

Yours in our Common Lord,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
Manuel Marzouk
WCC general secretary

Statement by WCC general secretary condemning violence against religious leaders and religious communities, 28 June 2013

Manipulation of religion in the Syrian crisis

Recent reports from Syria indicate once more that religious communities are being targeted in acts of violence aimed at dividing and manipulating the nation. I write to underline the rejection by the World Council of Churches of any attempt to use religion as an instrument of psychological warfare, political strategy or intimidation.

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches, I am profoundly shocked and deeply concerned over the brutal murder on the evening of Saturday 22 June of Father François Mourad in the village of Al-Ghassaniyah. This killing seems to have been a targeted attack against the Monastery of St Anthony. I also extend my deep and sincere condolences to Fr François’ family, his Franciscan brothers, as well as to the custos of the Holy Land, Fr PierbattistaPizzaballa and His Beatitude Ignatius Youssef III Younan, patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch. May Fr François’ memory be eternal in our Lord’s mind and in the heart of those who loved and knew him.

The Christian people of the village of Al-Ghassaniyah, as well as Father François himself, had desired to stay peacefully in this part of Syria, where they have lived for centuries, alongside local Muslim communities. Sadly and alarmingly, it is becoming apparent that foreign radical and terrorist elements are making use of the conflict in Syria and are deliberately targeting Christians, not sparing clergy and religious institutions and shrines. Their attacks are an attempt to sow interreligious tension, as are similar attacks that have taken place on Alawite, Shi’ite and Sunni communities and houses of worship, as well as the destruction in March of the oldest Jewish synagogue in Syria.

We have been assured by a number of Syrian Muslim leaders, with whom we are in regular contact and dialogue, of their horror at brutal actions which seem deliberately intended to create hostility between Christians and Muslims in Syria and the wider Middle East. We strongly encourage and invite them to condemn all those who seek to misuse Islam as a justification for aggression against neighbours, and especially against civilians. We remember how, in March 2011, the beginning of the peaceful uprising in Syria, reclaiming freedom, dignity and equal citizenship, seemed to be a sign of hope for the Syrian people and for the whole region. We are now looking at a completely different and tragic picture.

We continue to pray for the safe release of Metropolitan Mar Gregorios Youhanna Ibrahim and Metropolitan BoulosYazigi, abducted on April 22, of all those who are kidnapped, and of other political prisoners. I assure the people of Syria, and our member churches in the region, of the determination of the World Council of Churches to stand in solidarity with them at this very difficult time of pain and suffering.

Advocacy strategies on Indigenous Peoples issues, 27 June 2013

Report of the Consultation on Developing Advocacy Strategies for WCC Work on Indigenous Peoples Issues

Church Centre, New York, 21-23 May 2013
The World Council of Churches has been involved in indigenous people's issues for decades. It has played a key role since the beginning of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), especially in the process towards the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Issues, and also the work of Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

There are several member churches, organizations and individuals within the ecumenical movement committed to indigenous issues, and living in indigenous communities. In preparation for the world conference, and with a view to develop a coordinated advocacy agenda towards the UN World Conference on Indigenous People's Issues to be held in conjunction with the first week of the UN General Assembly in September 2014, an ecumenical expert consultation was held in New York in May 2013.

In order to identify relevant issues for reflection and action to contribute substantially in the global dialogue and also for ecumenical advocacy strategies, this consultation focused on two key areas. These are: 1. The **Doctrine of Discovery and its continuing impact** through its legitimisation of extractive industries that displace and destroy many Indigenous People and other vulnerable communities besides harming the eco-system; and 2. **Evangelism** in relation to indigenous communities—historically and now, with a view to clarify the role of the ecumenical movement in supporting and advocating respect for cultural and spiritual traditions in the indigenous communities in the view of reconciliation and of re-creating confidence and trust.

The following issues were discussed:

- Abuse of land and people
- The increased threat by extractive industries to indigenous cultures, land and climate
- The need to focus on spirituality: right to spirituality and spirituality as an integrated dimension of culture, in particular when approaching and interacting with member states around indigenous peoples’ rights.
- Need to replace the Doctrine of Discovery with a “Doctrine of Reconciliation”
- Need for liberation of theology and to “decolonize Jesus”
- Need for analyzing processes of “othering” – the ‘we’ and ‘them’ syndromes, particularly in relation to mission and evangelism
- Need for building a movement of solidarity with indigenous peoples
- Two agendas for advocacy: (1) toward the UN and its member states, and (2) toward the WCC member churches
- Advocacy at the UN requires a focused message and a strong identity of the messenger
- Advocacy to churches must aim to encourage, educate, and inspire, and must invite churches to discover how indigenous spirituality and theological reflection can contribute to enrich and renew the broader ecumenical discourse and challenge the churches
- Need for an ecumenical network in solidarity with indigenous peoples – to be pressure and pleasure groups within the ecumenical movement
- Need for strategizing in preparation for the WCC Pre-assembly and Assembly, Permanent Forum in May 2014, World Conference in September 2014
- Need for a WCC “platform” affirming and recalling positions previously adopted by the WCC on issues related to the indigenous peoples agenda at the UN, with the purpose of serving as a policy brief for advocacy in capitals and at the UN (Geneva and New York). Need to examine own statements, compare them to UNDRIP and hold governments accountable.
• Need to address and to undertake the task to “dismantle” the Doctrine of Discovery as a means to embark on the road of decolonizing attitudes and “mission strategies,” and to prevent repetition in relation to the ongoing race for natural resources in the Arctic and elsewhere. Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery is not enough; dismantling it varies locally.
• Should be a focus on extractive industries and the damage they cause, and how indigenous rights—as they have been recognized in UNDRIP and ILO Conventions No. 107 and No. 169, are abused.
• The potential for making alliances with environmental organizations and organizations involved in advocacy around climate change should be explored.
• Need to establish dialogue with extractive industries through Global Compact.
• Right to land, spirituality and identity could be a relevant theme for reflection and focus on advocacy;
• Need for storytelling within the church about experiences of indigenous peoples
• Suggestions to submit reports to the UN on for example spirituality or any other theme that is relevant to the competence, experience and identity of the ecumenical movement
• The need to acknowledge that UNDRIP is an invitation to work together, and that it is not a threat but a framework for reconciliation
• Need to call member states to implement UNDRIP
• Build awareness on the close relation between indigenous spirituality and connection to the land
• Interdependence must replace the notion of dependence. As someone said, ‘we don’t need help; we need relatives’.
• Recognize that there is an inter faith dimension to the work
• The notion of metanoia should play an important role in theological reflection – “all my relations”.
• Important to make member churches aware of how big the indigenous populations are around the globe (350 million?)
• Bring in the discussions of the ‘s’ in relation to peoples, especially at the UNPFII.
• Churches should be involved in the discussions on “Access to Justice” relative to the current study conducted by EMRIP.

Some suggestions for ecumenical advocacy:

• Advocate for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries
• Urge churches to advocate in their capitals for the recognition of UNDRIP and to integrate the rights in their legislative frameworks. UNDRIP calls for concrete steps to save the planet earth from destruction as well as framework for reconciliation with the First Peoples.
• Discuss in what ways the ecumenical movement can contribute to the global discourse on indigenous rights by submitting reports addressing themes up for discussion, or by submitting shadow reports
• Bring to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or belief that citizen rights are denied indigenous peoples who belong to other religious communities than the ones officially recognized. Documentation would be needed in order to state the case.
• Contribute to the UNPFII’s work on Indigenous spirituality. WCC is uniquely placed to do this.
• Create a network of ecumenists to coordinate actions and initiatives, and to share resources and knowledge
• Invite churches to discover the connection between commitment to climate issues and the rights of the indigenous peoples, and encourage them to work jointly with environmental organizations as well as with indigenous communities.

Summary

1. Affirm that WCC must continue to support IP work

2. Need of a statement/call/mandate/platform to give to churches about urgency and immediacy of concerns as well as richness of IPs to ecumenical movement/WCC

3. Assembly
   a. Strong and substantial message to the assembly
   b. Need of focusing on extractive industries rather than DOD
   c. Earn partnership of all activities

4. Share stories of good practice

5. Value of interdependence of life: share as an alternative to current value system

6. Interfaith dialogue

7. Initiate and expand dialogue on spiritual rights with a view to contribute to the UN work on IP rights.

8. Work toward an ecumenical network of Indigenous Peoples.

9. Work in partnership with World Evangelical Alliance on a number of these issues in view of the fact that many IP communities also belong to churches in the WEA.

Participants:
Beatriz Ascarrunz, Andean Ecumenical Higher Institute of Theology, Bolivia
Sarah Augustine, Surinam Health Fund, USA
Geronimo Desumala, World Council of Churches,
Sarah Eagleheart, The Episcopal Church, USA
Mayra Gomez-Perez, The Peace Foundation, USA
Margareta Grape, World Council of Churches,
John Henriksen, Saami Parliament,
Tore Johnsen, Sami Church Council, Church of Norway,
Glen “Chebon” Kernell, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church
Wilton Littlechild, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, USA
Wati Longchar, Shrachi Centre, India
Deenabandhu Manchala, World Council of Churches
Stanley Mckay, United Church of Canada
Rex Reyes, National Council of Churches in the Philippines
Cecil "Mel" Robeck, Fuller Seminary, USA
Elsa Stamatopoulou, Columbia University, USA
Joint statement issued at international ecumenical conference on Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, Notre-Dame du Mont Monastery, Lebanon, 25 May 2013

Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

“You take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Preliminary

Gathered in Lebanon, a land that bears the impression of the footsteps of Jesus Christ, a nation in which Christians form an integral and vibrant component of its culture and civil society, a place that is a crossroad of cultures, peoples and religions, the participants in this meeting included leaders and representatives from Christian churches in the Middle East and Christian churches and organizations from 34 other countries, in order to help strengthen the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East for the benefit of unity, justice and peace for all in this crucial region, in times of significant changes for the whole region and for every nation. We meet while neighbouring Syria and the region is experiencing unprecedented political, cultural and historical convulsions, disrupting and endangering the lives of all who live in this region, including Christians.

Participants in this conference, long-scheduled by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) to take place during the Paschal season for the Orthodox participants and at Pentecost according to the Gregorian calendar, arrived at the conference hoping for news of the safe release of the two Archbishops from Aleppo, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi) Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Alexandretta and His Eminence Mor Youhanna Gregorios (Ibrahim) Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo in Syria, kidnapped over one month ago. The news of their kidnapping shocked the whole world especially people of this region, and galvanized Christians around the world. But they remain captives, as do hundreds of other kidnapped persons. This reality also represents a symbol pointing to the situation faced by the people of Syria, and throughout the region, and cast long shadows over our consultations – urging us to action, not merely reflection. We pray and hope that their speedy release, and assistance of the leaders of Muslim and Christian communities, will strengthen interreligious co-operation.

Our work together

The conference participants – both from churches of the Middle East and from other parts of the world – have met in order to be the witnesses of our common Christian faith. We believe that the Gospel calls us always to love God and love our neighbours and all people, as did Jesus Christ, the revelation of divine love. In Him, the whole of humanity is reconciled and united in the bond of God’s plan of salvation.

The conference has joined together in prayer according to the traditions present and in Bible study and sharing. It has been resourced by a very rich and diverse array of experts from the region and from abroad, as well as by working document, “Christians in the Middle East: presence and witness” that has provided welcome foundation to our work. Not only by these things, but also by the decades that have preceded this conference have participants been prepared. We are committed to witness together what we have heard, to bear each other’s burdens, and to undertake actions that our common Christian identity requires of us.
We acknowledge some fundamental principles underlying our consultations:

1. From the time of Jesus Christ and over the intervening centuries, Christians have been rooted in the soil of the Middle East. The Christians living in this region are an essential part of their lands.

2. Christians in the Middle East have a long history of living in plural societies that respect all diversities, understanding that all people are created by God. The teaching of Jesus Christ is that no violence is acceptable, particularly violence that is committed in the name of religion. The Gospel-rooted imperative of witness and service to the neighbour marks the historical role of Christians in the region and in the world.

3. Christians living in the lands of the Middle East reject being labelled “minority” since they reject being understood as a lesser people (aqalliyya). They rather understand themselves as full citizens of their nations. States have the responsibility to protect all of their citizens on an equal basis. Numerical proportion historically has not limited the contribution and role of Christians in the East.

4. This is a time of crisis with special intensity here in the Middle East, but affects all of humankind. The elements of this crisis include an intensification of religious tribalism, increasing fundamentalism in many of the world’s religions, dispersion of the influence of radicalized Islamist groups, widespread violence and insecurity, a deficit in democratic legitimacy and credibility, poverty and lack of opportunity, especially for women and youth, Christian emigration from the region, and a generalized sense of abandonment following decades of unhelpful intervention. Christians, Muslims and Jews all experience the destructive effects of these trends.

5. Palestine continues to be the central issue in the region. Resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine in accordance with the UN resolutions and international law, will greatly help resolving the other conflicts in the region. The persistence, after sixty-five years, of continuing dispossession of Palestinian people – Christian and Muslim alike – from their land by Israeli occupation, continuing settlement of land inside the 1967 borders by a nation empowered by overwhelming military strength and external alliances and influence, is central to the turmoil in the region and exacerbated by duplicity of policies of the western powers, especially the United States. Christians have been called to condemn and act against this continuing injustice, affirming the voice and demands of Palestinian Christians, including as heard in the Kairos Palestine document.

6. Jerusalem today is an occupied city with a government which has adopted discriminatory policies against Christians and Muslims alike. “Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity. She is the city towards which all people are in movement – and where they will meet in friendship and love in the presence of the One Unique God.” (Kairos Palestine) Christians look to Jerusalem as a place God blessed with the significance of His presence, a place revered by the faithful of three religions. Jerusalem must be an open, accessible, inclusive and shared city for two peoples and three religions, with careful protection of their holy places. It needs to be the place that models for the world the possibilities of living together peacefully in mutual respect in accordance with God’s plan. We look to Jerusalem to be the symbol of the world as it should be and for which we long.

8. Christians must reject Islamophobia, which mischaracterizes Islam as an undifferentiated whole, and undermines decades of cultivation of co-operation with Muslims, and must refuse the temptation to amalgamation, generalization, and sensationalization of our Muslim brothers and sisters.

9. The churches of the Middle East include faithful women, youth, and men as lay members of their congregations. Strengthening the possibilities for lay participation, and witness will strengthen the churches. Empowering women of the region to develop their capacities and to publicly articulate their unique perspectives will enrich society and the churches.

10. Youth have been at the forefront of engaging in the process that continues after the events that roiled Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011 demonstrating the vital importance of their presence and role in civil society and in the churches. Young people in the Middle East have been engaged in work for a society based upon respect for the human dignity of all persons, human rights, equality, citizenship, the rule of law, freedom and mutual respect. The churches are also challenged to continue to listen to and engage with them in meaningful ways, using their capacities in church and society. Churches may need to reflect on ways that grassroots actions exercised by citizens questioning authority, rejecting corruption and favouritism and eroding traditional tribal cohesion will affect the churches.

11. Governments throughout the region are hearing demands for participation, access, transparency and accountability. The churches in the Middle East are aware that the guarantee of our free and pro-active Christian existence in the region is not a bequest given by political powers, but is acquired by being courageous in exposing the structures and mechanisms of oppressive political systems, and by persistent patience in changing mentalities and structures.

12. The circumstances throughout the Middle East present the churches with a Kairos moment, as did South Africa in 1985, and Palestine in 2009, each of which called the churches to prophetic action. This is another time for such action, for a new vision of Christian cooperation in the region, for recommitment to Christian-Muslim engagement, for engagement with Jewish partners also working for peace and justice, expressing our Christian vocations by working together to express mutual support and solidarity, all of which may help to stem the flow of Christians from the region and to eliminate the barriers to full and meaningful lives for Christians in the countries of the Middle East. In the Middle East, Christians understand that “only united can we flourish; divided we vanish.”

**Call to action**

The Christian churches of the Middle East, present through heads of churches and church representatives, representatives of sister Christian churches of the World Council of Churches and ecumenical partners, recognizing this as a Kairos moment for the Christians in the Middle East, commit to support one another in steadfast prayer and call for the following actions to support the continuing vital Christian presence and witness in the Middle East.

To the member churches in the region, we encourage you to:
• Recognize and affirm each other and your shared ministry as a sign of the unity for which the Lord prayed “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (John 17:21).
• Continue to be being involved in the building of democratic civil societies, based on the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights, including religious freedom.
• Commit to engage together to reinvent, reinvigorate and renew the Middle East Council of Churches, in order to continue being the voice of Middle East Christians to the world, being the trusted source of basic, objective information.
• Reflect on ways that grassroots actions exercised by citizens in their countries questioning authority, rejecting corruption and favouritism and eroding traditional tribal cohesion will affect the churches, in order to understand and participate in the important changes going on.
• Empower women in the churches to develop their capacities and provide opportunities for their meaningful participation in the churches and society.

To the Middle East Council of Churches:
• Include significant roles for young people, developing the capacity of the next generation whilst at the same time enhancing the capacity of the MECC by their gifts and perspectives. Engage with young people in meaningful ways, using their capacities to enhance their participation in the church and society.
• Encourage the process toward developing a Kairos statement for the region.
• Envision the role of the MECC to include regional and international advocacy on behalf of the Christians in the region, engaging in theological exchange with ecumenical partners, amplifying the voices of the Christians in the Middle East, including to regional ecumenical organizations and national councils of churches worldwide and inter-governmental institutions.
• Advocate for efforts in education to build a better understanding and respect among the different religions, including revision of textbooks, especially in how they portray other faiths, their history and their beliefs, integrating insights from religious studies and historical research.
• Develop exchange programmes to facilitate the sharing of experiences, information on interfaith relations and dialogue among the churches and religions. Encourage and facilitate responsible pilgrimage to the region.

To the World Council of Churches:
• Recommit itself to working with the MECC as a partner.
• Develop a new vision and theological foundations for WCC engagement with other religions in order to work more directly together for understanding, peace and justice, particularly with respect to areas where political and social tensions have been misidentified as struggles between religions; draw upon the expertise and positive efforts of churches in regions with effective interreligious cooperation.
• Engage on a regional and international level in advocacy on behalf of the Christians in the Middle East, continuing programmes that enhance those efforts (for example, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel). Also engage in advocacy for all oppressed and marginalized persons in the region.
• Convene the spiritual and academic resources of the WCC and ecumenical partners in consultations to address Christian Zionism, disclosing its sources, its use as a political weapon against the Palestinian people, and its effects on intra-Christian relations.
• Encourage member churches to develop and disseminate educational materials that accurately reflect the geography and history of the Middle East and the realities of sister churches located there.
• Communicate, with ecumenical partners, the dire humanitarian situation within Syria and suffered by refugees from Syria in neighbouring countries, appealing to WCC member churches
to interpret their relief policies in ways that deliver resources to the most vulnerable. Seek ways to exert pressure to stop actions of violence.

- Encourage WCC member churches to support measures both to prevent war and to open channels for citizen diplomacy and mutual understanding with Iran. WCC member churches should explore ways to visit their contexts and remain in fellowship with them.
- Encourage WCC member churches to support the churches in Iraq by visiting them in their contexts and remaining in active fellowship with them.

To the MECC and WCC:

- Advocate that churches and nations around the globe ensure that Jerusalem is established as a city of two peoples and three religions with unrestricted and free access for all humankind.
- Advocate for a nuclear-free Middle East. Caution and work against any kind of escalation of tensions in the region.
- Encourage the United Nations, United States, European Union and Russia, along with other countries in positions of political power, to create policies that promote peace with justice for all peoples of the region.
- Explore ways to attract to the region resources to provide quality education, development, employment opportunities, including especially decent work for young people, which would counter socioeconomic pushes to emigrate from the Middle East.
- Use re-envisioned instruments of interreligious dialogue and cooperation to raise awareness among Muslim and Christian leaders, including women and youth participation, and leaders of other civil society groups, to accept and respect each other for the sake of mutual benefit and co-existence.
- Appoint a small group including persons from both the MECC and the WCC to further develop the working paper “Christians in the Middle East: Presence and Witness” drawing upon the consultations that took place at this conference to finalize a document can be presented to the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in November 2013 in Busan, South Korea.
- Encourage the participation of women and youth from the region in the Busan assembly.

Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to member churches in Bangladesh, expressing concern over the recent workplace tragedies, 17 May 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write this letter to express our grave concern and sympathies because of recent tragedies in your country. Since late February and onwards your country has faced political and religious violence and atrocities as well as major disasters, such as the collapse of a garment factory building in Savar, Dhaka, which has taken the lives of more than 1000 people.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I express deep sadness over the deaths and injuries of so many people who continue to suffer because of politics, religious persecution and lack of basic human rights and security in the workplace.

The ecumenical solidarity team that visited you on behalf of the WCC and the CCA in April reported on the frightening situation of attacks and persecution against religious minorities in the country. It is very disheartening to hear about this development of communal hatred in Bangladesh, once known for its tolerance and now grappling with religious intolerance and politicization of religion. The systematic violation of human rights is most unfortunate and needs
to end. As you know, the WCC is committed to supporting all persecuted minorities, irrespective of their religions, as the human rights and dignity of every person should be upheld.

The WCC believes that it is critical to find sustainable solutions to any conflicts. It calls on all parties involved to adhere to the rule of law and to use legal and constitutional measures to resolve the differences in their societies. We hope and pray that all peace-loving people of Bangladesh will denounce this new wave of violence and stand together to offer protection to those living in dangerous situations.

The Savar garment factory tragedy shows that Bangladesh needs to introduce immediate steps to improve working conditions of garment factory workers, especially women who are forced to work in unfavourable conditions. Despite having drastically increased their presence in the labour force, Bangladeshi women still face disadvantages and discrimination in the workplace. Labour conditions and safety provisions in factories across the country are not adequate to meet normal labour-law standards and must be improved upon. Bangladeshi authorities need to act immediately to ensure that factories across the country comply with international labour standards stipulated by International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions.

We, as the WCC and members of the global ecumenical movement, stand in solidarity with you and the people of Bangladesh, particularly those who are suffering today. We pray for God’s manifold blessings upon all people of Bangladesh.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, expressing concern at the methodology and results of the Albania Census 2011, 1 May 2013

Your Excellency,
Kindly accept my cordial greetings!

The World Council of Churches would like to express its concern on the methodology followed and on the reliability of the results of the 2011 census in Albania regarding the optional question of religious affiliation. The latest official report of INSTAT regarding the religious identity of the population from the 2011 Census declares that Orthodox Christians in Albania are 6.75% and that the overall number of Christians has been drastically reduced from 31% to 17%.

The restoration of religious life in all the traditional religious communities and especially the flourishing of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, in the years since the coming of democracy in 1991, after the long antireligious persecution, are quite evident throughout the country. The Orthodox Church possesses evident (baptismal registers, from both before and after the persecution and the registers of 460 Orthodox parishes throughout the country) that the numbers of Orthodox Christians in Albania 24% of the population.

Following the results of the census, the Orthodox Church of Albania distributed a questionnaire regarding the census to Orthodox participants at liturgies held on two Sundays,
December 9 and 16, 202 in Tirana, Durrës, Berat, Korçë, Vlorë, and other cities. The results were disturbing: 7,118 persons completed the questionnaire which included their first and last names and their address. Of these only 2,46 persons or 34.68% declared that they were visited and questioned regarding their religious affiliation during the census; 4,643 persons or 65.23% were not visited or when visited were not asked about their religious affiliation by registrars of the census; 56 persons declared the registrars wrote information in pencil or not in the official form and an additional eleven persons testified that the registrars refused to record religious affiliation or did so only under significant pressure. Moreover they received testimonies that in a large number of cases citizens were not asked to sign the census form and that information was written in a notebook rather than the official form as procedure required. The results of this questionnaire show that in 65% of the cases there were irregularities in the census taken with regard to religious affiliation.

It is worth mentioning that according to the Council of Europe ("Third Opinion of the Council of Europe on Albania adopted 23.11.2011," the population census ‘cannot be considered to be reliable and accurate, raises issues of compatibility with the principles enshrined in Article 3 of the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities...").

The Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief. Article 3 charges the state with ensuring religious coexistence. Article 20 restates protection for minority religious rights and freedoms. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory to international human rights instruments guarantying freedom of religion or belief.

Having full confidence in your work for the respect, protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief around the world, we urge you, prof. Dr Bielefeld, to use your good offices to ensure that freedom of religion or belief for all citizens of Albania is fully respected.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Oral statement delivered by the CCIA at the UN 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, supporting women’s initiatives against violence, New York, U.S.A., 25 March 2013

The World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of churches with a total membership of 580 million, wrote in March 1992 to the Secretary General of the United Nations: “In various international fora, women are urging the United Nations to recognize that violence against women constitutes the violation of the basic human rights of half the world’s population. As Christians we support these initiatives, guided by the firm conviction that all human beings are made in the image of God and deserve protection and care.”

In a statement prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the World Council of Churches said:

It has been painful for us to acknowledge that institutions which should stand in solidarity with women, including governments and the churches, have not often responded with resolute action. We encounter, through our contact with women at the periphery of all our societies, the struggle for dignity and livelihood that women engage in every
We believe that empowerment is not possible as long as women live in contexts of violence, often exacerbated by cultural and religious tradition.

It was also said:

*We draw the attention to the liberating power of religions and we affirm the positive and supportive role that the churches and other religious institutions can play in standing in solidarity with those women who have to make ethical choices and decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive rights. But of equal concern to the World Council of Churches is the increasing religious extremism in all faiths and the deleterious consequences this has on women’s legal, political and social rights.*

These statements were made two decades ago, but they are still valid and highly relevant in relation to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women today. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to reiterate that women’s rights are human rights, and that human rights are universal. Traditional values or religious beliefs cannot justify the acceptance of violence against women, nor can they be accepted as limitations on women’s rights and freedom.

Women as well as men are created in the image of God and deserve to be respected, protected, and cared for. It is necessary for member states to agree upon and protect strong international frameworks. Civil society, including the faith-based community, has an important role to challenge attitudes and traditions that contribute to undermining women’s rights and dignity.

We the peoples of the United Nations, have a shared responsibility to protect, defend, and expand women’s rights and freedom.

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**Letter from WCC general secretary to the Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the UN in Geneva, expressing support of the Religious Track of the Cyprus peace process, 19 March 2013**

Your Excellency,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA/WCC), would like to express its support to the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, initiated with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus.

The WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) has a long history and tradition of involvement in the struggle for human rights and religious freedom, as well as strengthening and promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation, especially in conflict situations. WCC has been accompanying the people and churches of Cyprus for many years, in their struggle for a peaceful solution to the decades-long conflict that has divided the island.

The root causes of the political conflict in Cyprus are not religious, nonetheless, religion has fallen victim to this conflict. Places of worship are desecrated, vandalized or simply neglected, historic cultural heritage sites are under threat of collapse, there is lack of freedom of movement for religious leaders to visit their places of worship, the right of access to places of worship is on many occasions denied or at best heavily controlled.

Against this backdrop, WCC would like to highlight the unprecedented efforts of the Religious track of the Cyprus Peace Process facilitated and coordinated by former CCIA/WCC colleagues, as a hopeful sign for the future. The interreligious dialogue for human rights, peace and reconciliation is a historic peace-building effort in Cyprus as it has initiated and brought
together the religious leaders of the island for an engaged and honest dialogue to contribute to the Cyprus Peace Process.

The Religious Track aims at building relationships, understanding and trust between the religious leaders and ultimately the respective faith communities including clergy. Special focus is being put on youth and women. Through this process it is hoped that not only the main concerns of the religious communities for the full exercise of the right to religious freedom will be ensured, but that also religious leaders will be actively involved in the Cyprus peace process, by providing their valuable contributions on issues related to forgiveness and reconciliation, necessary preconditions for a viable peace in the island.

For the first time in the contemporary history of Cyprus in the last 50 years the heads of three main Christian communities of the island, led by HB Archbishop Chrysostomos II are meeting with the Mufti of Cyprus discussing peace, human rights and religious freedom in Cyprus, under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus. Through this dialogue, the religious leaders have affirmed their belief and conviction for the respect of freedom of religion, the right for all faithful to access their places of worship and the right to worship itself.

It is our strong belief that religious leaders have a responsibility but also a unique role to play in the peace process and we hope that the Government of Cyprus will support and encourage efforts like the Religious Track, which aim at promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation both at the level of religious leaders and at the grassroots level.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Cyprus, expressing support of the religious track of the Cyprus peace process, 19 March 2013

Your Beatitude,
Grace and peace from God our Father and our common Lord Jesus Christ, the prince of peace!

The Commission of Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA/WCC), would like to express its support to the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, initiated with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus.

The WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) has a long history and tradition of involvement in the struggle for human rights and religious freedom, as well as strengthening and promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation, especially in conflict situations. WCC has been accompanying the people and churches of Cyprus for many years, in their struggle for a peaceful solution to the decades-long occupation that has divided the island.

We are very much aware of the destructive consequences that the political conflict in Cyprus has had on religion and on the right of people to fully exercise their right to religious freedom. Places of worship are desecrated, vandalized or simply neglected, historic cultural heritage sites are under threat of collapse, there is lack of freedom of movement for religious
leaders to visit their places of worship, the right of access to places of worship is on many occasions denied or at best heavily controlled.

Against this backdrop, WCC would like to commend the efforts of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process facilitated and coordinated by former CCIA/WCC colleagues, as a hopeful sign for the future. We believe that the interreligious dialogue for human rights, peace and reconciliation is a historic peace-building effort in Cyprus as it has initiated and brought together the religious leaders of the island for an engaged and honest dialogue to contribute to the Cyprus Peace Process.

It is very promising to see that for the first time in the contemporary history of Cyprus in the last 50 years, the heads of three main Christian communities of the island, led by your Beatitude, are meeting with the Mufti of Cyprus discussing peace, human rights and religious freedom in Cyprus, under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus.

We strongly support the Religious Track in its aim to build relationships, understanding and trust between the religious leaders and ultimately the respective faith communities including clergy. We also encourage the special focus given to the participation of youth and women in this process.

It is our strong belief that religious leaders have a responsibility but also a unique role to play in the peace process. Through this process religious leaders can actively be involved in the Cyprus Peace Process, by providing their valuable contributions on issues related to forgiveness and reconciliation, necessary preconditions for a viable peace in the island.

We would thus like to praise your leading role in these efforts and assure you of our long standing commitment and support to all initiatives of interreligious dialogue and cooperation at the level of religious leaders and at the grassroots level, aiming to promote respect of religious freedom of all religious communities in the island.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter of concern to WCC member churches and the National Council of Churches in Pakistan regarding attacks on Christian minorities, 12 March 2013

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has received with great distress the news of the attack against Christians by a Muslim mob who burned more than 170 houses owned by members of the Christian minority community in the BadamiBagh area of Lahore.

This is part of a series of attacks targeted against Christian minority communities in different parts of the country. These attacks have caused unimaginable human suffering. We share the pain of hundreds of innocent families who have become victims of atrocious acts, and we deplore such actions.

We view this targeting of Christians within the context of Pakistan’s harsh blasphemy laws, frequently used to persecute religious minorities or settle personal disputes. Social persecution, discrimination and violence against religious minorities have become particularly widespread in
Punjab province. These acts of violence and persecution of innocent people from minority Christian communities deserves to be condemned by all peace-loving people in the country.

The WCC is deeply disturbed by the present environment of religious intolerance and religiously linked violence that seems to be growing in Pakistan. In September 2012 the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the WCC organized a public hearing on “Misuse of the Blasphemy Law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan” in Geneva.

The communique produced by the hearing stated unequivocally: “We believe that the role of religion is to create a climate of peace, stability, tolerance, reconciliation and respect for human dignity and the human rights of all people and not to promote conditions that create intolerance and hatred. The core values of all religions teach values of justice, peace, reconciliation, equality and human dignity. The adherents and leaders of all religions have the moral responsibility to promote and protect peace with justice and human dignity.”

It is heartening that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has taken notice of the attack on Christians and has called on high officials of provincial government to address the concerns of persecuted Christian minorities. However, we are of the opinion that Pakistan's federal and provincial authorities should take a firm decision to undertake actions that introduce effective law enforcement mechanisms to protect all religious minorities.

We request you to convey our deep concern and sympathy for the victims of the wanton attacks upon the BadamiBagh community, and especially for persons who have lost their homes and are living in camps and temporary shelters.

Be assured of our continuous prayers and solidarity with the Christians of the BadamiBagh community in Lahore.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

**Communiqué from public hearing on the “Misuse of blasphemy law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan”, organized by the WCC/CCIA, 19 September 2012**

1. We believe that the role of religion is to create a climate of peace, stability, tolerance, reconciliation and respect for human dignity and the human rights of all people and not to promote conditions that create intolerance and hatred. The core values of all religions teach values of justice, peace, reconciliation, equality and human dignity. The adherents and leaders of all religions have the moral responsibility to promote and protect peace with justice and human dignity.

2. The international hearing on the “Misuse of the blasphemy law and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan”, organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 17 to 19 September 2012, was attended by about 100 participants from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, including 23 representatives of Christian, Muslim and Hindu religious groups and civil society and human rights organizations from different parts of Pakistan. The hearing provided opportunities for participants to listen, analyze and understand the complex situation of the rise of religious
fundamentalism and extremism and the misuse of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan which leads to blatant violations of human rights.

3. Recalling the assurances given to the religious minorities by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, that “all citizens are equal regardless of belief”, and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, we, the participants of the international hearing, express great concern and regret that the minority religious communities in Pakistan today have become a target of discrimination and attacks and are facing violations of fundamental human rights. While we recognize that in many communities Muslims and minority religions live in harmony, the blasphemy law nevertheless has become a source of victimization and persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan.

4. During our three days of deliberations at the hearing – plenary presentations, panel discussion at a side event during the 21st session of the United Nation’s Human Rights Council, open hearing and workshop sessions – we heard examples of the alarming trend of misuse of the blasphemy law and its impacts. Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom of religion as a fundamental right stating that “every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion” and article 36 stipulates the protection of minorities in that “the state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities”.

However, these constitutional guarantees are being negated. Pakistan society has been experiencing militarization and politicization of religion, which has led to abuse of religion for political gains, which in turn results in violations of fundamental human rights of minority religions in Pakistan. Religious minorities in the country have been living in a state of fear and terror as the blasphemy law has been used to register false cases against religious minorities. The increasing trend of the misuse of the blasphemy law intensifies communal hatred, religious intolerance and persecution against religious minorities in Pakistan. The law is often being used as a tool to settle personal scores through attacks on religious minorities. These incidents have fostered a climate of religiously motivated violence and persecution in several parts of the country.

5. General Zia Ul Haq introduced a number of amendments to the Pakistan Penal Code in the 1980s. Its Chapter XV deals with offences relating to religion, including sections 295 to 298. The Blasphemy Law, vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary, has become one of the most stringent laws in the country. The law itself provides only a vague definition of blasphemy, yet blasphemy carries a mandatory death sentence in some cases, specifically Section 295C. The blasphemy law has been used in recent years to victimize minority religious communities in the country. The participants further regretted the fact that a large number of Muslims have also suffered under and been vulnerable to this law.

6. There are also serious flaws in the presumptions, intent and the content of the Blasphemy Law. Since the mandatory death sentence was introduced, as a result of a Federal Shariat Court interpretation to Section 295C in 1990, many innocent people have lost their lives. The common experience of abusing and misusing the blasphemy law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life among innocent people over the years. In recent times, the number of victims has been increasing. Many victims of the blasphemy law have faced displacement or been forced to live in hiding. Charges brought against individuals under the blasphemy law were malicious, stemming from personal enmity, often with the motivation to have people imprisoned to gain advantage in business or land disputes.
7. We express deep concern that the judiciary in the country also faces threats, intimidation and pressure, specifically while dealing with blasphemy cases. As a result of this, the lower courts have often been constrained to convict persons without proper evidence placed before them. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain a fair hearing for those charged under the blasphemy law. On the testimony of a complainant, a person charged with blasphemy is immediately placed in detention. Under the provisions of the present law, the element of intent is not a consideration.

8. In this context, we the participants of the international hearing urge the Government of Pakistan to take realistic and solid steps to stop abuse of the blasphemy law that are causing massive human rights violations. Tinkering with procedural amendments has not delivered; it has failed to mitigate extremely sad consequences of a law that is inherently susceptible to abuse. Therefore, we urge the government to constitute a competent inquiry commission immediately to look into the tragic consequences of the blasphemy law and suggest a way out of this difficult and embarrassing situation. The participants affirmed the need for the civil society to help the Commission in its deliberations, monitor its progress and keep the communities informed.

Joint communiqué of the 6th meeting for dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Iran and the WCC, Geneva, 17 – 18 September 2012

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) held their sixth meeting for dialogue in the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, near Geneva, Switzerland, on 17-18 September 2012 which corresponds to 27-28 Shahrivar 1391. The overall theme for this meeting was “Interreligious dialogue and society: ways, means and goals”.

The meeting was the continuation of the process of dialogue between the WCC and the CID which began in 1995. Participants from the WCC came from Britain, Germany, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Switzerland and the United States. They met with five Muslim scholars and religious leaders who came from Tehran and Qom.

The general secretary of the WCC, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, welcomed the Muslim and Christian participants and spoke about the importance of the meeting at this time of considerable tension. During the two days of the meeting participants listened to stimulating papers and reflections exploring various aspects of the overall theme: how to spread the outcomes of interreligious dialogue and evaluate its impact; the opportunities and challenges involved in conveying the outcomes of dialogue to wider society; the role of key actors from religious, social and academic circles in disseminating interreligious dialogue; the importance of involving women and young people in promoting the wider acceptance of interreligious dialogue. The papers reflected the different geographical and social contexts of the participants.

Dr Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, vice-president of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Tehran, also shared his vision for dialogue:

- The basic requirement includes commitment, cooperation and comprehensiveness.
- Its methodology should be reciprocal, respectful and representative.
- Its approach required participation, proclamation and promotion.
- Ways for dialogue included exchange, education and evaluation.
Dialogue needs to involve people in mutual understanding, offering an Incentive approach, and be an authentically indigenous dialogue from generation to generation.
The members of the Muslim and Christian delegations emphasized the following points:
• Dialogue is the best means of overcoming misunderstandings and fostering mutual appreciation and peaceful coexistence between the adherents of different religions in today’s multicultural world.
• Dialogue at the theological and philosophical level may result in significant gains in mutual knowledge, understanding and insight about each other’s religion; however, it is also very important to seek to spread the fruits of such personal encounters to the members of wider society.
• We will make every effort to spread peace, friendship and peaceful coexistence among the adherents of different religions by encouraging various forms of dialogue: conceptual, joint social action and in daily life.
• The need to work strategically with various forms of media, to share the results of interreligious dialogue, was underscored.
• The participants emphasized the importance of encouraging young people to actively take part in interreligious dialogue and of ensuring that future generations promote the value of peaceful coexistence and respect for their fellow human beings, irrespective of their religion.
• We encourage the active participation of women in interreligious dialogue at all levels, recognizing women’s previous initiatives.
• We agree that effective dialogue can constitute a significant means to counteract the words and actions of those who incite religious hatred or seek deliberately to dishonour what is sacred to others.
• We encourage interreligious dialogue in all sectors of society with the aim of involving all in ensuring justice, equality, non-violence, welfare, friendship and compassion in society.
We commit ourselves to taking steps towards the goals and hopes expressed in this communiqué. When we meet again in 2014 in Tehran will share what has been achieved in various contexts.

Participants
Rev. Dr Martin Affolderbach
Mr Rasoul Dadashi Azar
Rev. Dr Jean-Claude Basset

Statement by WCC general secretary urging non-violence and respect for religions following the release of U.S. film on Islam, 14 September 2012

The film “The innocence of Muslims” is gratuitously offensive to Muslims and to the faith of Islam, and I regret that it has been made. The film was produced and distributed by particular individuals who are not in any way representative of the attitudes of any mainstream religious group, nor indeed of particular countries or governments. This incident shows how important it is to prevent incitement to racial or religious hatred. I believe such an insult to the heart of the Muslim faith is an insult to all peoples of faith. Christian and Muslims need to stand together in condemning such insults.

At the same time the appropriate response to such a pernicious film is not the violence taking place in parts of the Middle East that we have read and heard about over the last few days.

Such a response, apart from the suffering it causes to innocent individuals and communities, merely plays into the hands of those who wish to foment tension. In the
relationships of dialogue the World Council of Churches has had over many years, we have confirmed our commitment to work together with our Muslim partners for justice and peace. So we believe that it is tragic if the reactions provoked by this film were in turn to lead to negative stereotyping of Muslims and an increase in Islamophobia in the western world.

In my role as general secretary I have a special concern for the safety and wellbeing of Christians who are living as minorities in the Middle East, in Asia and elsewhere. It is vitally important that the relevant authorities ensure that such potentially vulnerable groups are protected and do not become the target of violence by misguided individuals reacting to the actions of those far away.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary World Council of Churches

Joint written submission by WCC and Pax Christi International at the UN Human Rights Council’s 21st session on the status of Jerusalem, 10–28 September 2012

Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches call for an urgent resolution to the issues destabilizing Jerusalem, and applauds the Human Rights Council’s attention for the numerous and disastrous violations of human rights in Jerusalem and the Council of the European Union’s recommitment to forging a lasting peace.

Jerusalem has a special status, given its pluralistic and religious importance. The ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the city threaten its peaceful future, and due to its special status, violations in the city do not only affect its residents but the global community at large. To reach a peaceful future, the five components of the city (three religions and two peoples) must be taken into consideration and given satisfaction, and due respect guaranteed to national or religious differences.

In UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947, the international community decided that:

Jerusalem should have special status and a “corpus separatum” was designated for the whole area of greater Jerusalem that would be under UN trusteeship. However, as a consequence of the war of 1948, Jerusalem became divided between the Western part that was controlled by Israel and the Eastern part that was controlled by Jordan. In the war of 1967, Israel occupied the Palestinian Eastern part of Jerusalem, together with the rest of the Western side of the Jordan River. Israel claimed Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel and annexed the East-Jerusalem, contrary to international law. The international community, the Holy See, the World Council of Churches and Pax Christi International do not recognize the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem. The international community considers East Jerusalem occupied territory and therefore international humanitarian law is applicable in addition to international human rights law.

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UNGA Resolution 181 reflected the special circumstances in the city that are defined by two dimensions, religious and political. On the political level, two nationalities, Israeli and Palestinian, are present and have political rights in the city. On the religious level: three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have religious rights, and require from both political entities to guarantee free access to the respective holy places, for all believers, local and international. Exclusivism from any side, political or religious, will harm the unique identity of the city and the harmony among all those who are concerned, all its sons and daughters. Jerusalem cannot be merely Israeli or merely Palestinian, neither merely Muslim or Christian or Jewish. It should be shared by all.

Since 1967, Israel has built vast Jewish-only settlements on occupied Palestinian land, including the Eastern part of Jerusalem. These settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention that prohibits the occupying power to transfer its population into occupied territory. The Israeli E-1 plan that connects the very large Ma'aleh Adumim settlement to Jerusalem cuts the West Bank in two and has completed the encirclement of East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities restrict access to Jerusalem to Palestinians from the West Bank and the movement between the north and south of the West Bank. The city is no longer the heart of Palestinian political, economic and cultural life. Despite international pressure, the Jerusalem municipality has over the past months approved plans to construct new housing units in Pisgat Zeev settlement and hotel rooms and housing units in East Talpiot.

In its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that “The construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and its associated regime, is contrary to international law” and that it should be dismantled. Until today, construction continues. The separation barrier divides people from their workplaces, farmhouses from their land, and villages from sources of water. The wall has seriously harmed the Palestinian economy, causing a de facto annexation of more land, often the most fertile areas. Religious places such as Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour are separated from Jerusalem by this wall. For Christians, the town of Bethlehem is inextricably linked to Jerusalem. Walls now divide Jerusalem and separate it from its natural hinterland.

The Israeli Jerusalem municipality rarely grants building permits to Palestinians and therefore many houses are constructed without a licence. Under this claim that they are unlicensed, houses in East Jerusalem are being demolished. On 13 July 2010 the Jerusalem Municipality demolished six structures in East Jerusalem: two houses that were under construction and aware house in Issawiyya neighbourhood, two populated houses in Jabal Mukabber neighbourhood and another house in Beit Hanina neighbourhood. It should be noted that this is the first time in about eight months that the municipality has demolished houses in East Jerusalem.

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8 Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to Civilian Persons in Time of War, article
Since 1967, Palestinian Jerusalemites have the status of permanent residents in the city. This status can be revoked by the Israeli authorities under certain circumstances. Israeli Haaretz newspaper recently described it as follows: “Citizens of Israel can leave the country for any length of time, and their citizenship and all their rights are theirs in perpetuity. But when it comes to Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, Israel applies draconian regulations whose covert intent is to bring about the expulsion of as many Palestinians as possible from their home city.”

Palestinian Jerusalemites do not have political institutions to refer to since Orient House was closed by the Israeli authorities. Israeli efforts to deny Palestinians political presence in Jerusalem were again illustrated by the Israeli High Court decision in June 2010 to revoke the residency rights of three Jerusalemite Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and to deport them. In addition, In June 2002, the Israeli Government issued a “temporary law” depriving citizenship to the husband/wife of any Jerusalem resident or Israeli citizen. Practically, the wife/husband, who is from the West Bank, will not be granted residency in Jerusalem or Israel and therefore cannot join the spouse.

Recent developments have continued on an alarming trend. The Knesset has approved a pilot programme to issue new magnetic cards. There is grave concern that the process will further restrict the movements of some inhabitants and may force out residents who are unable to provide proof of residency. This could result in the halving of the Christian population alone, from 8000 to 5000 inhabitants. This comes on top of this year’s Easter restrictions, where a number of Palestinian Christians were prevented from entering East Jerusalem for worship.

Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches applaud the position taken by the Council of the European Union during their Foreign Affairs Council meeting: inter-alia, its expression of concern regarding on-going illegal settlements; forced transfers of local populations; the worsening of living conditions for Palestinians, and the non-issuance of Palestinian building permits; that the EU reiterates its non-recognition of changes to the pre-1967 borders including Jerusalem; its reiteration of the urgent need to negotiate the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. In this regard, we also refer to the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah recommendation to activate and make more visible the implementation of the EU policies on East Jerusalem, for instance by avoiding to have Israeli security and/or protocol accompanying high ranking officials from member states when visiting the Old City/East Jerusalem.

Recommendations for the Human Rights Council:
• Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches call for the immediate cessation of further illegal demolitions and transfers, and a fair and transparent process for the registration and freedom of movement of inhabitants.
• Furthermore, Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches recommend the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur for Jerusalem. Given Jerusalem’s importance for Muslims, Jews and Christians around the world and the serious threat that ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the city pose to the possibility of reaching a just and lasting peace, it is important that a special monitoring mechanism for international law violations is adopted.

Finally, Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches urge the adoption of a resolution calling on all members of the UN to guarantee full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in East Jerusalem, e.g., by avoiding to invest in companies involved in construction of settlements or demolition of houses in East Jerusalem. Pax Christi International and the World Council of Churches firmly reassert their support for an accessible and just Jerusalem where inhabitants of all faiths can live, work and worship side by side in peace.

Minute adopted by the WCC central committee on the unlawful detention of Archbishop Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church; Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012

“I was in prison and you came to visit me’. . . ’Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these Brothers and Sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:36,40)

His Beatitude, Archbishop Dr Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church was arrested whilst crossing the border from Greece into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) on 12 December 2011. Unfounded charges were brought against Archbishop Jovan, following which he was tried and sentenced in absentia, without the basic right to defence, to two and a half years imprisonment by the Court of Appeals in Veles. Initially detained unlawfully at Veles, he was transferred to more solitary confinement in Idrizovo Prison on 16 January 2012. This is his sixth consecutive detention, despite two acquittals by the Municipal Court in Veles.

Amnesty International in 2005, predicated on the staged court cases and state persecution on religious grounds against Archbishop Jovan by the courts of FYROM, initiated ten years ago on the grounds of different religious beliefs, declared Archbishop Jovan a “prisoner of conscience”.

The persecution against the archbishop now continues and has been extended to include the intimidation of members of the archbishop’s family, the interrogation of hierarchs, clergy, monastics and faithful of the Archdiocese of Ochrid with added threats of confiscation, whilst denying Archbishop Jovan the essential right to visitations and external communications.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has denounced the arrest and unlawful detention of His Beatitude Archbishop Jovan of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje at the request of His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The general secretary of WCC has written letters to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the United Nations special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and to the president of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), expressing concern that Archbishop Jovan’s persecution over the past years constitutes a flagrant violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012, therefore:

A. Declares the unlawful imprisonment of Archbishop Jovan and the continued persecution of the members of the Archdiocese of Ochrid, and the members of the Archbishop’s family;

B. Calls upon the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to immediately release Archbishop Jovan and to cease and desist persecuting the Archdiocese of Ochrid;
C. **Urges** the authorities in FYROM to recognize the essential right to freedom of religion or belief, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

D. **Requests** the member churches of the WCC to join in prayer and solidarity with Archbishop Jovan by writing letters of protest to the relevant authorities;

E. **Encourages** the CCIA to organize a solidarity visit and continue to advocate for the release of Archbishop Jovan.

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**Statement adopted by the WCC central committee on abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages in Pakistan; Kolympari, Crete, 28 August–5 September 2012**

Despite the fact that Pakistan was created 67 years ago with a pledge of equal rights for all its religious minorities, today the minority religious communities in the country are facing serious threats to their existence. Pakistan’s Father of the Nation, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, laid down the “foundations of a modern, tolerant and progressive Pakistan”. He had promised to create a secular and liberal country where all religions could co-exist without any discrimination. The preamble to the constitution of Pakistan guarantees that adequate provision shall be made for minorities to freely profess and practice their religions and develop their culture. Article 25 (1) of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 states that “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law”. But a gradual Islamization has been taking place in the country since the martial law regime of General Ziaul Haq who introduced enforcement of the controversial blasphemy law in the 1980s.

Persecution and discrimination against religious minorities has forced more and more Hindus and Christians to abandon their religions and convert to Islam. Today, a significant number of young women of religious minorities, especially Hindus and Christians who live in Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan provinces, face violence, including sexual assault, including rape, threats, and persecution. These minority communities are living in a state of fear and terror due to the rising incidence of abduction of young girls and their forced conversion to Islam. The victims of these forced conversions are often girls from poor backgrounds and are unable to defend themselves against extremists because their community is deprived, defenceless and marginalized.

When young Christian and Hindu women are abducted, kept in confinement, converted to Islam and forced to marry Muslim men, the political authorities seem to be powerless to stop the Islamist fundamentalist forces that are responsible for these heinous acts and that are freely operating in the country. Although Christian and Hindu leaders and members of their religious communities have constantly challenged the government of Pakistan about the continued abduction and forced conversions of young women, their voices have been ignored. This lack of protection of religious minorities by the government of Pakistan is unacceptable.

Expressing deep concern on the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, from 28 August to 5 September 2012:

**A. Calls** on the government of Pakistan to ensure adequate protection mechanisms for all religious minorities in the country;

**B. Urges** the government of Pakistan to take immediate action to prevent the abduction, forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage of young women from minority religious communities and to bring to justice all those who engage or have engaged in these heinous crimes;
C. Requests
the governments and other international civil society organizations, interfaith
groups, and Churches to exert continued pressure on the government of Pakistan to prevent the
abductions, forced conversion to Islam and forced marriages of young women from religious
minorities.

Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Dr Mohamed Morsi, the newly
elected president of Egypt, 26 June 2012

Your Excellency,
Greetings in the Name of the One God,

As the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a fellowship of 349
churches worldwide, with founding member churches in Egypt (the Coptic Orthodox Church,
the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, and the Evangelical Church of Egypt/Synod of
the Nile, and the Anglican/Episcopal Diocese of Egypt), I wish to extend to your Excellency our
heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of your election to the presidency of the Arab Republic
of Egypt.

At the WCC, we, along with our member churches and the many Muslim partners we have
in Egypt, have been closely following the latest developments in the country. We have great
admiration for the courage of the younger generation which peacefully led a popular movement
seeking democracy and freedom, social justice and equality in citizenship. We believe that respect
for the principle of public and individual freedoms in Egypt, including political freedom, as well
as freedom of thought, opinion and expression, will be an example to be followed by all other
Arab countries. We trust that you will guide the process through which these freedoms will be
stated in laws guaranteeing their protection.

Acknowledging all the sacrifices made by thousands of people in Egypt, including you
personally, in suffering persecution and political imprisonment to achieve this new future, we are
confident that such a climate of fear will no longer be reproduced in the new Egypt under your
leadership. You have indeed clearly declared, at several occasions, that you will be the president
for all Egyptians, and everyone will be equal under the rule of law, which will protect the rich
heritage of political, cultural and religious diversities in the country.

Together with our member churches in Egypt, and the large fellowship of churches
around the world, we reiterate our wishes and prayers to the One God, that He may grant Your
Excellency a successful mandate, and keep Egypt a safe and prosperous country.

With my prayers for your peace, and for the peace of Egypt,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary, WCC

Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches following the
demolition of an Episcopal parish church in Khartoum on orders of Sudanese
government authorities, 22 June 2012
The All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches strongly condemn the demolition of the Episcopal Parish Church of Saint John, Haj Yousif in the Diocese of Khartoum by the Government Authorities in Khartoum at 11.00 AM on Monday 18th June 2012. We are saddened that this has happened within two months after the occupation and confiscation of property of the Sudan Council of Churches and Sudan Aid premises in Nyal, Darfur, by security forces on 23rd April 2012. We also recall that the Sudan Evangelical Church Bible School was destroyed and books including the Holy Bible, burned on the 21st April 2012 in the full view of the police, in Gerief West in Khartoum. We are further reminded that, the government of Khartoum had, for the first time in the country’s history, denied its citizens the Christmas holiday in December 2011.

We express our fears that all these events may not be isolated but rather calculated attacks on Sudanese civilians who are not of the Muslim faith and their property in Khartoum, and in particular Christians. This is more the case considering that church leaders from the demolished Saint John, Haj Yousif, had for 25 years been pleading with government authorities to issue the church with legal recognition just as the rest of the allocations in the area. Further, it is now public knowledge that Christians of Muslim background have also been targeted and have been dispossessed of their properties and their spouses.

We once again regret that despite repeated rhetoric about freedom of religion and the protection of the minorities in the Republic of Sudan, the government policy seems to be bent on threatening and discriminating against Christians in Khartoum. By protecting religious fundamentalists who wreck mayhem and havoc on innocent civilians with impunity, the Republic of Sudan undermines the tenets on which a multi-religious society is based.

The ecumenical movement cannot remain silent while such a horrific violation of human rights and threat to lives continues unabated. Indeed, as the church, we are called to promote and assure abundant life, a possibility that seems to be fading for many Christians in Sudan.

We call upon all Christians in the Republic of Sudan to remain peaceful and encourage one another. We also wish to call upon our Muslim brothers and sisters in Khartoum to show solidarity with their fellow country-men and -women of the Christian faith. We believe peaceful life together between Christians and Muslims is essential for a promising future of Sudan.

We call upon the Government of the Republic of Sudan to fully investigate the motive of these repeated incidents and apprehend those responsible for these criminal acts, and to provide adequate and true security to Christians in Sudan.

We call upon the international community to exert renewed pressure on the government of Sudan to observe in full the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, including the freedom of religion and freedom of assembly and the protection of Christians and all other religious minorities in Sudan.

We call upon all believers around the world, and especially Christians, to pray for their brothers and sisters in Sudan in these difficult times when they are not able to freely practice their faith as they should.

We salute the courage of the church leaders in Sudan and welcome their plan to organize prayers on Sunday, 24th June on the site of the demolition, the Episcopal Parish Church of St John, Khartoum. We call upon Christians around the world to express their support and solidarity with Christians in Sudan by joining them in prayer on that Sunday,
Joint statement issued by a high-level international delegation of Christian and Muslim leaders promoting interreligious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions, 25 May 2012

We are a delegation of Muslims and Christians from a number of countries around the world, with senior roles in our respective religious communities. We have come on this working visit to Nigeria, under the auspices of the Royal Jordanian Aal Al Bayt Institute and the World Council of Churches, to express to the people of Nigeria, and to their religious and political leadership, the concerns and anxieties of the international community about the current situation in this country.

We also come here to express our solidarity and our prayers for all the people of Nigeria and in particular those who have been the victims of violence in any form. We have been told that we are the first high-level international interreligious delegation of Christians and Muslims to visit Nigeria, certainly in recent years. We have valued being accompanied also in our visit by a number of Nigerian Christian and Muslim religious leaders. We hope by our visit to demonstrate an international model of Muslims and Christians working together in interreligious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions. We bear witness that we believe that both Christianity and Islam are religions which long for peace, and that in both our faiths love of God and love of our neighbour must belong together.

Before coming to your country, in preparation for our visit, we met with the ambassadors of Nigeria in a number of our own lands. One ambassador, in commending the visit, challenged the group to ‘Seek out the truth and share it.’ This we have sought to do, and will seek to follow up, in spite of the inevitable constraints on our work due to the length of our visit. As well as meeting members of the Muslim and Christian communities here in Abuja, we have visited Kaduna and Jos and met with community representatives in both places.

In hearing the pain of those who have spoken to us we also caught a glimmer of their dreams, and the hopes of many, both religious leaders and ordinary people, that a transformed reality is possible. We express our admiration of all those who spoke to us in a way that made it clear that they did not want their faith to be used as a pretext to propagate violence. We look forward to the day when the Christians and Muslims of Nigeria may offer an example of working together to the international community.

We now need to digest what we have seen, heard and experienced, and we are committed to writing a detailed report of our experiences within the coming month. In this we will make some recommendations as well as specific suggestions relating to our own continued commitment to the welfare of Nigeria and Nigeria’s people.

We have been very grateful for the welcome and hospitality we have received during our visit. We give particular thanks for the preparatory work and support of the Christian Council of Nigeria and the office of the Sultan of Sokoto, without which our work here would not have been possible.
Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches would like to express its deepest concern concerning the arrest and detention of Archbishop Jovan (Vranišovski) of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). Archbishop Jovan was arrested on 12 December 2011 at the border crossing between Greece and FYROM and transferred to the Idrizovo prison in Skopje and later to the Suto Orizari prison, where he remains pending his trial.

Archbishop Jovan has been detained six times since 2002, when he joined the canonical Serbian Orthodox Church. In 2004, the domestic courts of first and second instance held that, in leaving the Macedonian Orthodox Church and establishing the “Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid”, the accused had created a schism causing religious hatred, discord and intolerance. Consequently, they sentenced Archbishop Jovan to 18 months of imprisonment for undermining the position of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, conducting a service of worship in a private flat and distributing a calendar that offended the religious sentiments of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. These sentences were later overturned by FYROM’s higher appellate court. It is worth mentioning that an opinion by the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief expressed concerns about the judgement’s approach which seemed to suggest that any form of religious activity that has the effect of challenging the legitimacy and supremacy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church as the dominant religion was to be considered as causing religious hatred.

In 2009, Archbishop Jovan was sentenced in absentia to two and a half years, this time for embezzlement and misuse of donations at the dioceses he previously headed. In November 2010 he was arrested at the Bulgarian-Serbian border after a red Interpol notice was issued in FYROM. However, a Bulgarian court released him, on the basis that the court sentence was a result of religious persecution.

Despite the evident fear of religious persecution, Archbishop Jovan chose to return to FYROM in order to be retried, as the previous conviction was the result of a trial in absentia. Upon entering the country he was arrested and transferred to the Idrizovo prison in Skopje, without any clear indication regarding a possible retrial. After long efforts on his part, a new trial was set and is currently in process. Meanwhile, pending his trial he remains in custody in the Suto Orizari prison under very hard conditions especially in light of his poor health.

It should be noted that this goes against the criminal law of FYROM as regards detention. More particularly, under article 199 of the criminal law, detention pending trial is imposed for crime suspects with sentences of more than five years and when there is a high possibility to commit again the same crime and a high risk of leaving the country. All these conditions do not apply in Archbishop’s Jovan case. He was sentenced to two and a half years for embezzlement of assets from his previous dioceses, to which he no longer belongs. Furthermore, on his own initiative he has surrendered to the court both his passports, thus there is no risk of him leaving the country. Consequently, there are no reasons that justify his detention.
We strongly denounce his arrest and detention in violation of national criminal law. Furthermore, we believe that his persecution over the last years constitutes a flagrant violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights, mainly the right to freedom of religion and belief, as guaranteed in a number of international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We call for a fair trial and for his immediate release pending his trial.

Having full confidence in the work of the United Nations for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights around the world, we urge you, your Excellency, to use your good offices to ensure that the human rights, especially freedom of religion and belief of Archbishop Jovan (Vranišovski) of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje, are fully respected.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
cc. His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church
H.E. Dr Gjorge Ivanov, president of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)
Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Statement by WCC deputy general secretary following armed attacks on Christian churches during church services in Kano and Maiduguri, Nigeria, and in Nairobi, Kenya, 30 April 2012

Following armed attacks Sunday on Christian churches in Kano and Maiduguri, Nigeria, and in Nairobi, Kenya, leaders of the World Council of Churches (WCC) have called for people of faith to support afflicted believers through prayer and solidarity.

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and God’s ears are open to their cry,” said Georges Lemopoulos, deputy general secretary of the council, pledging spiritual and practical support to the afflicted. Quoting from Psalm 34, he continued, “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

The leadership of the WCC is in close contact with member churches in Nigeria, Kenya and other nations and regions, including South Asia and the Middle East, where religious communities have come under fire in recent times.

According to news agency reports, at least four people in Maiduguri and fifteen in Kano were killed, and many more injured, in a series of bombings during Sunday morning worship services. A church service in Nairobi was the target of a similar grenade attack; late in the day, one person was said to have been killed there and 16 others were wounded, five of them critically.

Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches regarding the increasing incidents of attacks on Christians and destruction of church property in Sudan, 24 April 2012

We express grave concern over the increasing incidents of attacks on Christians and destruction of church property in Sudan. We condemn the destruction on 21st April of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church Bible School and burning of its books including Bibles.
It is worrying to note that the incident, which took place in Gerief West in Khartoum, happened while policemen stood by but did nothing. We have also learned with disbelief that on Monday 23rd April security forces took over the premises of the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and Sudan Aid in Nyala, Darfur. We call for the immediate withdrawal of security officials from the SCC office and for the release of the vehicles and bikes that the security forces confiscated.

We regret to note that, despite the rhetoric about freedom of religion and protection of minorities by the government of Sudan, threats and discrimination against Christians in Khartoum and its environs are increasing with time. Mobs like the one that burned down the Bible School are marauding in parts of Khartoum and causing mayhem with impunity. They seem to have been encouraged by the inflammatory speeches of government leaders in Khartoum.

We salute the courage of Christians who gathered in the compound of the Presbyterian Evangelical Church on 22nd April to encourage one another; and we welcome the solidarity expressed by Muslims, women’s groups, and some politicians who joined the gathering.

We call on the Government of the Republic of Sudan to move with speed and apprehend those responsible for attacking Christians and burning down church property, and bring them to book. Unless and until such actions are dealt with decisively and early enough, true security and the protection of Christians in Sudan will be greatly compromised.

We call on the international community to put pressure on the government of Sudan to respect the freedom of religion and protect Christians and all other religious minorities in Sudan.

We call on Christians around the world to pray for their fellow Christians in Sudan who are going through very difficult times and are not able to practice their faith in freedom.

For: World Council of Churches
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

For: All Africa Conference of Churches
Rev. Dr André Karamaga
AACC general secretary

Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus,
denouncing the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus, 20 April 2012

Your Beatitude,
Christ is Risen!

First of all, allow me to convey to you my cordial Paschal greetings. May the Risen Lord fill our lives with the light, the hope and the joy of His Resurrection!

It is with great concern, your Beatitude, that the World Council of Churches has been informed of the recent events concerning Bishop Christoforos of Karpasia and his placement on the ‘stop list’ by the occupying regime, forbidding him thus to visit the bishopric and reach his community for the celebration of Easter in the occupied area.

We regret and denounce the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus and the restrictions imposed on his grace Bishop Christoforos of Karpasia. One of the main elements of religious freedom is the
right to be able to manifest one’s religion or belief in practice and worship. Such actions, as those occurred during Easter, are in direct offence to the core elements of the right to religious freedom and a worrying sign of religious intolerance which can only hamper efforts to bring peace to the divided island.

Despite this deplorable event, the Church of Cyprus has always spoken out against any acts that constitute a violation of the right to religious freedom of all people of Cyprus, irrespective of their religious or national background. It is within this context that I would like to salute and express my appreciation for your exemplary and unequivocal condemnation of the arson against the external canopy of the Koprulu Haci Ibrahim Aga Mosque, in Limassol, in the early hours of the Orthodox Great Saturday. As you have so wisely stated, irrespective of the real motives that lie behind this intolerable act and which are a matter of police investigation, the act itself constitutes an unacceptable disrespect towards a place of worship.

By condemning acts directed against places of worship, be it Christian churches or Muslim mosques, which restrict freedom of religion, the Church of Cyprus is setting a great example and is providing a true witness as a preacher of love, solidarity, peace and reconciliation. As the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states

‘inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’.

Please accept, your Beatitude, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration and our firm determination to support your struggle to stand by your community and exercise your right to religious freedom in the occupied territories, but also in your efforts to reduce tensions and build a culture of dialogue and trust between the two sides, which can eventually lead to a long lasting peace in the Republic of Cyprus.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Statement by WCC general secretary regarding the Fatwa of Saudi Arabia’s grand mufti endorsing the destruction of churches, 18 April 2012

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has expressed great appreciation for recent comments by Mehmet Görmez, head of the Religious Affairs Directorate in Turkey, who sharply criticized the Fatwa (religious order) of Saudi Arabia’s grand mufti endorsing the destruction of churches, criticizing it as baseless and against Islamic principles.

In his interview appearing in Today’s Zaman on 14 April, Görmez said that Muslim leaders in Islamic countries are responsible for the wellbeing of non-Muslim minorities. He openly condemned the recent statement by the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, who reportedly called for the destruction of all churches in the Gulf.

“Such a statement has nothing to do with Islam’s fundamental sources, with the agreements the prophet Muhammad signed with non-Muslim groups,” Görmez is quoted as describing the statement as unacceptable, completely lacking any validity in Islam.
“All over the world, Muslims have started to live together with members of other civilizations. That’s why we need to rediscover our long-standing culture of living together,” he added.

The WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit applauded Görmez’ stance of promoting peaceful co-existence among religious communities.

“As our member churches in Turkey have been advocating for the rights of Christian minorities and interreligious cooperation in plural situation like theirs, we appreciate Görmez’ stance of promoting peaceful co-existence,” said Tveit.

He went on to say that “the WCC has long been engaged in interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam, and therefore endorses the condemnation of justifying violence in the name of any religion.”

Tveit also called Görmez’ reference to the issue of the Halki Theological School in Heybeliada, Istanbul a “hopeful sign”. The Halki Theological School was closed in 1971, and has remained a major concern for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, though theological education has been significant for the Armenian Patriarchate as well as for WCC member churches in Turkey, including both the Greek and Armenian churches.

In his interview, Görmez said, “I believe it doesn’t befit the grandiosity of the civilization we built on this territory for Orthodox citizens to have to send their children to Greece or for Armenian citizens to have to go to Armenia to be educated as clergymen.” He stressed the need for a timely resolution of the Halki Theological School issue.

In March 2010, the WCC general secretary visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and strongly advocated for the reopening of the Theological School of Halki.

**Statement by WCC general secretary condemning hate crimes in France, 22 March 2012**

It is with dismay and deep sadness that I heard of the attack on the school in Toulouse, and the murder there of three young Jewish children, and the father of two of them. My heart goes out to those who have been bereaved and those who have been injured. My prayers are with them.

The WCC forcefully condemns acts of violence targeted at particular groups on account of their religion or ethnicity. We consider that this is terror against all of us, and should be condemned particularly by all of us who worship the One God, the Creator of all.

We are of course only too aware of the dark history of violence against the Jewish people, especially in Europe, and the shameful story of anti-semitism in Europe and elsewhere.

Yet, as when we experienced a not dissimilar tragedy in Norway last July, I am touched by the way that so many people in France have expressed so strongly their solidarity with those who have suffered in this week’s attacks. They have been determined to make clear how repugnant are the actions of the gunman. As citizens of Europe in the twenty-first century, they clearly cherish the rich diversity in our societies today as one of the fruits of the influence of Christian tradition in our continent and world.

With people of all faiths and traditions, we condemn the murderous acts of recent days. We call for prayer and practical support on behalf of the families of victims at the school in
Toulouse, of the French soldiers and police who have been killed or wounded this month, and of all who have been affected by this horrible outbreak of violence. By God’s grace, may we rediscover our proper relationship as neighbours called to love one another and live together in justice and peace.

Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Istanbul, Turkey, 3 March 2012

The Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on 3 March in Istanbul, Turkey. He met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in order to discuss the need for “harmony” and “mutual trust among the religious and national groups”, a gesture greatly appreciated by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The patriarch expressed his satisfaction over this visit, hoping that the pending issues concerning the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Christian religious minorities in Turkey will soon be resolved.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate enjoys a “primacy of honour” among the Orthodox churches, related to the ancient status of Constantinople as capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Following his visit to the patriarch, Davutoglu said, “What the world, and especially this region, need more than everything is harmony, the will for cohabitation and mutual trust among religious and national groups.”

In appreciation of the foreign minister’s visit, Bartholomew I said, “This visit, like last year’s visit by the vice-president of the government and other officials of the Turkish Republic, testifies to the fact that the attitudes of the state, of today’s government, towards the historical institution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has changed for the better.”

In May 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a decree ordering local officials “to do more to protect the rights of Christian and non-Muslim religious minorities, such as by returning their confiscated properties and taking action against anti-Christian groups”.

Bartholomew I said that the “old prejudices are gone” and political willingness to address the issues is prevailing. In this framework, he said, “we are optimistic and we expect that our pending problems will also be solved.”

The WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit appreciated the Turkish government’s efforts in reaching out to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

“We are encouraged to hear about the visit of the Turkish foreign minister to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other religious communities’ leaders. We, on behalf of our churches, have strongly advocated for the protection of the rights of Christians and religious minorities in Turkey and elsewhere,” said Tveit.

In March 2010, the WCC general secretary visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
“After my visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch, I had strongly advocated for the reopening of the Theological School of Halki,” he added.

“We hope that these discussions are a significant step forward to resolve the issues and contribute to religious harmony, acceptance and mutual trust in the country. This could be a contribution to similar developments in other states as well,” said Tveit.

Message from WCC executive committee to all Churches in Syria, extending solidarity as they face enormous challenges due to the ongoing violence in the country, 20 February 2012

We, the members of the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting from 14 to 17 February 2012 in Bossey, Switzerland, greet you in the name of the Triune God who dwells among the people to inspire us with hope for peace with justice.

As we are participating in the meeting of the executive committee of the WCC, we take this opportunity to assure the churches, Christians in Syria and the entire Syrian people of our prayers that peace and reconciliation may soon prevail in your country. While we pray, we are reminded that Syria is the land from whence St. Paul spread the Good News of love, peace and justice to the world.

The members of the executive committee who represent WCC constituencies from various parts of the world have discussed the current situation of turmoil in Syria. The report of the WCC general secretary to the executive committee shared information about the “ecumenical conversation on emerging trends in Syria” that was held in Geneva on 9-10 December 2011. We were also informed that about twenty church leaders from all confessional traditions in Syria came together to address their challenges and concerns and to envision their goals and expectations for the future of the Christian presence and witness in the region. We trust that the Christians in Syria are determined to find ways to be messengers of love and to convey the peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hostility and violence.

At the last central committee meeting in February 2011, the WCC reiterated its principles that guide the council’s policy in the whole Middle East region. These principles include:

“God’s justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths”.

(Minute on the Presence and Witness of Christians in the Middle East, WCC central committee, February 2011)

On behalf of the WCC, the general secretary sent a letter addressed to the Church leaders in Syria, in May 2011, which expressed the Council’s deep concern over the widespread violence and the indiscriminate use of force since early March 2011. The general secretary expressed the hope that the cycle of violence will end immediately. Unfortunately, military action and repression have increased and violence has spread over many parts of the country, resulting in the loss of several thousand lives and tens of thousands wounded, internally displaced or forced to find refuge in neighbouring countries and in the whole region. In August 2011, a short statement was also issued condemning the violence.

We are aware of the fact that this is indeed a difficult and crucial moment in the history of your nation and people. Many Christians in Syria also feel uncertain about their future.
We strongly support the important message by three heads of churches in Syria, His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka I, and His Beatitude Patriarch Gregorios III, that was issued on 15 December 2011 to their communities and all citizens in Syria, in which they clearly condemned “the use of any type of violence” and called for the “respect of the principles of justice, freedom, human dignity, social justice and citizenship rights”. The heads of the churches encouraged the people not to fear and not to lose their hope.

We are confident that the churches in Syria, which are deeply rooted in the land, and have developed a long historic experience of engagement in the life of the society, will have an important role in a national dialogue especially in this critical and difficult moment. We are hopeful that such a dialogue will lead to a new reality: a society built on peace with justice, human rights and human dignity, the bases for living together in diversity and mutual respect.

We pray and hope that the ongoing situation of military repression and violence will end soon, and the movements seeking democracy and freedom will achieve their goals through peaceful and nonviolent means. Our prayer and hope is that the current unrest will not undermine the historical and human ties between Christians and Muslims in Syria, as well as in the entire region. We learn from your courage and steadfastness when you remain rooted in your faith and promote Christian ethical values in such critical moments.

In response to the ongoing conflict in your country, we are calling upon WCC member churches to engage in concrete actions of solidarity with you during this time of difficulties. As a fellowship of churches, we are “to express the common concern of the churches in the service of human need, the breaking down of barriers between people and the promotion of one human family in justice and peace” (WCC Constitution).

Recognizing your difficulties at this critical juncture of your history, we are also reminded that we are called to be instruments of peace and agents of reconciliation and unity among all people in Syria. Be assured that the entire ecumenical family holds you constantly in prayer. This is an imperative of costly solidarity within the one body of Christ.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 7).

Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012

1. Indigenous Peoples have the oldest living cultures in the world. Three hundred to five hundred million Indigenous Peoples today live in over 72 countries around the world, and they comprise at least 5,000 distinct peoples. The ways of life, identities, wellbeing and very existence of Indigenous People are threatened by the continuing effects of colonization and national policies, regulations and laws that attempt to force them to assimilate into the cultures of majoritarian societies. A fundamental historical basis and legal precedent for these policies and laws is the “doctrine of discovery”, the idea that Christians enjoy a moral and legal right based solely on their religious identity to invade and seize indigenous lands and to dominate Indigenous Peoples.

2. Around the world, Indigenous Peoples are over-represented in all categories of disadvantage. In most indigenous communities people live in poverty without clean water and necessary infrastructure, lacking adequate health care, education, employment and housing. Many indigenous communities still suffer the effects of dispossession, forced removals from
homelands and families, inter-generational trauma and racism, the effects of which are manifested in social welfare issues such as alcohol and drug problems, violence and social breakdown. Basic health outcomes dramatize the disparity in wellbeing between Indigenous Peoples and European descendants.

3. The patterns of domination and oppression that continue to afflict Indigenous Peoples today throughout the world are found in numerous historical documents such as Papal Bulls, Royal Charters and court rulings. For example, the church documents *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) called for non-Christian peoples to be invaded, captured, vanquished, subdued, reduced to perpetual slavery and to have their possessions and property seized by Christian monarchs. Collectively, these and other concepts form a paradigm or pattern of domination that is still being used against Indigenous Peoples.

4. Following the above patterns of thought and behaviour, Christopher Columbus was instructed, for example, to “discover and conquer,” “subdue” and “acquire” distant lands, and in 1493 Pope Alexander VI called for non-Christian “barbarous nations” to be subjugated and proselytized for the “propagation of the Christian empire.” Three years later, England’s King Henry VII followed the pattern of domination by instructing John Cabot and his sons to locate, subdue and take possession of the “islands, countries, regions, of the heathens and infidels...unknown to Christian people.” Thereafter, for example, English, Portuguese and Spanish colonization in Australia, the Americas and New Zealand proceeded under the doctrine of discovery as Europeans attempted to conquer and convert Indigenous Peoples. In 1513, Spain drafted a legal document that was required to be read to Indigenous Peoples before “just war” could commence. The *Requerimiento* informed Indigenous Peoples that their lands had been donated to Spain and that they had to submit to the crown and Christianity or they would be attacked and enslaved.

5. In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court used the same pattern and paradigm of domination to claim in the ruling *Johnson & Graham’s Lessee v. M’Intosh* that the United States as the successor to various “potentates” had the “ultimate dominion” or “ultimate title” (right of territorial domination) over all lands within the claimed boundaries of the United States. The Court said that as a result of the documents mentioned above, authorizing “Christian people” to “discover” and possess the lands of “heathens,” the Indians were left with a mere “right of occupancy,” an occupancy that, according to the court was subject to the “ultimate title” or “absolute title” of the United States. The Johnson case has been cited repeatedly by Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and United States courts, and the doctrine of discovery has been held by all these countries to have granted European settler societies plenary power (domination) over Indigenous Peoples, legal title to their lands, and has resulted in diminished sovereign, commercial and international rights for Indigenous Peoples and governments. Europeans believed this was proper based on their ethnocentric, racial and religious attitudes that they and their cultures, religions and governments were superior to non-Christian European peoples.

6. Consequently, the current situation of Indigenous Peoples around the world is the result of a linear programme of “legal” precedent, originating with the doctrine of discovery and codified in contemporary national laws and policies. The doctrine mandated Christian European countries to attack, enslave and kill the Indigenous Peoples they encountered and to acquire all of their assets. The doctrine remains the law in various ways in almost all settler societies around the world today. The enormity of the application of this law and the theft of the rights and assets of Indigenous Peoples have led indigenous activists to work to educate the world about this situation and to galvanize opposition to the doctrine. Many Christian churches that have studied the pernicious doctrine have repudiated it, and are working to ameliorate the legal, economic and social effects of this international framework. Starting in 2007, for example, with the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, followed by the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York in 2008, and in 2010
by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, individual churches began adopting resolutions and minutes repudiating the doctrine. In 2009, at its 76th General Convention, the Episcopal Church adopted resolution D035 – “Repudiate the doctrine of discovery.” In 2010, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada adopted resolution A086 – “Repudiate the doctrine of discovery.” In 2011, various Unitarian Universalist churches and Quaker organizations are adopting and considering adopting resolutions and minutes repudiating the doctrine. This issue of the doctrine of discovery has also been brought to the forefront of world attention by Indigenous Peoples working with international bodies. 

7. Considering the fact that the doctrine of discovery will be the theme for the 11th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in 2012, churches and the international community need to be sensitized on this issue. The doctrine of discovery: its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples and the right to redress for past conquests (articles 28 and 37 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) will be discussed at the UNPFII from 7 to 18 May 2012; this event will bring together representatives of Indigenous People’s organizations and networks around the world. Churches and ecumenical networks of the WCC will be mobilized to be part of the 11th session of the UNPFII in 2012. In this context, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting at Bossey, Switzerland, 14-17 February 2012,

A. **Expresses** solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of the world and supports the rights of Indigenous Peoples to live in and retain their traditional lands and territories, to maintain and enrich their cultures and to ensure that their traditions are strengthened and passed on for generations to come;

B. **Denounces** the doctrine of discovery as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God;

C. **Urges** various governments in the world to dismantle the legal structures and policies based on the doctrine of discovery and dominance, so as better to empower and enable Indigenous Peoples to identify their own aspirations and issues of concern;

D. **Affirms** its conviction and commitment that Indigenous Peoples be assisted in their struggle to involve themselves fully in creating and implementing solutions that recognize and respect the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and to exercise their right to self-determination and self-governance;

E. **Requests** the governments and states of the world to ensure that their policies, regulations and laws that affect Indigenous Peoples comply with international conventions and, in particular, conform to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169;

F. **Calls** on each WCC member church to reflect upon its own national and church history and to encourage all member parishes and congregations to seek a greater understanding of the issues facing Indigenous Peoples, to support Indigenous Peoples in their ongoing efforts to exercise their inherent sovereignty and fundamental human rights, to continue to raise awareness about the issues facing Indigenous Peoples and to develop advocacy campaigns to support the rights, aspirations and needs of Indigenous Peoples;

G. **Encourages** WCC member churches to support the continued development of theological reflections by Indigenous Peoples which promote indigenous visions of full, good and abundant life and which strengthen their own spiritual and theological reflections.

**Communiqué adopted at the Christian-Muslim consultation on “Christian presence and witness in the Arab world”, Antelias, Lebanon, 27 January 2012**
A Christian-Muslim consultation on Christian presence and witness in the Arab world, in the light of what has come to be currently known as the “Arab Spring” was held between the 24-27 January 2012. The meeting was organized by the World Council of Churches, in collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches and hosted by the Armenian Catholicoosate in Antelias, Lebanon.

Participants came from a number of Middle Eastern countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, UAE, as well as from a small number of churches in the United States, Europe and Pakistan. They included religious leaders, scholars and young people.

During the discussions there was a clear concern, among Christians and Muslims alike, to strive to build diverse societies based on human dignity, drawing their strength from faith in the One True God, Creator of all.

The consultation formed part of a series on ongoing meetings which are aiming to create an appropriate atmosphere for honest and open dialogue, under the eyes of God, for the service of humanity in the region.

The discussions focused on the following three themes:

1. The “Arab Spring” with its consequences for both Christians and Muslims in Arab societies.
2. Present and future citizenship models in the Arab world.
3. Christians and Muslims working together to achieve freedom and justice in the Arab world.

Those present noted the growth of a common hope for a new reality where Arab societies will be built on human dignity, which is the basis for living together, diversity and the respect of others in their otherness.

Participants also expressed their support for peaceful popular movements which are seeking democracy and freedom. Working in such a way can help to achieve the values that those movements are calling for: equality, social justice and citizenship.

There was also insistence on the necessity of respecting the principle of public and individual freedoms in Arab societies. These include political freedom, as well as freedom of thought, opinion and expression, all of which need to be stated in laws guaranteeing their protection. Members of the consultation paid tribute to the role of young people in inducing positive changes in the Arab world.

Participants discussed mechanisms to assist in transforming this “Spring” into a constructive one for Christians and Muslims alike. The following suggestions were proposed during working groups and discussions:

1. To promote the role of religious dialogue in defending human rights; to deal with religious tensions through dialogue in order to solve conflicts; to avoid these religious tensions being used by external actors.
2. To offer space for interaction between young people and religious institutions.
3. To provide media and educational material in order to improve accurate knowledge and common understanding between Christians and Muslims.

Participants also highlighted some topics to be discussed in greater depth during future meetings:
• The role of women in the Arab Spring.
• The attachment of Christians to their homelands and the issue of emigration.
• Issues relating to mission and conversion

Members of the consultation hoped that the changes in the Arab world will result in active movements leading to the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation on the basis proposed by Christian Palestinians in their document “A Moment of Truth”.

Participants called on everyone to pray so that, together, we find in our respective spiritual traditions, common space to enable us to fight against repression, poverty and ignorance. So we conclude by paying tribute to one of God’s most noble gifts: Human dignity.

Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, President of the Republic of Nigeria, expressing deep sadness over the current wave of violence in Nigeria, 26 January 2012

Your Excellency,

We are deeply saddened by the continuing violence and social upheaval in Nigeria and pray that peace with justice will come soon for the Nigerian people. We continue to mourn the loss of life particularly among those who were killed in brutal attacks this past weekend in Kano and the attacks on and deaths of Christian worshipers celebrating the mass service of Christmas in Abuja only a month ago.

We must remain prayerful and vigilant regarding the developments in Nigeria as they are potentially destabilizing not only for Nigeria itself but for countries in Africa and other regions. We ask the WCC member churches from around the world to pray for Nigeria. We also believe that those who have perpetrated these crimes must be brought to justice and that the healing begins for those who are suffering.

The actions of Nigeria’s Christian and Muslim leaders working together to end the violence is a contribution that will ultimately allow both communities to live in peace. Nigeria cannot become another battlefield where religion is used to promote division, hatred and allowing for destructive intentions. Christians and Muslims around the world offer their support to our sisters and brothers in Nigeria to enable them to live together in peace.

We ask that from your position you continue to encourage those who are seeking peace in Nigeria and those who desire that Muslim and Christian stand side by side in solidarity with the people of Nigeria.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, we would like to express our condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families and all victims affected by these attacks. The World Council of Churches strongly condemns these wanton and barbaric attacks of terrorism and violence which target innocent human lives.

May God almighty heal the deep wounds, protect all God’s children and help them to overcome hatred, intolerance and violence.

Sincerely yours in Christ, our common Lord
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary
Final communiqué from the ecumenical solidarity visit to Ivory Coast, 28 November-4 December 2011

From 28 November to 4 December 2011 an ecumenical delegation visited the Ivory Coast to meet with the churches and representatives of civil society in the country on the initiative of four international church organizations:

• The World Council of Churches (WCC), represented by Rev. Simon Dossou, African WCC president, Dr Nigussu Legesse, of the Africa desk of the WCC in Geneva, Father François Tounkara, of Conakry, Guinea, and Mme Jeannette Aneyé, central committee member,
• The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), represented by Rev. Richard Murigandé, from Rwanda,
• CEVAA (Community of Churches in Mission), represented by Rev. Étienne Roulet, from Switzerland, and
• The Protestant Federation of France, represented by Rev. Daniel Thévenet, from France.

The delegation had successive meetings with leaders of the United Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast, the Evangelical Federation of the Ivory Coast, the Head of the Ministry of the Interior, the National Human Rights Commission, the Governor of the District of Abidjan, the leaders of the Work and Missions of the Baptist Churches, the Catholic Archbishop of Abidjan, and the Truth and Reconciliation Dialogue Commission.

The following message was given to all those whom we met:

1. The ecumenical community has closely followed the crisis which has shaken the Ivory Coast and has not ceased to pray for the country.
2. We have come on a visit to show solidarity with all those who have suffered, to whatever side they belong.
3. We have come to see, listen and understand our Brothers and Sisters in the faith, as well as the main leaders in public and political life.
4. We have come to offer support in the seeking of solutions that will allow the Ivory Coast to arrive at reconciliation and rebuild the nation.

We have heard from those whom we met some strong statements that can be summarized as follows:

1. The Ivory Coast has always been a hospitable country, welcoming many from neighbouring countries. What happens in the Ivory Coast has repercussions throughout the sub-region.
2. The problem leading to the outbreaks of violence is neither ethnic nor religious in origin, but originates at political and economic levels.
3. The traditional values of engaging in dialogue to reach understanding have been eroded despite the peaceful tradition of the Ivory Coast.
4. Many people, on all sides, have suffered violence, but the people of the Ivory Coast are highly resilient. None the less, there is a real need for truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation, in order to mend the damaged social fabric.
5. Some political movements have made use of the Christian churches and have attempted to manipulate them in order to add a religious dimension to the conflict.
6. The Christian churches have thus been confused with some extremist religious movements and have become victims because of that identification.
7. The strength of the churches (Protestant, Evangelical and Catholic) lies in their ability to enrich one another out of their diversity, and to use it to serve the cause of unity.

We thus recommend:
1. That politicians acknowledge to one another, in a spirit of humility and truth, the wrongs and errors they have committed, and ask for forgiveness in order to take forward the process of national reconciliation.
2. That, to that end, they have recourse to the traditional values of Ivory Coast wisdom of engaging in dialogue and listening to one another.
3. That political authorities do not ignore the historical and instituted churches, but have confidence in their ability, through their extended country-wide networks, to participate in reconciliation and rebuilding national life; and that extremist religious movements be better identified and monitored.
4. That the churches do not allow themselves to be manipulated by political movements, but play to the full their role in proclaiming the Word of God in a totally independent way.
5. That, to that end, the churches do not cast themselves in the role of victims, but should participate in a resolute and politically unbiased way in public life.
6. That the churches should come together in a credible and responsible organization in order to speak with a united voice, in cooperation with other religious traditions.

As they end their mission, the members of the ecumenical delegation wish to thank all whom they have met for their attentive listening and their openness, and, in particular, the United Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast for welcoming and kindly accompanying the delegation.

Abidjan, 3 December 2011. On behalf of the delegation
Rev. Simon Kossi Dossou
Spokesperson
Translated from the French, Language Service, World Council of Churches

Communiqué adopted at the World Council of Churches international study consultation on “Freedom of religion and rights of religious minorities”, Istanbul, Turkey, 28 November-2 December 2011

We, the participants of the International study consultation on freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities – drawn from churches, church related organizations, academia, civil society and human rights organizations and the legal profession in 23 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas and Europe – met in Istanbul, Turkey as part of an international study consultation organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches. The consultation analysed the situations of rights of religious minorities and freedom of religion in various contexts.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I for welcoming us and addressing the participants, and express our joy in sharing in an audience with Him and in attending the Holy Liturgy for the Feast of St Andrew, Patron Saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

During the study consultation we received reports on the position of religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities in 27 countries. These furthered our common understanding of the rights to which all people are entitled, highlighted many human rights concerns and enabled us to identify a number of steps to be taken to ensure freedom of religion and belief and the rights of religious minorities in various contexts.

We recognize that respect for freedom of religion or belief is a common good and a prerequisite for the democratic and peaceful progress of human society. Widespread and
grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and development of many states and severely impact upon the daily lives of individuals, families and communities, especially their peaceful coexistence.

We affirm that all people are endowed with inherent dignity. We recognize and reiterate the significance of international human rights standards relating to religion and belief and to religious minorities. In relation to matters of religion or belief the international human rights framework provides all persons with the right to:

- have or adopt the religion or belief of one’s choice, including the right to change one’s religion;
- manifest religion both privately and publicly, alone or with others, in worship, teaching, observance and practice;
- protection from discrimination in any sphere of life on the basis of religion or belief; coercion in matters of religion or belief;
- bring up children in accordance with their own beliefs;
- conscientious objection.

It is the duty of states and governing authorities to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief, in all its dimensions, for all individuals under their jurisdiction or control without regard to their religion or belief.

We recognize and welcome positive steps taken towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in a number of contexts. However, we also witness serious violations of these rights with grave concern.

During the study consultation several examples regarding the non-fulfilment of the right to religious freedom have been highlighted. In several contexts practices exist to limit the right to change one’s religious status that can result in the separation of families, material and social deprivation or even criminal prosecution, imprisonment or the death penalty. Anti-conversion provisions found in a number of countries, are open to misuse, and contribute to negative public perceptions of and violence towards religious minority communities.

Many individuals are facing serious difficulties in freely professing and practicing their religion or belief as they see appropriate in the face of state or religious compulsion. In certain cases there is also state interference in the decision-making processes of a religious group, while in other cases religious law and jurisprudence is imposed by state sanction. At the same time, existing blasphemy laws have a chilling effect on public discourse and on the right to profess religion or belief, and impact disproportionately on members of minority religions.

Numerous religious communities encounter problems in obtaining the legal status necessary to function; in acquiring, building or maintaining of properties such as places of worship and burial grounds or facilities; and in providing religious and theological training. These difficulties seriously impact on their ability to manifest religious faith.

Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief is also seriously affecting the ability of religious minorities to access their rights to education, healthcare and employment and to participate in the democratic process. Discriminatory legislation and state practices provide a legitimising framework for wider discrimination in society. Deprivation, social exclusion and violence towards minorities are the inevitable results of systematic discrimination and threaten the social fabric of society.

In many instances, educational syllabuses and textbooks portray negatively or under-represent the role of religious minority groups in society and serve to affirm existing societal prejudices and promote intolerance and discrimination. Moreover, obligatory religious education
of children of minority religious backgrounds in the majority faith, violates the rights of parents and children. Furthermore, existing legislation and state practice with regard to mixed marriages in certain countries can also impact negatively on the right to religious freedom with regard to the bringing up of children of such marriages.

Also the media in many countries are responsible for the negative portrayal of religious groups, thus perpetuating false stereotypes and exacerbating discrimination.

Lastly, the failure of states to protect religious minorities from violence, threatens, in some cases, the very survival of communities and is in violation of states’ international obligations. The culture of impunity created by failures to investigate and prosecute crimes against members of minority communities is a threat to the long-term stability of nations.

In moving forwards, the participants in the study consultation:
• urge states to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and devise effective safeguards against violations of national and international law relating to religious freedom;
• call for concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to address violations of this right;
• invite the Commission of Churches of International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to do a follow up to this Consultation and elaborate an action plan which can address among others the relationship between secularism and religion, the issue of growing nationalism and politicization of religion, the rights and obligations of religious minorities and awareness-raising and education for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief;
• propose as possible follow-up, the organization of thematic and region-specific Consultations and the exploration of the possibility for the creation of an ecumenical Forum on religious freedom and human rights.

The promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief should be the concern and work of all. The participants recalled the statement by the ecumenical patriarch, “we are called to be prophetic societies of transformation in a world that has reached a deadlock. Prophetic societies of peace in a global society threatened by war, prophetic societies of dialogue in a civilization characterized by ambivalence and hostility and prophetic societies of reconciliation with the creation of God in an era, that the future of the earth is at risk”.

**WCC’s continued support for Egyptian Christians in their quest for justice, rejection of violence and initiatives for dialogue in the wake of 9 October clashes between peaceful protestors and the army in Cairo, 18 October 2011**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) supports Egyptian Christians in their quest for justice, rejection of violence and initiatives for dialogue in the wake of 9 October clashes between peaceful protestors and the army in Cairo which resulted in 25 people dead, mostly Coptic Christians, while the country was preparing to return to democracy.

Egypt’s Christians make up about 10 percent of the population and mainly consist of Coptic Orthodox as well as Presbyterian, Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholic churches.

Christians in Egypt have remained vulnerable to the threat of religious extremism for some time, and their concerns have emerged crucially during the recent changing political landscape of Egypt.

They are now asserting themselves in condemning violence as witnessed on 9 October, and in the burning of churches like the Church of Al-Marina and Edfu-Aswan this year.
A recent statement issued by the Protestant Church in Egypt says, “Churches reject acts of violence in Egypt during this time of sociopolitical transitions. We therefore appeal to all those within the nation to stand together side-by-side in order to confront these incidents. We call on all Egyptians to reject the use of violence and, in doing so, work together to create a unified legislation to allow for building places of worship for all.”

“Thus,” the statement continued, “as Egyptians – both Muslim and Christians alike – we must call for the immediate investigation of the events of 9 October, with emphasis on bringing accountability to the doors of those responsible for the violence which, tragically, left many dead.”

Similarly the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Service joined hands with civil society actors including writers, academics, religious leaders, youth and media professionals to condemn the violence. A joint statement at the end of a symposium on “Together against sectarian tension” stated:

“We appeal to all Egyptians to call for an end to violence. We must act now, collectively, to save the future of our great nation from the alternative – a divided and violent future which reminds us little of the Egypt we know and love.”

The WCC praises the efforts of the churches in raising their voices for peace and dialogue. Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC, says, “We as churches condemn the violence perpetrated against the Coptic Christians during the unfortunate incidents of 9 October. We hold the victims in our prayers. It is through the resilience of Egyptians, both Christians and Muslims, that the sectarian strife can be defeated. We stand in solidarity with the Egyptian churches in these difficult times.”

The WCC through its programme Public witness: addressing power, affirming peace has been engaged with the churches in Middle East in collective efforts by ecumenical partners to achieve peace and justice at local, national, regional and international levels.

Visit of the WCC general secretary to Pakistan, calling for protection of minorities, 8-10 October 2011

During his recent visit to Pakistan, the World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit urged for the protection of religious minorities and the need for the state to take necessary measures against religious intolerance.

“The Pakistani government should not turn a blind eye to the culture of violence perpetrated through the use and abuse of the blasphemy law, which intensify communal hatred, intolerance and persecution that can hit anybody in the country, and particularly the religious minorities,” said Tveit, who was speaking at a press conference in Lahore, at the end of his three day visit.

Christians are among country’s religious minorities including Hindus, Ahmadis, Parsees, Sikh and Baha’is, affected severely by the discriminatory laws, including the ambiguous blasphemy law 295 C, which has caused many lives, including of the minister for minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, this year.
During his stay in Pakistan, Tveit met with church and ecumenical leaders and representatives of civil society organizations. The church leaders shared with him how religious minorities especially, “Christians live in an atmosphere of insecurity. The existences of Christians have never been threatened as it is today, and the situation has gone worse in the past years,” Tveit was told.

Tveit emphasized, “Pakistan should give protection to every citizen, also its religious minorities under the constitution of the country,” recalling assurance given to the religious minorities from the founder of the country Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who clearly stated, “You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this state of Pakistan,” in 1947 after the country’s independence.

Tveit was accompanied by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, who described this visit as “timely solidarity expression since the Christian minorities are fearful of the violence which is a threat to the interfaith harmony and peaceful co-existence.”

From 8 – 10 October, Tveit addressed an ecumenical gathering at the headquarters of the National Christian Council of Pakistan, met with national executive committee of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, attended a public reception organized by the Synod of the Church of Pakistan and the Raiwind Diocese, and participated at the dedication of the Central Cathedral of Praying Hands in Lahore. In his greetings he quoted Psalm 85: “Righteousness will look down from the sky.” Tveit also delivered a keynote address at a mission conference on the theme, “Finding God in a challenging and difficult situation”, organized by the Church of Pakistan.

Minute on peace and security in South Asia adopted by the WCC executive committee, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 September 2011

1. The South Asia region, (comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), continues to be one of the most volatile regions of the world. The negative effects of ongoing ethnic conflicts, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, communal and political violence, persecution against minority religious communities especially against Dalits and Indigenous Peoples, terrorism, counter terrorism, religious extremism, militarization, gross and systematic violation of human rights, unresolved inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and subversive economic interests, etc., are visible today more than ever before in the South Asia region. South Asia has become a hotbed of the war on terror and a victim of the strategic interests of major power blocs keeping the region in constant turmoil and uncertainty. The nature of its volatility and that of the conflicts has been redefined by the U.S.-led war on terror, wherein the rulers of the region have joined together as partners. This has wider repercussions in the region as resentments against foreign forces in the region are growing among various sectors in society, especially in the context of the recent happenings in Pakistan.

2. There is a feeling among the general public that peace and security in South Asia are defined today in terms of the strategic interests and objectives of countries outside South Asia. Home to one-fifth of the world’s population, this region is accountable for fifty percent of the world’s illiterate and forty percent of the world’s poor. This poverty-stricken region faces innumerable adversities in terms of securing peace, security and development. The extent of human deprivation in the region contrasts with the large armies, modern weapons and increasing
defence budgets, arms race and nuclear power struggle which keep the region seething with unrest.

3. The increasing trend of religious intolerance and politicization of religion create havoc in Pakistan, Bangladesh and in India. Although one of the world’s bloodiest and longest-running civil wars in Sri Lanka is over, it left parts of the island devastated and hundreds of thousands of people displaced and forced to live in camps. A dysfunctional judiciary and justice system, lack of democratic governance and gross violations of human rights have become pervasive phenomena of Sri Lanka today. Although a new government has been installed recently in Nepal, the Constituent Assembly could not agree upon a new Constitution, and the country is facing a constitutional crisis with political parties failing to reach a consensus; the peace and reconciliation process initiated in the country has been jeopardized.

4. A meeting of the South Asia Ecumenical Forum on Peace and Security (SAEFPS), which was initiated in 2009 by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the South Asian Councils of Churches (SACC) met on 18-19 April 2011 in New Delhi, India. Having analyzed, listened to and realized the seriousness of the situation in various South Asian countries, the SAEFPS made a proposal to the WCC and CCA to be involved in global ecumenical advocacy on peace security in South Asia.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 13 to 16 September 2011, expresses particular concern about the deteriorating situation that threatens the peace and security in South Asian countries. In light of the present situation of increasing hostility and security threats, the executive committee:

A. Extends support and encouragement to the South Asian churches and National Councils of Churches as they work for peace, security, reconciliation, religious tolerance and justice for all;

B. Encourages WCC staff to continue to monitor developments in South Asian countries and exchange information;

C. Calls on WCC member churches to accompany and support the churches in Pakistan in their initiatives to address the issue of the misuse of blasphemy law, especially through their engagement in advocacy at the local, regional and global levels;

D. Extends support to the Pakistani churches’ efforts to promote communal harmony and religious tolerance;

E. Calls on WCC member churches to be in solidarity with the persecuted religious minorities in India, especially the Dalits and Indigenous Peoples;

F. Calls on WCC member churches to pray for the people and churches in South Asia.

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**Message from WCC general secretary, honouring the anniversary of 11 September 2001, 7 September 2011**

Ten years ago, thousands of people from more than 90 countries were killed in a coordinated assault on targets in the United States of America. These events on 11 September 2001 and the consequences of what happened that day – including wars centred in Afghanistan and Iraq – deeply scarred the first decade of the 21st century and have left a legacy of pain, grief, disorder and enmity.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I write to assure all those who have been affected by violence and inhumanity – in the United States and throughout the world – of continuing prayer and solidarity on the part of the fellowship of churches we constitute. As a Norwegian who experienced tragedy within my own homeland this past summer, I appreciate the power and meaning to be found in supportive prayers and other expressions of compassion.
Terrorism in all its forms – whether committed by individuals, groups or states – is to be condemned. But one may reasonably ask how best to respond. Perpetrators should be brought to justice and security measures devised to prevent the repetition of such trauma. Many of us remain convinced that nonviolence can be the most helpful long-term response to violence and the most effective means toward a lasting peace based on justice.

We in the ecumenical movement have dedicated ourselves to dialogue among people of different faiths, and in this context especially to dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims. There is great power and importance in religion, yet on this anniversary we must admit that belief can be twisted and perverted to fuel hatred, terror and war. The World Council of Churches is preparing for its 10th Assembly in 2013 and has adopted an assembly theme in the form of a prayer: “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.” Life, justice and peace are high ideals in every religion deserving of the name, and we appeal to religious leaders and people of goodwill to join us in building strong relationships based on human dignity and mutual respect.

In October 2001, the World Council of Churches commissioned an ecumenical “Living Letters” team to visit the United States and help to comfort its grieving people. At the conclusion of this visit, the team spoke in a pastoral letter of building “a culture of peace”. On this anniversary we re-dedicate ourselves to dialogue and cooperation in search of Just Peace. Establishing peace is the surest path to true victory over those who on 11 September, 2001 sought to inaugurate an era of division and death. Together, let us proclaim that their aims have been rejected.

As Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” ... and, “Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called children of God.”

God of life, lead us to justice and peace! Amen.
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter of greetings from the WCC’s general secretary to the heads of Muslim religious communities on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, 31 August 2011

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear friends,

On the occasion of the celebration of Eid al Fitr by all Muslim communities all over the world, the World Council of Churches greets you in the spirit of human solidarity. The days of fasting during Ramadan, which Muslims over the world have just concluded, are significant because they demonstrate the intent of the people of faith to engage in a noble act through which they demonstrate acts of solidarity towards the many disadvantaged of our world with whom they share their own gifts of privilege which the Almighty has bestowed upon them.

This year, more than any time before, the Eid al Fitr should prompt Muslims and Christians to act in a spirit of oneness based on our common humanity and spotlight our energies on rallying people to form alliances for peace and reconciliation with justice. This common effort should draw in people from the many great religious traditions of our world.
Historic changes are taking place in several countries and regions of the world where Muslims live. The Middle East and North Africa have particularly experienced momentous events. These significant and life-altering events are shaping new forms of politics and their ripple effects can be felt in all arenas of global society – social, economic, cultural, and religious. As people of faith committed to justice, peace and reconciliation, we should be able to work together in order to preserve the dignity of all peoples, their basic human rights and the rule of law that applies equally to all citizens. In the predicament that we find our world in, we, as people of faith, are obliged to seek and articulate a common vision of a world through human encounters for truth and justice.

We have experienced the terrible reality of terror also in my dear homeland of Norway recently, in the commission of an evil and individual action related to mistrust and stigmatization of Muslims in European society. I am encouraged to see that even in terrible events like this, there is a strengthening of open and trusting relationships between the Christian church and the Muslim community in Norway. We need to stand together to prevent all kinds of terrorism, as we work together to build an inclusive future life based on dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims in all continents.

I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that the World Council of Churches (WCC) convened an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May of this year in Kingston, Jamaica. The nearly one thousand participants issued a common message. In this message the WCC’s unequivocal commitment to peace and interreligious dialogue to serve peace is clearly spelled out: “With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments. Through intensified interreligious dialogue we seek common ground with all world religions.”

The World Council of Churches offers you its greetings and prays that this blessed occasion of Eid Al Fitr will give us all an opportunity to journey together to usher in peace in our times.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Statement by WCC general secretary, expressing deep concern about the blatant violation of freedom of religion by the Fiji authorities, 26 August 2011
WCC calls cancellation of Methodist meeting by Fiji government “unacceptable”

Government interference in church affairs in the Pacific nation of Fiji has been identified as a matter of profound concern by the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Pacific Council of Churches and a meeting of Pacific church leaders, Tveit has expressed his deep concern about the blatant violation of freedom of religion by the Fiji authorities in cancelling the annual conference of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma, and in their detention of church leaders.

“It is absolutely unacceptable that the Fiji authorities intervene in internal church decisions and affairs,” Tveit said from Samoa where he is attending the regional meeting.

According to news reports, the military government of Fiji cancelled the annual conference of the Methodist Church, saying the leadership was too political.
The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has said the leadership and senior members of the church were summoned by the military to hear the order, and the government unsuccessfully attempted to detain the former president of the church, Rev. Josateki Korio.

This is the third year in a row that the government has cancelled the Methodist annual conference. Authorities have also suspended the national constitution, restricted media freedom and detained other opponents.

The church remains critical of the regime.

While in neighbouring Samoa, Tveit held meetings with the Rev. Vaiao Eteuati, general secretary of the Methodist Church of Samoa. Eteuati called on the global church to put pressure on the Fiji authorities against what he calls unjust actions towards the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

Tveit reaffirmed the stance of the WCC central committee who in 2009 proclaimed its support for the churches in Fiji. He also called Christians throughout the world to join in common prayer for the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

Reflections by WCC general secretary on the tragedy in Norway, 16 August 2011

As the world’s attention turns toward the tenth anniversary of 11 September 2001, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit ponders what we may learn from more recent acts of terror in his homeland.

I was on summer holiday during the second half of July, spending time with family, former colleagues and other friends in my native Norway. As it happens, my travels took me into Oslo on 22 July. As I was leaving the city, I heard the terrible news of the many murders in the capital and at the Utøya Island youth camp.

Like many Norwegians, I was acquainted with some of the victims and their distraught families. One of those killed on Utøya was the son of a Norwegian official who had visited me only months before in the Geneva offices of the World Council of Churches. Like many Norwegians, I am still struggling to realize that this actually happened.

The man who has confessed to causing this carnage insists that he acted in defence of “Christian culture”. He has adopted an attitude that diverse “civilizations” must inevitably “clash”. He is criminally mistaken.

In a united pastoral response to the tragedy of 22 July, the churches of Norway have exhibited how to embody a genuinely Christian culture and act in line with truly Christian values. They work in cooperation and empathy with representatives of other faiths. The people of Norway are demonstrating that a nonviolent response to violence is the strongest, most courageous response possible.

An image that comes to me again and again is that of the Christian pastor and the Muslim imam standing side by side at the funeral of one of the young victims of violence.

This picture has been broadcast and published internationally. It has become a nearly iconic symbol of the determination to build a sustainable, caring, open society together. Many people from a variety of nations have told me they were profoundly encouraged by all the people
of Norway, of whatever background, for their positive, communal response to terror despite the pain it inflicts.

As churches, we are committed to work together for Just Peace. That means striving for open societies where people of all groups are treated as individual human beings with their duties and rights, and where unjust and sinful behaviour is condemned. We must consult our consciences about what we say, and what we do not say and continue in dialogue with our neighbours.

In times like these, we are called to reflect on the impact of the most fundamental Christian value: the command to love our neighbour. We see how much this is necessary in times of pain and death. We see how much we need the mutual embrace of love and respect amongst us all. We see how much the command to love is needed when we address honestly the profound challenges implied by changes in immigration patterns and an increasingly multi-religious society.

For all of us, the human catastrophe of 22 July serves as a dire warning.

Statement by WCC general secretary calling to end the violence in Syria, 9 August 2011

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I express my deep concern in this time of conflict for the people of Syria from every background and belief. I appeal to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to renounce violence at once, and to re-dedicate themselves and their country to the pursuit of dialogue, healing and peace.

In the wake of so many deaths, it is particularly urgent that the army and government security agencies cease the indiscriminate use of force, ensuring the citizens’ rights to free assembly and expression, pursuit of political progress and basic human dignity. All governments have an obligation to protect the lives and dignity of their citizens, and to protect their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

From the government and on all sides there has been a stated desire for national reform. Now is the time to end the violence and enter a process of dialogue leading to democratic change.

At the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, convened by the World Council of Churches in May 2011, in Kingston, Jamaica, more than 1,000 participants included these words in their message to the world:

“With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments.”

It is in that spirit that we call upon all who have been caught in the tragic cycle of confrontation within Syria: Stop the violence and killing. Seek a Just Peace for all.

May God bless Syria, and heal the wounds of the nation.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches
Call by Asian church leaders at consultation on “Peace and security in Asia: ecumenical response” for deeper involvement and ecumenical advocacy actions, Bangkok, Thailand, 2-6 August 2011

Serious issues that threaten Asia’s peace and security have been recognized by an ecumenical consultation that was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia. The event was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 2 to 6 August.

The ecumenical consultation with 35 participants from 20 Asian countries addressed the theme “Peace and security in Asia: ecumenical response”. It analyzed the emerging geopolitical trends and peace and security concerns.

The group concluded that, although many Asian countries claim to be democracies, the paradox is that their images are defiled by frequent cases of illegal detention, torture, custodial deaths, extrajudicial execution and forced disappearances. The common people, particularly minorities and the underprivileged, are made to endure many forms of inhuman and degrading treatment at the hands of armed personnel.

Peace and security concerns set the context for the current interplay of geopolitical trends, especially in regard to the dominant U.S. presence in the socioeconomic and political affairs of Asia, and in the emerging strategic competition between China and the United States as well as, to a lesser extent, between India and China. Other concerns identified were the contesting of boundaries and challenging of sovereignty in the quest for natural resources, the persistence of protracted internal conflicts based on social and ethnic or religious conflicts, and gross human rights violations and lack of democratic governance.

“An increasing trend of religious intolerance and denial of freedom of religion, lack of rule of law and dysfunctional legal systems in several Asian countries are factors identified by several participants as affecting peace and security in Asia, according to Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC.

“As the rulers in several Asian countries foster religious extremism with a view to either acquiring or holding on to political power, politicization of religion is growing, and this undermines the peaceful coexistence of adherents of various religions which has been a long-nurtured tradition and culture in Asia. It is in this context that the Bangkok consultation identified priorities for ecumenical advocacy actions at various levels”, Mathews George continued.

The ecumenical consultation also decided that the WCC and the CCA will initiate joint advocacy to address issues relating to these areas: human rights, democratic governance, disarmament; the rights of migrant workers, stateless and internally displaced people; the rights of minorities and freedom of religion, all of which are essential components for ensuring peace and security in Asia.

Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), Kingston, Jamaica, 24 May 2011
Glory to God and peace on Earth
The message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation
I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (Ephesians 3: 16-17)

We understand peace and peace-making as an indispensable part of our common faith. Peace is inextricably related to the love, justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation. It constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God’s love for the world. The dynamic nature of peace as gift and vocation does not deny the existence of tensions, which form an intrinsic element of human relationships, but can alleviate their destructive force by bringing justice and reconciliation.

God blesses the peace-makers. Member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other Christians are united, as never before, in seeking the means to address violence and to reject war in favor of “Just Peace” – the establishment of peace with justice through a common response to God’s calling. Just Peace invites us to join in a common journey and to commit ourselves to building a culture of peace.

We, nearly 1,000 participants from more than 100 nations, called together by the WCC, have shared the experience of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), a gathering of Christian churches and interreligious partners dedicated to the pursuit of Peace in the community, Peace with the Earth, Peace in the marketplace and Peace among the peoples. We met on the campus of the University of the West Indies (Mona) near Kingston, Jamaica from 17 through 25 May 2011. We are profoundly grateful to our hosts in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean region who generously have provided a rich and spacious setting for fellowship and growth in God’s grace. By the very fact that we met on the site of a former sugar plantation, we were reminded of the injustice and violence of slavery and colonialism and of the forms of slavery that still plague the world today. We have been informed by the severe challenges of violence in this context as well as the brave involvement of churches in order to meet those challenges.

We brought the concerns of our churches and regions to Jamaica; we spoke with one another here; now, we have a word to share with the churches and the world. We have encountered one another through Bible study, spiritually enriching common prayer, inspiring expressions of the arts, visits to local ministries and other service agencies, plenaries, seminars, workshops, cultural events, lecture sessions, wide-ranging deliberations and deeply moving conversations with persons who have experienced violence, injustice and warfare. We have celebrated the achievements of the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). Our engagements have inspired us in showing that overcoming violence is possible. The Decade to Overcome Violence has generated many beautiful examples of Christians who have made a difference.

As we gathered in Jamaica, we were keenly aware of events in the world around us. Stories from our churches remind us of local, pastoral and social responsibilities for people who must deal daily with each of the issues we discussed. The aftermath of earthquake and tsunami in Japan raises urgent questions concerning nuclear energy and threats to nature and humanity. Governmental and financial institutions face the necessity of taking responsibility for their failed policies and the devastating impact on vulnerable people. We witness with concern and compassion the struggle for freedom, justice and human rights of the people in many Arab countries and other contexts where brave people struggle without global attention. Our love for
the peoples of Israel and Palestine convinces us that the continued occupation damages both peoples. We renew our solidarity with the people of divided countries such as the Korean peninsula and Cyprus, and people yearning for peace and an end to suffering in nations like Colombia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

We realize that Christians have often been complicit in systems of violence, injustice, militarism, racism, casteism, intolerance and discrimination. We ask God to forgive us our sins, and to transform us as agents of righteousness and advocates of Just Peace. We appeal to governments and other groups to stop using religion as a pretext for the justification of violence.

With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments. Through intensified interreligious dialogue we seek common ground with all world religions.

We are unified in our aspiration that war should become illegal. Struggling for peace on earth we are confronted with our different contexts and histories. We realize that different churches and religions bring diverse perspectives to the path towards peace. Some among us begin from the standpoint of personal conversion and morality, the acceptance of God’s peace in one’s heart as the basis for peace-making in family, community, economy, as well as in all the Earth and the world of nations. Some stress the need to focus first on mutual support and correction within the body of Christ if peace is to be realized. Some encourage the churches’ commitment to broad social movements and the public witness of the church. Each approach has merit; they are not mutually exclusive. In fact they belong inseparably together. Even in our diversity we can speak with one voice.

Peace in the community
Churches learn the complexities of Just Peace as we hear of the intersection of multiple injustices and oppressions that are simultaneously at work in the lives of many. Members of one family or community may be oppressed and also the oppressors of others. Churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can end abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, economic justice, unity and peace. The churches need to continue to confront racism and casteism as dehumanizing realities in today’s world. Likewise, violence against women and children must be named as sin. Conscious efforts are required for the full integration of differently abled people. Issues of sexuality divide the churches, and therefore we ask the WCC to create safe spaces to address dividing issues of human sexuality. At every level churches play a role in supporting and protecting the right of conscientious objection, and in assuring asylum for those who oppose and resist militarism and armed conflicts. The churches must raise their common voice to protect our Christian brothers and sisters as well as all humans who are subjected to discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religious intolerance. Peace education must move to the centre of every curriculum in schools, seminaries and universities. We acknowledge the peace-making capacity of youth and call on the churches to develop and strengthen networks of Just Peace ministries. The church is called to go public with its concerns, speaking the truth beyond the walls of its own sanctuary.

Peace with the Earth
The environmental crisis is profoundly an ethical and spiritual crisis of humanity. Recognizing the damage human activity has done to the Earth, we reaffirm our commitment to the integrity of creation and the daily lifestyle it demands. Our concern for the Earth and our concern for humanity go hand in hand. Natural resources and common goods such as water must be shared in a just and sustainable manner. We join global civil society in urging
governments to reconstruct radically all our economic activities towards the goal of an ecologically sustainable economy. The extensive use of fossil fuels and CO2 emissions must be reduced urgently to a level that keeps climate change limited. The ecological debt of the industrialized countries responsible for climate change must be considered when CO2 emission shares and plans for adaptation costs are negotiated. The nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima has proved once again that must no longer rely on nuclear power as a source of energy. We reject strategies such as an increased production of agro fuel which hurt the poor by competing with food production.

Peace in the marketplace

The global economy often provides many examples of structural violence that victimizes not through the direct use of weapons or physical force but by passive acceptance of widespread poverty, trade disparities and inequality among classes and nations. In contrast to unfettered economic growth as envisioned by the neoliberal system, the Bible signals a vision of life in abundance for all. The churches must learn to advocate more effectively for full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights as the foundation for “economies of life”.

It is a scandal that enormous amounts of money are spent on military budgets and toward providing weapons for allies and the arms trade while this money is urgently needed to eradicate poverty around the globe, and to fund an ecologically and socially responsible reorientation of the world economy. We urge the governments of this world to take immediate action to redirect their financial resources to programmes that foster life rather than death. We encourage the churches to adopt common strategies toward transforming economies. The churches must address more effectively irresponsible concentration of power and wealth as well as the disease of corruption. Steps toward just and sustainable economies include more effective rules for the financial market, the introduction of taxes on financial transactions and just trade relationships.

Peace among the peoples

History, especially in the witness of the historic peace churches, reminds us of the fact that violence is contrary to the will of God and can never resolve conflicts. It is for this reason that we are moving beyond the doctrine of just war towards a commitment to Just Peace. It requires moving from exclusive concepts of national security to safety for all. This includes a day-to-day responsibility to prevent, that is, to avoid violence at its root. Many practical aspects of the concept of Just Peace require discussion, discernment and elaboration. We continue to struggle with how innocent people can be protected from injustice, war and violence. In this light, we struggle with the concept of the “responsibility to protect” and its possibility misuse. We urgently request that the WCC and related bodies further clarify their positions regarding this policy.

We advocate total nuclear disarmament and control of the proliferation of small arms.

We as churches are in a position to teach nonviolence to the powerful, if only we dare. For we are followers of one who came as a helpless infant, died on the Cross, told us to lay aside our swords, taught us to love our enemies and was resurrected from the dead.

In our journey towards Just Peace, a new international agenda is of the utmost urgency because of the scope of dangers surrounding us. We call on the ecumenical movement as a whole, and particularly those planning the WCC Assembly of 2013 in Busan, Korea, with the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”, to make Just Peace, in all its dimensions, a key priority. Resources such as An ecumenical call to Just Peace (ECJP) and the Just Peace companion can support this journey to Busan.
All thanks and praise to you, O Triune God: Glory to you, and peace to your people on earth. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

Letter of solidarity from WCC general secretary to the churches in Egypt, expressing concerns about the recent incidents against the churches in Egypt and the increasing sectarian tensions witnessed by the country, 17 May 2011

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!
I greet you with this joyful acclamation, during this blessed season of Easter, in which we renew our faith in God’s love for His creation, and hope for a just world transformed through God’s Holy Spirit.

We are very much troubled by the recent incidents against the churches in Egypt and by the increasing sectarian tensions witnessed by the country.

Christians and Muslims have lived together in Egypt for centuries; they have struggled together in times of difficulties and shared together victories and celebrations. They have both contributed to the development and progress of the Egyptian communities and have stood together against corruption and injustice.

In these challenging times of uncertainty in the country we call upon the security forces to put more efforts in providing safety to all the citizens. We also call upon the Egyptians to join hands and hearts in facing these times together and moving forward towards a better future and greater conviviality.

The signs from the authorities promoting freedom of religion and worship and combating discrimination on the basis of just and inclusive communities are very encouraging.

We trust that by your wisdom and prayers, and in dialogue with the Muslim counterparts, you will be able to lead the people of Egypt out of the troubled times towards a common life of prosperity.

We pray for the victims and their families that God embrace them in his heavenly peace.

I remain yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus, denouncing the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus, 20 April 2012

Your Beatitude,
Christ is Risen!

First of all, allow me to convey to you my cordial Paschal greetings. May the Risen Lord fill our lives with the light, the hope and the joy of His Resurrection!
It is with great concern, your Beatitude, that the World Council of Churches has been informed of the recent events concerning Bishop Christoforos of Karpasia and his placement on the ‘stop list’ by the occupying regime, forbidding him thus to visit the bishopric and reach his community for the celebration of Easter in the occupied area.

We regret and denounce the continued violations of religious freedom and freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the Republic of Cyprus and the restrictions imposed on his grace Bishop Christoforos of Karpasia. One of the main elements of religious freedom is the right to be able to manifest one’s religion or belief in practice and worship. Such actions, as those occurred during Easter, are in direct offence to the core elements of the right to religious freedom and a worrying sign of religious intolerance which can only hamper efforts to bring peace to the divided island.

Despite this deplorable event, the Church of Cyprus has always spoken out against any acts that constitute a violation of the right to religious freedom of all people of Cyprus, irrespective of their religious or national background. It is within this context that I would like to salute and express my appreciation for your exemplary and unequivocal condemnation of the arson against the external canopy of the Koprulu Haci Ibrahim Aga Mosque, in Limassol, in the early hours of the Orthodox Great Saturday. As you have so wisely stated, irrespective of the real motives that lie behind this intolerable act and which are a matter of police investigation, the act itself constitutes an unacceptable disrespect towards a place of worship.

By condemning acts directed against places of worship, be it Christian churches or Muslim mosques, which restrict freedom of religion, the Church of Cyprus is setting a great example and is providing a true witness as a preacher of love, solidarity, peace and reconciliation. As the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states

‘inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’.

Please accept, your Beatitude, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration and our firm determination to support your struggle to stand by your community and exercise your right to religious freedom in the occupied territories, but also in your efforts to reduce tensions and build a culture of dialogue and trust between the two sides, which can eventually lead to a long lasting peace in the Republic of Cyprus.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

South Asia ecumenical forum on peace and security condemns religious intolerance in South Asia and expresses concerns on deteriorating peace and security in several South Asian countries, Delhi, India, 18-19 April 2011
Opening session

*Moderator: Dr Mathews George*

Opening prayer was led by Bishop Duleep de Chikera. Welcome and greetings on behalf of the National Council of Churches in India was extended by Bishop Taranath Sagar, president of the NCCI and a member of the WCC central committee.
In his introductory remarks, Dr Mathews George, director of WCC International Affairs, who coordinates the SAEFPS, explained about the developments in the post-SAEPP period. The South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme initiated by the WCC in 2003 was ended last year. As the SAEPP was coming closer to its last phase, the idea of SAEFPS was discussed at the 2009 March meeting held in Bangalore and subsequently, it was launched in November 2009 at the Pegasus Reef, Colombo meeting organized by the WCC in collaboration with SACC and CCA. Several issues related to peace and security in South Asia were identified for ecumenical advocacy at various levels, but it has not been followed up. Mathews George affirmed that in the post-SAEPP South Asian context, WCC considers that the two most prominent concerns are peace and security and hence, the WCC was supportive to initiating the South Asia ecumenical forum for peace and security at the request of the South Asian churches, especially the NCCs, to refocus our priority and joint mission of ecumenical advocacy.

Mathews George explained the objective of the meeting and the proposed agenda. It was agreed that the major foci of the agenda should be identified as “freedom of religion and minority situations in South Asian countries, Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan, peace and security issues, interfaith cooperation, rights of migrant workers, and people-to-people exchanges to strengthen cooperation among South Asian countries and to develop diplomacy at people’s levels.” It was also suggested that the issue of peace as economic justice needs to be identified for a focused pragmatic involvement of the forum.

Mathews George briefed about his discussion with the United Church of Christ / Disciples of Christ, U.S.A. Executive Secretary Rev. Dr James Vijayakumar about the situation in Bhutan and Dr Vijayakumar’s suggestion to discuss the Bhutan NCC’s proposal at the Delhi meeting. The members agreed to the proposal and suggested to take up this issue during the Bhutan country situation presentation by NCC Bhutan General Secretary Mr Lahtru.

While recalling the earlier decisions, the composition of the membership of the forum was outlined as follows:

1. Six general secretaries of South Asian NCCs, (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka)
2. Six South Asian NCC women secretaries.
3. Three members of WCC central committee from South Asia (Bishop S. Azariah – Pakistan, Bishop Sagar – India, Rev. Ebenenezer Joseph – Sri Lanka).
4. Three members of CCA general committee from South Asia (Bishop Philip Marandi – India, Mr Joyantha Adhikari – Bangladesh, Dr Roakaya, CCA president - Nepal)
5. Two members of WCC’s CCIA Commission from South Asia (Bishop Duleep de Chikera and Mr Joyantha Adhikari).
6. CCA Justice and International Affairs members from South Asia (Ms Vijula Arulanandam, moderator of CCA JIA)
7. Director of WCC International Affairs and executive secretary of CCA International Affairs (Dr Mathews George & Mr Charlie Occampo)

Members present at the meeting
1. Bishop Taranath Sagar, WCC central committee member and NCCI president
2. Bishop Samuel Azariah, WCC central committee member, Pakistan & moderator of Church of Pakistan
3. Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, WCC central committee member and NCC Sri Lanka gen. secretary
4. Bishop Philip P Marandih, CCA general committee member & CNI deputy moderator
5. Mr Lhatru Wangchuk, NCC Bhutan general secretary & CCA gen. committee member
6. Dr K B Rokaya, CCA president & NCC Nepal general secretary
7. Bishop Dulip de Chickera, WCC-CCIA member
8. Mr Joyontho Adhikari, WCC-CCIA member, and CCA general committee member
9. Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad, NCC India general secretary
10. Ms Rachel Pradhan, NCC India women’s secretary
11. Rev. David Anirudho Das, NCC Bangladesh general secretary
12. Ms Vijula Arulanandam, CCA JIA moderator
13. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director WCC International Affairs
14. Rev. Asir Ebenezer, NCC India executive secretary (Facilitator)
15. Rev. Vinod Victor, former coordinator of SAEPP / Church of South India (facilitator)

It was noted that several women members of the forum could not join at the meeting due to various reasons including visa restrictions. For example, NCC Bangladesh and NCC Pakistan women’s secretaries were denied visas. Mr Victor Azariah, NCC Pakistan general secretary, also did not get his visa to India. Mathews George informed that Mr Charlie Occampo has not been well and is currently undergoing some medical check-ups in Australia.

Bishop Duleep de Chikera suggested to explore the possibility of strengthening the forum with additional members, but the financial constraints for meetings and travel expenses will be a major hindrance. He mentioned that some years back, the South Asian church leaders could meet only in other events outside Asia, but in recent times Mathews George played a key role in bringing the South Asians together, which helped to address the South Asian issues at this level.

Dr Rokaya also affirmed the need for more South Asian solidarity to address vital issues in our societies; smaller churches in South Asia like Nepal and Bhutan where Christianity is new need support from the big and experienced churches from their neighbouring countries. He said that the very coming together of the South Asians is in itself an achievement, hearing, learning, encouraging and challenging one another. This was not possible before SAEPP was initiated. SAEPP helped this coming together and now this forum could also help us to refocus and reorient.

Country situation updates
Moderator: Bishop Samuel Azariah
The country situation contexts were then shared by respective NCC general secretaries.
Nepal

The Nepal situation is going from bad to worse. Of the many achievements in the last decade, the people’s movement that overturned the monarchy and the conversion of the state into a secular republic nation were milestones. But the birthing of the democratic process had not been easy. The peace process culminated in the formation of the 601-member constituent assembly mandated to write the new constitution for Nepal by May 28, 2010 and promulgate it. But strife within the ruling coalition and the inadequacies of managing coalition democracy and alleged international intervention made this a difficult proposition. More than 30 political parties compete with each other today in Nepal.The Assembly decided to extend its own term, which many believe was illegal and immoral; May 28, 2011 is decided as the new deadline and nothing is expected to happen by then. Civil society movements are now performing the funeral rites of the Constituent Assembly members in a symbolic action. The new government in place now has two-thirds majority that can work on the constitution with ease, but the difference of opinion on many issues has made it impossible. The cabinet is not yet formed. Social insecurity is the order of the day. Shut-downs, abductions and killings are becoming rampant. More than 110 armed groups though small are emerging across the nation and law and order are in disarray. The major issues in Nepal include the presence of two armies and the unresolved issue of their integration.
The old Royal Army and the Maoist Army were to be integrated into the Nepal Army with UN monitoring. But this has not happened and over 20,000 Maoists are still in the seven main barracks and about 20 sub-barracks across the nation.

The UN mission has left Nepal. Those recruited by the Maoists as child soldiers have been sent away and are regrouping with small arms, forming a fresh threat since no proper rehabilitation mechanism was in place. The next major issue is the inability to come to terms with the understanding of federalism. The basis of the demarcation of states and the powers to be given are still vague. The third issue in contention is the form of governance that would suit Nepal the best. The Maoists are insisting that there should be no compromise on the concepts of republic, secularism and federalism, but there are forces within that are even mulling the return of monarchy. Corruption is rampant. Criminalization of politics has made mafia groups gain prominence. People are beginning to think that there is no alternative but to return to fighting. There is also an allegation that India has a mysterious foreign policy viz Nepal and that Chinese interests are compounding the international interest in the region. Sub-regional geopolitics is also having a say in the national polity. U.S. interests, especially in relation to their China, India and Tibet policies, is also a matter of concern.

A major issue that the Christians face is government permission for burial grounds for Christians. Though the government has formed a committee to look into the issue, the solution is far from sight. Politically motivated Christian campaigns are becoming a new challenge. Religious intolerance is growing. Hindu groups are organizing themselves for establishing a Hindu country. Constitutionally, Nepal is a secular country, but for all practical purposes it is still a Hindu country like in the time of the King. Conversion is still illegal. The country’s old army was a Hindu army although it was known as a royal army. A Hindu defence army is being formed by militant Hindu groups.

The mineral wealth and hydroelectric power could be a matter of interest to the sub-regional major powers in Nepal. The role of the Church of Nepal in this context and that of the South Asian churches in being in solidarity with the people’s aspiration of Nepal has to be seriously reviewed. The global church must be concerned about the Nepal situation and engaged in global advocacy for Nepal’s peace and security. The post-May 28 scene has also to be seen with open eyes and prudent minds and global solidarity sought if the democratization process is not to be derailed by vested interest.

Bhutan

Mr Lhatru Wangchuk presented an update of the situation in Bhutan. Though democracy technically came to Bhutan in 2008, it is democracy without much freedom. Dissent even leads to disappearances of the dissenting. There are no church buildings in Bhutan yet and this is causing lot of issues with social functions like marriages and sacraments. When Christians die, there is no place to bury them and the attempts to bury have been creating lot of related hardships and communal tensions. The mainline churches in the South Asian region, especially the Churches in India, do not seem to take an active interest on Bhutan, leaving the NCC Bhutan a regional orphan. When the nation is gradually opening up to legalization of the Christian faith, the urgent need is to have a land bought, a model church built and the NCC Bhutan registered. The capacity-building of Bhutanese Christian leadership must be seen as a major priority and proper theological education must be ensured to check the fundamentalist inroads into Bhutan. It was pointed out in the discussion that followed that the post-denominational church in Bhutan must learn from the mistakes of the older churches of the region; it should learn to be a church with minimum structures and be daring enough to look at
new ways of being the church. Negotiations with the government must be strengthened to get the NCC registered. It must be noted that there is a general feeling that the Christians are dividing the Buddhist Bhutanese citizens and subverting Bhutanese culture. This challenge to Christian mission has to be seen in the right perspective. In the changing contexts, the Bhutanese Christians must also start discussions on cremations.

**Sri Lanka**

Rev. Ebenezer Joseph briefed the group on the ground realities in Sri Lanka. *Time Magazine* voting Mahindra Rajapakse as the sixth most popular president in the world is a pointer to what is happening in Sri Lanka. Constitutionally, the state is bound to protect Buddhism. The 2600th anniversary of the enlightenment of the Buddha has re-opened the anti-conversion laws discussions. Restrictions are being brought in in the construction of new churches, in marriage registrations, in admissions to schools and even in missionary visas. The aggressive means of evangelism adopted by splinter groups is becoming a major concern. The Christians are being forced to be much too government-dependent and this is achieved through various mechanisms. The rising extremist discourses of Buddhism have even started attacking the interfaith groups. In the ‘post-war’ scenario, Buddhist self-assertion is a strong reality in the North and the East. Buddhist statues and temples are being built everywhere, creating an uneasy feeling among the Tamils. Rebuilding of statues is being connected with war and freedom. Temples are being destroyed and Buddhist statues ‘reinstated’. The minorities are going through a painful period. There is no war and no peace and therefore no discussion on minority issues. The issue of displaced peoples remains a grave one. Taking over of land for tourism and military purposes in a systematic way is actually alienating the minorities from their land. Religious and war-related tourism are really painful to the people who are being made mere objects and show pieces. Militarization is happening all over the country. People believe that for every 25 families, there is a military intelligence officer. Interestingly, the Urban and Rural Development ministries are being handled by the Ministry of Defence and the Army.

The big question of the war crimes during the last days of the war and the commissions on lessons learned and reconciliation is haunting the nation, especially after the release of the UN report indicting the government. Minorities have become a silenced group, leaving everything to fate. Though the LTTE is annihilated, just a handful of people are enough to rekindle the fire if the issues remained unresolved. The present government is playing wisely between India, Pakistan and China and this could have serious repercussions for the future. The relationship with India is strained by fishing issues and India responding by Sonia attending the Global Tamil Forum. Human Rights are an area of major concern with a fear psychosis gripping the nation. The minorities have lost faith in the UN mechanisms. Government is willing to take on the West with support from China. The ordinary man in the street is frustrated and resigned. Human rights must be seen as collective rights. The judiciary itself is compromised. The attorney general is brought directly under the president. In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that the emphasis on development in post-war Sri Lanka is blurring issues relating the democracy and justice. The media is silenced. The global community including the regional and global churches has a major responsibility for advocacy in Sri Lanka.

**Bangladesh**

Rev. David Das presented the country situation of Bangladesh. He was of the opinion that under the present dispensation, one can say that the people are secure. Constitutional rights are re-established and secularism and democracy are visibly seen. The decision of the government to try the inhuman crimes committed by the collaborators with the Pakistan Army in the 1971 war has created ripples and tension among the pro-Islamist communalistic outfits, resulting in social
unrest. The Libya uprising and the crises in several nations have resulted in an influx of returnees from diaspora communities, especially the Bangladeshi migrant workers. There are 40,000 migrant workers still stranded in Libya. The India-Bangladesh relationship is improving. But the major challenge that the nation faces is the depletion of natural resources and energy sources. Mixed marriages are becoming a tool wherein many Christians are taken into the fold of Islam. Pro-Islamic militant groups are increasing, religious extremism is growing and they are against minority religions. Militant Islamic groups from Afghanistan and Pakistan are becoming active in the country. Grabbing of minority land is happening and a design of the majority community can easily be seen in this. The lack of proper theological education and the issue with the India visas for studies is a matter of concern. NGOs helped by the Middle East are also instigating religious intolerance and fundamentalism. Another positive aspect is that the Hindus are feeling safer now in Bangladesh. Hindu temples are being reconstructed and the Hindu migration to India is diminishing.

Poverty remains a major area of concern in Bangladesh. Joyanta Adhikari added that aggressive evangelism by overseas groups creates more communal disharmony. Minority Christians are becoming a target of majority-Islam’s fundamentalist groups in the country.

Sri Lanka

While presenting the Indian situation, Rev. Asir Ebenezer pointed out that the exposé on corruption tells the story of what is happening in India today, even though the World Cup win showed a lot of glory sides. Hindu fundamentalists Saffron and Social Activism India being run as corporate enterprises with the UID assuring consumer information for the market, the dwindling space for dissent and the clampdown on justice movements as was typified in the BinayakSen case, the reworking of the foreign currency regulations and tax codes and the sensationalization of news are major challenges. The discrimination of people based on religion remains a major challenge.

Freedom of religion bills aiming at anti-conversion are being introduced in as many as eight states in India. The governments are meddling with the administration of minority-run institutions and the politically polarized leaders of minority communities are compounding the issue. Human rights are an area of concern in many conflict-affected areas. The National Human Rights Commission is not very active. Though the lower judiciary has been stained, the Supreme Court is still respected. E-governance and the Right to Information Act have brought in a bit of transparency.

The church however is not keen on having a long-term goal or vision to cope with the challenges around them. The churches must also realize that they have a role in the formulation of the foreign policy of India.

Pakistan

Bishop Samuel Azariah gave inputs on the Pakistan situation. Pakistan is now a victim of a lot of circumstantial situations. When justice is denied, it leads to chaos and that’s what is happening. The coalition partners in the democratic fabric keep changing and this is affecting governance in a big way. The involvement of religion in governance is a matter of great concern, especially for the minority communities. The Blasphemy Law is drawn onto the streets and people are murdered. The murder of Shahbaz Bhatti is just a symbol. Though a minister, he was shot dead in the street and when the parliament offered a two-minute prayer, there were people who refused to stand. The rise of Islamic militancy is growing. Many young Christian girls are
being married into Islamic homes. This is not a question of human rights but of survival. Worship places are being monitored by the police.

The Shia/Sunni conflict is also a matter of grave concern for Pakistan. There is a serious issue with energy and power sources including electricity. Abuse of the Blasphemy Law has increased to the extent of saying to the non Muslims; either accept Islam or face the consequences.

Bishop Azariah said that the WCC must intervene here and speak for the persecuted Christian minorities in Pakistan. He reminded the meeting of what Nelson Mandela had said at the Harare Assembly: “Whatever we achieved in South Africa against Apartheid was achieved because of the WCC. A clear advocacy initiative to be planned by the WCC could create global opinion against the misuse of Blasphemy law in Pakistan. This is our need today.”

Presentation on geopolitical situation in South Asia

Moderator: Bishop Taranath Sagar

Dr C. Raja Mohan from the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi gave the keynote presentation on the geopolitics of South Asia with special reference to peace and security.

1. He affirmed that the formation of the modern territorial entity of South Asia was one of the key roots of the continuing conflicts in the region. The boundary lines of the empire were loose and it was the West that brought in the idea of national sovereignty in conjunction with territorial demarcations. The formation of India in 1947 by the British had three basic boundary line concepts. The inner line wherein the British had exercised full sovereignty, second the outer line and third the buffer line that was drawn with neutralized small kingdoms like Siam, Burma, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. The loose arrangements between the inner line and the outer line are a messy and complex situation that India and Pakistan inherited and on its fringes, there have always been roots for conflict.

2. The second issue stems from the partition of the subcontinent. It broke up territories into several frontiers, leaving issues on river waters, ethnic identities and unclear borders. The political partition did not necessarily mean economic borders and the shutting down of borders affected centuries-old trade. The wounds created in Bengal and Punjab because of the division still remain an issue. Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan and the maxim that ‘good fences make good neighbours’ made the situation yet more complex.

3. The third issue was the influence of the great powers who had stakes in the region. The Russians, Americans, Europeans and Chinese had their strategic interests in the region to be protected. The Cold War between East and the West had a direct consequence on how the India-Pakistan relationship emerged. Pakistan found an ally in the U.S. while the Indians went the Russian way. The China-Russia conflict also had an effect on the sub- continent. The India-China tension is beginning to impact all the nations in the region. In the sixties though, only Nepal was caught in between; now we see this extending to Sri Lanka, Burma and even Bhutan.

4. The fourth issue is the nature of the political systems. At partition, India and Pakistan opted for the democratic way, but in Pakistan and when later Bangladesh evolved, military intervention was an issue to contend with. There was seldom a smooth transition between two democratically elected governments. The present dispensation in Sri Lanka, that could be called a ‘muscular democracy’, could be another case in point. The nature of the centre-state relationship and the defining of democracy have always been trouble-ridden. The inability to protect minorities always remained a cause of conflict.

5. The fifth issue was the uneven economic development. The benefits of economic development have not perforated into the grassroots or spread across the regions. The tribal and
the indigenous people were invariably marginalized from the mainlines of economic growth and
the states’ failure to provide basic rights and human security has led to several small arms
uprisings where the ‘people’ rose in revolt against the state machinery.
During the discussion that ensued, several pertinent questions were raised. Now that partition
cannot be undone, how do we transcend the scars of partition? How do we think of the region
as a whole instead of bilateral relationships? How viable is the concept of a regional market and a
regional currency in South Asia? How does each nation, especially India, respond to internal
conflict in the other countries? How do we envisage free movement of people among the South
Asian nations without visa regulations? How do we creatively contribute to peace and security in
the region and also globally?
The way forward
The second day’s discussions were centered around identifying priorities and more concrete
action plans for advocacy at levels. The meeting resumed with a prayer led by Bishop Philip
Marandi.
Issues identified for future advocacy engagements
1. Blasphemy law in Pakistan – advocacy strategies and initiatives 
   Moderator: Bishop Philip Marandi
   Bishop Samuel Azariah gave background information on the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan and
how the extremists are using it today to haunt the minorities and to silence dissent. Bishop
Azariah mentioned that he was in Geneva the previous week specially to meet and hold
discussions with the WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and also with Dr Mathews
George. Several proposals were made at that time; this needs to be followed up and
implemented.
Mathews responded and said that the general secretary had taken all these proposals seriously
and had asked Mathews to include these as part of the 2012 programme plans of WCC. This was
an indication that Pakistan would not be a forgotten area as far as WCC is concerned, but similar
actions by CCA and South Asian churches are needed at other levels.
(i) Advocacy on misuse of blasphemy law is needed at various levels – South Asia, Asia and
global levels. South Asian NCCs and churches and civil society need to take up this issues.
(ii) It was decided to publish a detailed booklet explaining what the blasphemy law was, how it is
impacting Pakistan and its minorities. This information is needed to sensitize church people in
South Asia and also to sue for advocacy in South Asian countries. (WCC will take the lead in
coordinating the publication of the booklet).
(iii) WCC advocacy initiatives and engagements in the coming months are expected to reach the
goal with following steps:
o WCC general secretary’s visit to Pakistan in October 2011
o Possibility of the South Asian church leaders’ visit to Pakistan during WCC general secretary’s
visit and CoP consultation in October
o An international ecumenical team will be sent to Pakistan by WCC before the end of 2011,
after the visit of WCC general secretary
o WCC will convene an international consultation/hearing on the Pakistan situation and this will
be held in Geneva in conjunction with the UN Human Rights Council session in March 2012.
o A team of five Pakistan church leaders and two Muslim leaders will visit certain European
countries prior to the Geneva consultation in March 2012, mainly to meet with government
authorities in Europe and also to visit the EU headquarters in Brussels. They will participate at
the Geneva consultation.
(iv) The South Asian NCCs will gather opinion in their respective nations and will visit Pakistan
embassies and try to pressurize the Pakistan embassies in their respective countries.
(v) It was agreed that the interfaith networks in each nation could also be made use of for this purpose.

2. Freedom of religion in South Asian countries: advocacy initiatives

**Moderator: Ms Vijula Arulanandam**

The issue of freedom of religion is identified as a major concern in all South Asian countries. In addition to the minority persecution in Pakistan, all other South Asian countries are also facing the problem of lack of rights and freedom for minority religions to exist and for their adherents to practice their faith as religious fundamentalism and intolerance rise.

It was agreed that the forum should envisage a study and a consultation on Christian self-understanding and religious intolerance in South Asia.

Questions on becoming a truly local church, the continuing presence of colonial mission strategies, language and culture, the need for an apology for the violence caused to indigenous cultures should be discussed by our best thinkers, theologians and youngsters in the South Asian context.

The WCC and the CCA were requested to organize this meeting in collaboration with the SACC, preferably in Kathmandu between 5-8 December 2011. The crux of the issue is to let the people know of the current misuse of the law.

The anti-conversion bills prevailing in eight states of India were discussed. The issue of attempts to re-hinduise Nepal by Hindu fundamentalists was examined. The issue of burial grounds for Christians in Bhutan and Nepal was also discussed.

- In the context of Nepal where the new constitutions are being drafted, all efforts should be made to push for secular space.
- A national consultation could be envisaged for Bhutan on the sole issue of “burying the dead”.
- It was decided to initiate and publish a thorough study on the South Asian constitutional provisions on religious freedom and the way they are being practiced now. Asir Ebenezer, NCC India, was authorized to do this before the end of 2011. Ms Vijulala Arulanandam will also be collaborating in this study process.

It was emphasized that the issue of how wrong or unethical ways of doing mission are contributing to religious intolerance should also be addressed, based on case studies at the grassroot levels.

3. Rights of migrants and migrant workers

The fact that there are a large number of migrants and migrant workers in the Middle East and in Africa from the South Asian countries was noted. Several people are living in camps in adverse climatic conditions in the Gulf countries. Churches in congregations in the Middle East must take a much clearer role in this concern.

- A joint initiative with the Middle East Council of Churches could be mooted.
- Liaison between WCC, CCA, MECC and SACC on addressing the rights of migrant workers and their families from South Asian countries needs to be addressed with an immediate effect.
- A meeting of all the South Asian pastors working in the Middle East could be one very pragmatic first step that could be taken to address this concern. One church leader from each country in South Asia could also be invited.
- WCC and CCA were requested to facilitate this initiative.
- The possibility of governments in South Asia being influenced to be more sensitive to this human need could be explored.

- The SACC leadership meeting the migrants in the Middle East should be probed.
- A model like the Asian Migrant Centre and Filipino Migrant Centre in Hong Kong could be envisaged in the Middle East by the SAEF.
• Issue of human trafficking has become a major issue in South Asian context and this should be
addressed strongly in this connection.

4. People-to-people exchanges
South Asian people are isolated communities. Political disputes hinder them from traveling freely
or making social contacts with their own people living in neighbouring countries. While politics
divide people in South Asia, an important need is to develop more people-to-people contacts.
The objectives of the people-to-people exchange could be exposure, solidarity, fact- finding and
building relationships.
It was reported that the CNI Diocese of Delhi will be sending a delegation to Pakistan and
Pakistan church leaders will visit CSI on the invitation of the CSI moderator
In this context, the following concrete steps were suggested for follow-up:
• A group of church leaders from South Asia to visit Pakistan to coincide with the WCC general
secretary’s visit between 9th and 11th Oct 2011.
• SAARC countries people-to-people visit to be strengthened. Youth and women teams could
visit each others nation’s.
• Special efforts must be made to encourage team visits to and from Bhutan. NCC India could
take the lead in organizing a Bhutanese church leaders’ meeting in India.

Closing session
It was proposed to hold the next meeting of the South Asia Ecumenical Forum to meet in
Pakistan on the 8th of October 2011.
The meeting came to a close with a prayer by Ms Rachel Pradhan and benediction by Bishop
Duleep de Chickera.

Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to the secretary general of the United
Nations, on the killing of eight staff members of the United Nations Operation Centre in
northern Afghanistan, 5 April 2011

Your Excellency,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the killing of eight staff members of
the United Nations Operation Centre in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif during a
protest over the burning of a copy of the holy Koran by a U.S. pastor in Florida. Your
Excellency, I take this opportunity to extend our heart-felt condolences to you, all the staff and
the families of your colleagues who were killed in the attack.

I understand that the victims of this attack had devoted their time and life to a mission of
helping the Afghan people who are suffering in the midst of severe economic hardships and
insecurity.

In targeting the UN Staff, the perpetrators have exhibited an abysmal disregard for the
commitment of the UN and the international community, especially their efforts to help the
people of Afghanistan. We condemn this senseless act of violence carried out against innocent
workers of the UN ensuring a long lasting peace in Afghanistan. It is in every aspect unjustifiable
and those responsible for this attack must be held accountable.

I would also like to take this opportunity to let you know that the entire membership of
the World Council of Churches (WCC) firmly rejects the actions of burning the holy Koran or
any holy book and we feel deeply grieved by this reprehensible action conducted by a small
group of people who manipulate others in the name of Christianity.
The WCC is working at various levels to promote Just Peace, interreligious dialogue and harmony and stresses the importance of peace for all and urges all sides to reject violence and provocation.

On behalf of the WCC once again I offer our sincere condolences and offer our prayers.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Statement by WCC general secretary expressing concern regarding the on-going violence in Côte d'Ivoire, 5 April 2011

The World Council of Churches (WCC) expresses deep concern regarding the on-going violence and killings of a large number of civilians in Côte d'Ivoire, including women and children, particularly in Duekoue and Abidjan.

It is with great distress that we have been following the brutal killings of innocent people in the country as well as the mass exodus of civilians who are affected by the rivalry between the two political parties under the respective rival leaderships.

The escalation of violence in Abidjan and the surrounding towns over the weekend is a cause for profound regret. We are concerned by the worsening situation, as it can lead to deep ethnic and religious conflicts, and as a result Ivoirians may lose their sense of belonging and the spirit of communal harmony which inspires them to live in peace. When negotiations could lead to conflict resolution, it is unfortunate that the followers of the two major political factions have opted for violence to settle their disputes at the expense of the lives of citizens.

We fear that the deteriorating situation is on the verge of enflaming religious conflicts. Already, religion is being used to wield political and economic power. We appeal to all people of goodwill to reject such manipulation. It is in this context that the World Council of Churches urges leaders on both sides to take adequate measures to end the hostilities and work for a negotiated political settlement to attain justice, peace and reconciliation within the country.

We request that immediate action be taken to ensure the protection and security of every individual in Côte d'Ivoire. It is our sincere hope that those in positions of leadership and authority will take immediate actions to ensure security and peace with justice, to settle the political conflict and to launch a transitional government of national unity for the sake of all Ivoirians.

As members of churches who are committed to a Just Peace throughout God’s creation, we pray that a right order and the spirit of reconciliation will prevail among all people and communities in Côte d'Ivoire.

Oral intervention delivered by WCC staff at the UN Human Rights Council’s 16th session on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
Art. 37 of the convention on the rights of the child, 21 March 2011
Item 7: Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
Interactive dialogue with SR Richard Falk.
Mr President,

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches welcomes Mr Richard Falk’s latest report and commends him for the excellent work he has been doing despite the continuing refusal of the Government of Israel to allow him to visit the occupied Palestinian territories.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has followed the same trends through its ecumenical monitor and report human rights abuses. Through their regular presence in particular in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah they witnessed the eviction of families from their home, the arrest of children mostly in the middle of the night followed by detention and interrogations practice in gross violation of international law, in particular Art. 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The acceleration of house demolitions and numerous announcements of new settlement constructions in the last two months of 2010 are particularly worrying as they are adding more “facts on the ground” in advance of negotiations.

Recalling its Resolution on Jerusalem issued in September 2000, the WCC continues to encourage efforts to build an open, inclusive and shared city where free access to Holy Places and freedom of worship is assured for people of all faith. We also still firmly believe that Jerusalem can be a source of peace, stability and coexistence rather than of division and conflict that destroy human dignity and hope.

We would like to support the recommendations of special rapporteur Richard Falk and call upon the Human Rights Council to enforce them. In particular, measures to be taken to ensure that no child is arrested, detained and interrogated in contravention to the children rights.

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Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to Pakistan’s Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani regarding the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Pakistan government Minister for Minority Affairs, 2 March 2011

Your Excellency,

It is with great shock and dismay that we received news of the assassination of Mr Shahbaz Bhatti, minister for Minority Affairs in the government of Pakistan. We are deeply concerned by this heinous and outrageous crime directed against a member of your federal cabinet.

We understand that Mr Shahbaz Bhatti was assassinated by religious extremists because he was critical of the controversial blasphemy law in Pakistan. We have been informed by our member constituencies in Pakistan that Mr Bhatti was a man of courage and conviction who had recently stated that he was ready to sacrifice his life for the principled stand he had taken “because the people of Pakistan are being victimized under the pretence of the blasphemy law”. It was while Mr Bhatti was openly advocating amending the blasphemy law that he was assassinated by extremist forces.

We condemn the deplorable killing of a lawmaker of the country, and we also are concerned about the vulnerable situation in which Pakistan’s minority communities are living. Once again this act demonstrates that the extremists will stop at nothing in their desperate attempt to force religious extremism and violence on Pakistani society. We are of the opinion
that terrorist activities in any form or manifestation pose a serious threat to peace and security in any society. Violence and terror are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of motivation.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches has followed with great concern the use and misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan as well as persecution of the religious minorities in the country.

We urge the government of Pakistan to take all necessary measures to provide safety and security to the Christian minority in Pakistan, and other minorities, and not to be deterred by the violent crimes committed by religious extremists.

The World Council of Churches calls upon Your Excellency’s government swiftly to undertake the investigation necessary to identify the assassins and bring all who are responsible for this brutal murder to a court of law.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Joint written statement submitted by non-governmental organizations at the UN Human Rights Council’s sixteenth session, item 3, on the human right to peace and freedom of religion or belief, 22 February 2011

14 FORWARD-Germany, Renaissance Africaine, Tribal Link Foundation, Campaign Article 9, the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy (LCNP), Foundation for Gaia (GAIA), Association Biological-Cultural Diversity (ABCD), The Egyptian Association for Civic Engagement, the Sudanese Civic Forum, the Transparency Association in Bahrain, the Human Right Information and Training Center in Yemen, the Espace Associatif from Morocco, General Federation of Iraqi Women, Monitoring Net of Human Rights In Iraq (MHRI), The Association of Iraqi POWs, Association of International Humanitarian Lawyers (AIHL), Women’s Will Association (WWA), The Association of Iraqi Jurists (AIJ), Conservation Centre of Environmental & Reserves In Iraq (CCERF), Human Rights Division of the Association of Muslims Scholars In Iraq (AMSI), Al-Basaer Media Association (ABMA), Studies Center of Human Rights and Democracy (SCHRD), Association of Human Rights Defenders In Iraq (AHRDI), The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (Iraqi-CHR), The Organization For Widows And Orphans (OWO), The Iraqi Association Against War (IAAW), Organization for Justice and Democracy In Iraq (OJDI), Association of Iraqi Diplomats (AID), Arab Lawyers Network (UK), Iraqi Human Rights Center, Spanish Federation of Associations on Defensa y Promoción of Human Rights (Asociación para la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa (ADLR), Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España (APDHE), Asociación per a les Nacions Unides a Espanya (ANUE), Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), Comunidad Bahá’í de España, Federación Catalana d’Organitzaciones no Governamentals per a Drets Humans (27 NGOs and CSOs), Fundación Paz y Cooperación, Institut de Drets Humans de Catalunya (IDHC), Instituto de Estudios Políticos para América Latina y España (IEPALA), Justicia y Paz. España (JP. España), Liga Española Pro-Derechos Humanos (LEPDHHH), Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad (MPDL), Paz y Tercer Mundo – Mundubat (PTM), Global Alliance for Ministries and Departments of Peace (39 NGOs, please see in http://www.mfp-dop.org/), Operation Peace Through Unity (OPTU), United Network of Young Peacebuilders (42 NGOs and CSOs, please in http://www.unoy.org/), Hague Appeal for Peace (157 NGOs and CSOs worldwide, please see in http://www.haguepeace.org), Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (48 NGOs and CSOs worldwide, please see in http://www.gnpw.org/), International Peace Bureau (20 international and 270 national NGOs, please see http://ipb.org/i/index.html), Arab NGO Network for Development (23 NGOs and CSOs, please see in http://www.annd.org/), WIDE, Network Women in Development (12 NGOs, CSOs and networks, please see in http://www.wide-network.org/), International Association of Peace Messenger Cities (101 cities, please, see in http://www.iampc.org/), NGOs without consultative status, also sharing the views expressed in this statement reviewed by a technical drafting Committee of 14 independent experts, which approved on 24 February 2010 the Bilbao Declaration on the Human Right to Peace. The full text of the Bilbao Declaration is accessible in several languages at http://www.aedidh.org
I. The Spanish Society for the International Human Rights Law (SSIHRL) welcomed the International Congress on the Human Right to Peace, which took place in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) in the context of the World Social Forum on Education for Peace. It approved on 10 December 2010 by consensus two important documents:

Firstly, the “Santiago Declaration on the human right to peace”15, which represents the aspirations of the international civil society aiming at the codification of the human right to peace. It was the end of a fruitful private codification process initiated on 30 October 2006 with the “Luarca Declaration on the human right to peace”16, which was drafted by a committee of 15 independent experts.

During the World Campaign on the Human Right to Peace (2007-2010), the SSIHRL organized workshops and expert meetings on the human right to peace in all regions of the world, receiving inputs from different cultural sensibilities. The Luarca Declaration was reviewed by a technical drafting committee of 14 independent experts, which approved on 24 February 2010 the Bilbao Declaration on the Human Right to Peace17.

The Bilbao Declaration was also reviewed by the International Drafting Committee (ten experts from the five geographical groups), which approved on 2 June 2010 the “Barcelona declaration on the human right to peace218. This text was submitted to debate at the Santiago congress, which finally approved on 10 December 2010 the Santiago Declaration, which was presented to the Advisory Committee at its sixth session (January 2011).

Secondly, the Santiago congress approved the statutes of the International Observatory on the Human Right to Peace19, which will be operative on 10 March 2011 as a part of the SSIHRL, benefiting from the wide experience received throughout the four-year World Campaign on the Human Right to Peace, which has received the support of more than 800 civil society organizations world-wide, as well as numerous public institutions. To preserve its own autonomy, the Observatory will enjoy its own structure.

The observatory will network with local CSOs interested in the promotion and defence of the human right to peace. The CSOs that are part of the World Alliance on the Human Right to Peace will be especially invited to formalize their incorporation to the Observatory.

The main purpose of the Observatory would be the promotion and implementation of the Santiago declaration and to monitor de codification process within the UN, ensuring that the General Assembly would adopt a universal declaration taking into account the Santiago Declaration and its preparatory work.

Furthermore, the Observatory will prepare field reports; develop reliable indicators to measure the states’ and other international actors’ compliance with the human right to peace in accordance with the normative content of the Santiago Declaration; and publish reports on situations of serious, massive and systematic violations of the human right to peace.

The Observatory is expected to assist states and international organizations to focus on the development of the three pillars on which the Charter of the United Nations is based, namely:

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15 See full text of the Santiago Declaration at www.aedidh.org
16 See full text of the Luarca Declaration at www.aedidh.org
17 The full text of the Bilbao Declaration is accessible in several languages at http://www.aedidh.org
18 The full text of the Barcelona Declaration is accessible in several languages at http://www.aedidh.org
19 The statutes of the observatory are also available at www.aedidh.org
the system of collective security which prohibits the threat or use of force, and promote the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law; the economic and social development of peoples; and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without discrimination. Under these three pillars the human right to peace will be built.

II. The Human Rights Council has been working since 2008 on the “Promotion of the right of peoples to peace”. On 17 June 2010 it adopted Resolution 14/3 on the right of peoples to peace, which explicitly recognized “... the important work being carried out by civil society organizations for the promotion of the right of peoples to peace and the codification of that right”20; and “supported the need to further promote the realization of the right of peoples to peace”. In that regard it requested “the Advisory Committee, in consultation with member states, civil society, academia and all relevant stakeholders, to prepare a draft declaration on the right of peoples to peace, and to report on the progress thereon to the Council at its seventeenth session”21.

Therefore, the Advisory Committee (recommendation 5/2, of 6 August 2010) established a drafting group of four members who submitted its progress report to the Advisory Committee in January 2011. By recommendation 6/3, of 21 January 2011, the Advisory Committee took note of the progress report22; increased to six the members the drafting group; and requested it to prepare a questionnaire to be distributed among all the stakeholders. In the light of the comments to be received, it will submit in January 2012 a draft declaration to the Advisory Committee. The progress report will also be submitted to the HR Council at its seventeenth session23.

The progress report recognizes the important contribution of civil society to the international codification of the right to peace within the United Nations, paying tribute particularly to the World Campaign on the human right to peace carried out by the SSIHRL with the support of more than 800 NGO24.

As the Santiago Declaration, the progress report suggests to consider peace as the absence of organized violence, the effective protection of human rights, gender equality and social justice, economic wellbeing and free expression of different cultural values, without discrimination25. Consequently, it proposes nine guiding dimensions to be included in the future draft declaration26. Additionally, it recognizes that the right to peace has a double dimension - individual and collective-, and that the duty-holders of the right are both peoples and individuals27. Besides, it notes that the establishment, maintenance and strengthening of the right to peace requires the application and respect of all human rights for all28.

20 Last preambular paragraph of the res. 14/3 cit.
21 Ibidem id., operative § 15.
23 Ibidem id., paragraph 74.
24 Ibidem id., paragraph 14.
25 Ibidem id., paragraph 21.
26 According to the drafting group the nine guiding dimensions are as follows: peace as a right of all peoples; disarmament; human security and respect of our environment; resistance to oppression; conscientious objection; private military and security forces; education; development; the rights of victims and vulnerable groups; the obligations of states; and the monitoring and implementation of the right of peoples to peace, Ibidem id., paragraph 22.
27 Ibidem id., Annex III.
28 Ibidem id., paragraph 27.e.
Finally, the progress report recognizes that the contribution of women to the cause of peace is fundamental to the full development of a country and world-wide welfare\(^29\). Therefore, all international actors should empower women in their contribution to building, consolidating and maintaining peace after conflicts and to participate at all levels of decision-making process on peace and security issues\(^30\). To this purpose the gender perspective should be incorporated in a comprehensive peace and human rights education\(^31\). Furthermore, national laws and policies discriminatory against women should be reviewed, and legislation addressing domestic violence, trafficking of women and girls and gender-based violence should be adopted\(^32\).

The phenomenon of intolerance in matter of conviction or belief constitutes a danger for the peace in the world. As several special rapporteurs have concluded, it has been a disturbing feature in many regions of the world and has caused the loss of many lives by bringing about many wars and repression throughout human history\(^33\). Discrimination and violence in the name of religion or belief is at the heart of many conflicts that are based on religious issues, often intertwined with particular ethnic, national, political or historical backgrounds\(^34\). The HR Council recognized that “the disregard for and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, continue to bring, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to humankind” (resolution 4/10).

Mr A. Amor, former special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, considered that religious extremism violates the right of individuals and peoples to peace and prejudice human rights as a whole. He accordingly recommended that the General Assembly adopt appropriate instruments to combat “hatred, intolerance and acts violence, including those motivated by religious extremism” and to encourage understanding, tolerance and respect in matter of freedom of religion or belief within the framework of the purposes of the Charter and the General Assembly resolution 39/11 of 12 December 1984 (Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace)\(^35\).

Since freedom of religion or belief is protected as a fundamental right under international law\(^36\), the interreligious and intra-religious dialogue is vital for the prevention of conflicts\(^37\). Although the interreligious dialogue alone does not solve underlying problems, it may be a first step in the right direction to look at a common strategy to reduce tensions and promote

\(^{29}\) Ibidem id., paragraph 9.
\(^{30}\) Ibidem id., paragraph 67.c.
\(^{31}\) Ibidem id., paragraph 57.a.
\(^{32}\) Ibidem id., paragraph 57.f.3.
\(^{34}\) Ibidem id., paragraph 42.
\(^{36}\) International human rights instruments containing provisions on the struggle against intolerance and discrimination in matters of religion or belief are as follows: Article 2 and 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948, article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1966; the ILO Convention on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation of 1958; the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960; the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979.
\(^{37}\) Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, A/HRC/6/5, of 20 July 2007, paragraph 52.
tolerance\textsuperscript{38}. Several special rapporteurs recommended that the HR Council invite member states to promote and practise dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions as a more profound way of combating racism and religious intolerance\textsuperscript{39}.

Education is an essential tool to create a genuine human rights culture in society. Schools can be a suitable place to learn about peace, understanding and tolerance among individuals, groups and nations to develop respect for pluralism\textsuperscript{40}. School education should contribute to the elimination of negative stereotypes that frequently poison the relationship between different communities and have particularly detrimental effects on minorities\textsuperscript{41}. Appropriate resources should also be available to develop non-formal educational programs as a partnership between governments and CSO.

IV. Recommendations

The SSIHRL and associated CSOs welcome that the proposals of the progress report may also be found in the “Santiago Declaration on the human right to peace”. However, the Santiago Declaration addresses other issues that should be included in a future declaration, namely:

• To consolidate the human right to peace in its double dimension – individual and collective – as a means to foster the right to self determination of peoples and all human rights, including the right to development
• To recognize the close relationship between human right to peace and integrity, liberty and security of the person and the refugees law; physical and mental health and wellbeing; the need to protect victims from uncontrolled weapons of mass destruction and from conventional weapons, genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and sexual violence and ensure redress for the victims; the need to disarm all weapons; the right to emigrate, to return to the country of origin and to not emigrate; the right to know the truth about human rights violations; the need to protect the rights of the most vulnerable, in particular, women and children
• To strengthen the exercise of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic rights to enhance social justice, equity and gender equality, and the elimination of extreme poverty, to enable solidarity, peace and friendly relations among all nations, races, ethnicities or religions.
• To stress that the human right to peace includes the rights to environment and to education on and for peace and all other human rights, as well as the construction of democratic, egalitarian and multicultural societies.
• To defend the dialogue and peaceful coexistence among cultures, civilizations and religions or belief, to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.
• To identify further measures to implement the human right to peace in accordance with the UN Charter, the UDHR and the international and regional human rights instruments. And,
• To recognize women contribution in the field of peace-building and to stress the importance of their participation at all levels of decision-making, as affirmed by the GA in its resolutions 3519 of 1975 and 3763 of 1982; and by the SC in its resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 and

\textsuperscript{38} Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, A/HRC/13/40, of 21 December 2009, paragraph 61.
\textsuperscript{39} Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, and the special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mr Doudou Diène, further to HR Council decision 1/107 on incitement to racial and religious hatred and the promotion of tolerance, A/HRC/2/3, of 20 September 2006, paragraph 63.
\textsuperscript{40} Interim report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir, A/62/280, of 20 August 2007, paragraph 31.
\textsuperscript{41} Report of the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, A/HRC/16/53, of 15 December 2010, paragraph 29.
1889 (2009); and to claim a full and effective implementation of the SC resolution 1325 on women and peace and security.

Minute on the presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 16-22 February 2011

Two recent attacks against Christians in their places of worship in the Middle East have raised fears and concerns among churches everywhere. Close on the heels of the brutal attack against Christians praying in churches in Baghdad, Iraq in October 2010 came news that Christians who were praying were subject to an equally vicious and cruel attack in Alexandria, Egypt on New Year’s Eve, December, 2010. These two events resulted in a huge public outcry.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which counts within its fellowship a sizeable number of Churches in the Middle East, several of whom are founding members of the WCC, is alarmed at the nature and consequences of these attacks. An equally major concern is that these incidents are being exploited by some political parties in several countries as well as by some religious groups to fuel islamophobic tendencies and negative images about Islam.

The situation could easily assume detrimental dimensions if, in the name of protecting their future and maintaining their security, the above trends were further advanced. The WCC’s approach to the presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East is radically different. Rather than allowing the situation to deteriorate into one of conflict and antagonism towards other citizens in different countries, the imperative is to find ways and means of bringing to the fore a genuine Christian spirit of solidarity.

The WCC seeks to reinforce a positive engagement for churches in the life of the nations to which they belong. The continuous presence and active participation of Christians in the life of the entire region has been a remarkable witness to the Christian faith regardless of the times of torment and suffering at various junctures.

Since its inception, the WCC has viewed the Middle East as a region of special interest, being the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For Christians, the region is the place where our Lord was incarnated and born, preached, suffered crucifixion, and was resurrected. It is also the land from where the Good News was spread to the entire inhabited world. Our living faith has its roots in this land, and is nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots from the apostolic times. Without this Christian presence, the conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, civilizations, which is a sign of God’s love for all humanity, will be endangered. In addition, its extinction will be a sign of failure of the ecumenical family to express the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity.

Christians in the Middle East are facing unprecedented challenges now, and are attempting to respond through new forms of witness. They are more aware than ever that when they express together a common vision about their role in society and deliver a unified message, their voice is better heard and their presence and impact in their societies is more appreciated.

In the birthplace of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians have come together from all church traditions and expressed their common word of “faith, hope and love” from the “heart of their suffering”. The *Kairos Palestine* document challenges the ecumenical family and the international community to put an end to the Israeli occupation. It is a call to the Palestinian community to remain steadfast in their land, witnessing to God’s love for all, while peacefully resisting the evil of occupation. The community is a sign of hope for the ecumenical family.
Christians in Iraq have suffered, like all citizens, from the disastrous and tragic consequences of the illegal, immoral, and ill-advised invasion of their country. After several years of occupation, they still lack security, including social security. Facing tremendous challenges, Christians have come together and formed a “Christian Council of church leaders in Iraq” with a vision that is unequivocally committed to the advancement of all Iraqi citizens, aiming at engaging in promoting ecumenical initiatives, dialogue, and partnership with Muslims.

The recent developments in Egypt have demonstrated that the democratic aspirations of a population cannot be suppressed and that the social struggle for transformation can lead to equal citizenship. Christians in Egypt, especially young people, were part of this struggle for dignity and freedom. Despite the recent attacks against them – even in their places of worship – from obscure forces that threaten their stability and dignity, they have remained steadfast and undeterred. They remain resolute and unwavering to make their Christian presence felt through acts of service that are life transforming for individuals and Egyptian society, as for example when Christians recently formed a living circle hand-in-hand for the protection of praying Muslims in Tahrir Square in Cairo.

However, an alarming trend is that in some parts of the region religious minorities, including Christians, do not enjoy equal citizenship and their presence is often challenged by open discrimination, especially when it comes to construction of churches. They continue to face restrictions on their practice of religion, and on their access to places of worship, and sometimes their historical existence is threatened through confiscation of church properties and disrespect of their cultural heritage.

The Middle East Council of Churches exists to be the rallying point that can mobilize churches in the region and provide genuine perspectives to the relations between churches in the region and the rest of the world. The need to maintain and strengthen this ecumenical tool is essential in the face of the increasing challenges and signs of hope that are opening up throughout the region.

Recent political developments in the region point to signs of hope for democratic changes, respect for human rights and the rule of law in several countries. However, the task ahead is arduous. Notions of a comprehensive Just Peace are not anywhere near being realized. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and of other Arab lands remains a source of unrest and tensions in the region and beyond, and a major obstacle to achieving a Just Peace that can bring security, stability, and prosperity to all peoples in the region. For the WCC, it remains a non-negotiable principle that peace and reconciliation must be conditioned by justice.

God’s justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths have always guided WCC policy concerning the region. The WCC continues to believe that the core challenge for the churches, but also for the whole ecumenical family, is to witness to God’s justice in the midst of unjust occupations, deprivation of freedom, and oppression. The irrevocable call is to courageously challenge the sources and structures of these injustices, as well as the authorities that perpetuate them.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva from 16 to 22 February 2011, therefore:

1. **Calls** for solidarity of WCC member churches with Christians in Iraq in multiple ways including:
(a) Providing support to the newly formed Christian Council of church leaders in Iraq (CCCLI) so that it grows into a unifying force for churches to act in unity to rebuild war-ravaged Iraqi society;
(b) Supporting churches to build capacities to serve Iraqi people to rebuild their lives;
(c) Extending specific cooperation to Christian communities, especially those who have been disadvantaged by the war and occupation, in ways that make them self-reliant and encouraged to remain in Iraq as a continuing sign and affirmation of Christian presence and witness in the country.
(d) Providing support to Iraqi Christian refugees living in neighbouring countries.

2. **Urges** WCC member churches to study and disseminate the Kairos Palestine document, and to listen and concretely respond to the Palestinian Christian aspirations and calls expressed in this document.

3. **Encourages** WCC member churches to examine and act on the substance and proposals of the conference on “Transforming Communities: Christians and Muslims building a common future” jointly convened by the WCC and a number of international Muslim organizations and networks in November 2010.

4. **Endorses** the call of this conference for the formation of a joint working group, which can be mobilized whenever a crisis threatens to arise in which Christians and Muslims find themselves in conflict.

5. **Regards** current events in various countries in the Middle East as an opportunity for peaceful positive changes in the societies and encourages all people in the region, including Christians, to continue to play their part in the common longing to secure human rights, peace and respect for all people of the region.

6. **Calls** for convening an ecumenical international conference in 2012 to address the new challenges Christians are facing in the Middle East, in collaboration with the churches in the region.

7. **Invites** churches and their agencies who are engaged in support and solidarity work in the Middle East to provide coordinated support in the re-envisioning and re-invigoration process of the Middle East Council of Churches so that its mission as a unique ecumenical tool rallying and coordinating church witness and action can be fulfilled effectively.

8. **Prays** and continues to be involved in proactive ecumenical advocacy in solidarity with the churches in the Middle East.

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**Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Archbishop of Cyprus Chryostomos II strongly denouncing the actions of the Turkish Cypriot authorities in stopping the Christmas day service of a church in Rizokarpaso, 28 January 2011**

Your Beatitude,

Following your letter on the deplorable events that took place on Christmas day in Rizokarpaso, I have attached the letter sent by the World Council of Churches to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Navanethem Pillay and to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeldt.

We strongly denounce these actions as we believe that they constitute a flagrant violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights, mainly the right to freedom of religion and belief as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many other International human rights instruments. The World Council of Churches will never cease to defend religious
freedom and stand by those victims who are being persecuted for reasons of their religious beliefs. We believe that, as the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letters from WCC general secretary to H.E. Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights and Mr Heiner Bielefeldt, UN special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, regarding the ceasing of worship/refusing to give permission to hold services at two Christian churches by the Turkish Cypriot police in Cyprus on Christmas day, 28 January 2011

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches would like to express its deepest concern and indignation concerning the events that took place on Christmas day in the village of Rizokarpaso, in the area of the Republic of Cyprus under the control of Turkish troops and administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkish Cypriot police entered the Church of Saint Sinesios and demanded that the worship activities cease. Following this they forced the congregation out and sealed the church. Their argument was that the local Turkish Cypriot authorities had not granted the congregation permission for the service, an accusation that the Church of Cyprus strongly denies. It should be noted that the church is one of seven religious sites in the area which is governed by a special status under which religious services can be performed on a regular basis without receiving advanced permission. Furthermore, the local Turkish Cypriot authorities refused to give permission for the performance of the Holy Service to the Gialousa Saint Trinity Church (Agia Triada) in occupied Karpasia.

We strongly denounce these actions as we believe that they constitute a flagrant violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights, mainly the right to freedom of religion and belief, as guaranteed in a number of international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the Third Vienna Agreement of 1975, concerning among others the safeguard of the right to education and religious freedom of the enclaved Greek Cypriots, living in the northern occupied part of the Republic of Cyprus.

One of the main elements of religious freedom is the right to be able to manifest one’s religion or belief in practice and worship. Such actions, as those that occurred on Christmas day, are in direct offence to the core elements of the right to religious freedom and a worrying sign of religious intolerance which can only hamper efforts to bring peace to the divided island. As the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Having full confidence in the work of the United Nations for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights around the world, we urge you, your Excellency, to use your good
Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the attack on worshippers in the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt during a New Year's midnight mass, 1 January 2011

The World Council of Churches (WCC) condemns the vicious attack on innocent worshippers in the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt when a bomb was detonated at the conclusion of the celebration of a New Year's midnight mass. As a result, at least 21 people have been killed and more than 80 injured.

The WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, on behalf of the fellowship of WCC member churches and the entire ecumenical family, expresses profound sorrow as well as condolences and prayers for the families of the victims, for the wounded and for all the people of Egypt. He encourages Egyptians to stand firm and united through the many trials and tribulations that continue to threaten.

The events of 1 January 2011 are a reminder of other tragedies in the region, including an attack on Coptic worshippers in Nag Hammadi, Egypt on 7 January 2010 and the lethal assault on the Church of Our Lady of Salvation (Sayidat al-Nejat) in Baghdad, Iraq on 31 October 2010. Tveit recalled that the Baghdad attack took place at the time of a significant Muslim-Christian dialogue in Geneva and that the Muslim and Christian leaders who were present issued a joint denunciation of the act.

The World Council of Churches appeals to President Mubarak of Egypt, to religious leaders and to governments across the region to act swiftly and boldly to safeguard the fundamental religious rights of worshippers of all faiths, to ensure security in the face of violence and to guarantee justice for all people.

Places of worship representing many different faith traditions have been targets of violence by extremists. Tveit said, “Government action must be matched by solidarity among Muslims, Christians and people of all faiths as they interact at the local level and together denounce any violent attack. We expect leaders to join once again in condemning such acts.”

Tveit referred to a message from the WCC executive committee to the churches in Egypt in 2010. At that time, he said, “the WCC expressed once again its deep concern and solidarity while affirming its unequivocal support to the churches of Egypt in these troubled times during which Coptic Christians continue to provide living examples of true Christian witness, to the point of martyrdom.”

In these difficult and challenging times, Tveit added, the WCC calls particularly on religious and national leaders to support the people in Egypt as they affirm life and engage in countering negative trends through peaceful means, such as proactive engagement in dialogue and partnership between Christians and Muslims in Egypt and throughout the world.
Letter from WCC general secretary to Pope Shenouda III expressing condolences at the news of the bomb attack on the Qeddiseen Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria on New Year's eve, 1 January 2011

Your Holiness,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with great sadness and shock that I received the news of the bomb attack on the Qeddiseen Coptic Orthodox church in Alexandria on New Year's eve, especially that the attack targeted, once again, innocent worshippers celebrating the midnight mass of the New Year.

With this letter, I want to express to Your Holiness the profound condolences of the ecumenical family and our prayers for the Church in Egypt, and especially for the families of the victims and for the wounded.

It is troubling to hear about continuous threats and attacks on the churches in Egypt and in other parts in the Middle East, and I want to assure Your Holiness that the World Council of Churches will continue to manifest its solidarity with the Coptic Orthodox Church, especially in these difficult times. As one ecumenical family we continue to hold the churches in Egypt in our prayers, and we continue to support the important efforts of the Coptic Orthodox Church in addressing these challenges.

Although this is not an occasion for us to rejoice, I wish Your Holiness a blessed season of the Nativity of our Lord and His Epiphany in the Jordan River. We pray that our Lord and Saviour will grant Your Holiness and all members of the Coptic Orthodox Church strength and courage to withstand the difficulties.

In Christ our Lord,
Rev. Dr Olav Tveit
General secretary

Statement issued by participants at an international consultation on Muslim-Christian relations, Geneva, Switzerland, 4 November 2010

Transforming communities: Christians and Muslims building a common future Geneva, Switzerland

Preamble
At the joint invitation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Islamic Call Society (WICS), the Royal Aal al Bayt Institute and the Consortium of a Common Word, 64 Muslim and Christian leaders, scholars, and activists from around the world gathered in Geneva, from 1 to 4 November 2010, to develop concrete ways of building a common future, in order to achieve more compassionate and just societies, based on equality, co-citizenship, and mutual respect.

Nature and objectives
Very few meetings have like this one been organized as a jointly prepared and jointly sponsored consultation. It has been made possible because of the shared experience over recent decades of international Christian and Muslim consultations: Motivated by our commitment to interfaith dialogue, the consultation aimed to help Muslims and Christians move beyond the discourse of minority and majority towards upholding the principle of shared citizenship. We desired to stress the role of religion in reconciliation, instead of allowing it to be identified with
conflict, and to emphasize the importance of education in eliminating mistrust among religious communities.

With this in mind the consultation focused on three main areas:

• Beyond majority and minority
• From conflict to compassionate justice
• Education for understanding and shared citizenship.

In the opening session representatives of the organizers presented their perspectives on the theme of the consultation. Short lectures by invited experts on each of the topics were presented to the full consultation. Parallel working groups then listened to local experiences from around the world presented by participants. On this basis they then considered the themes in ways which combined theoretical and practical perspectives.

Opening session

Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, opened the proceedings by welcoming the participants and thanking the Muslim partners for their commitment to this project. The consultation builds on the long experience of such meetings in which the WCC has been an active and committed partner. From its origins the WCC has been committed not only to the oikoumene of the Christian churches but that of all humanity. The general secretary spoke of his experience as chair of the church’s dialogue with the Islamic Council of Norway. He posed three central questions to the consultation: How can communities be transformed to express an inclusive “we”? How can Muslim and Christian leaders build relationships which can face challenges together? And how can our spiritual and religious resources be used to transform our communities?

Dr Ibrahim Rabu presented greetings from Dr Muhammad Ahmad Sharif, general secretary of the World Islamic Call Society (WICS). Based on Islamic principles, the World Islamic Call Society strongly believes that interreligious dialogue and cultural cooperation are the best ways of dealing with global challenges, whether religious, educational or social.

This gathering brings under one roof a significant number of leaders from Muslim and Christian communities at a time when all of us are anxious about the growing phenomenon of violence coupled with extremism. It is our duty, dictated by the moral need to be open towards each other, to express our deep anxiety, on behalf of Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians, alike, as a result of the Swiss referendum that led to the banning of mosque minarets. Such an outcome contradicts the image we all hold of this country. We cannot conceal our worries that the ban may impact world relations negatively at various levels. We believe that the opportunity still exists to deal wisely with such a delicate situation. We are certain that this country will continue protecting the rights of every one of its citizens to freely practice his/her religion.

Rev. Dr Thomas Wipf, on behalf of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and the Swiss Council of Religions in Switzerland, and HE Sheikh Yousef Ibram, Imam of the Geneva Mosque, extended the welcome of the local and national religious communities to the consultation. Both emphasized their deep regret at the referendum of December 2009 which prohibited the building of minarets. The churches and the Muslim organizations had, both together and separately, campaigned against the ban and continue to work together to ameliorate
the negative impacts of that event. This consultation, they said, will have a significant effect also on the local situation and help with looking forward to a more positive future.

Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, president of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), presented greetings on behalf of CEC and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and stated that the consultation will contribute to the development of a set of values that could strengthen the exercise of religious freedom and human rights.

In the first of two keynote lectures, HRH Prince Ghazi b. Muhammad b. Talal of Jordan, referring to the October 2007 statement ‘A Common Word’ signed by 138 senior Muslim scholars, focused on the shared Muslim and Christian principle of defending the oppressed regardless of religion. He quoted the example of ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri who, exiled in Damascus after having resisted the French invasion of Algeria in the 1830s, saved many thousands of Christians during sectarian clashes. Political powers and media frequently keep the public in ignorance of realities which do not suit their interests. In relation to this consultation it is therefore particularly welcome that the UN General Assembly in October 2010 agreed to establish the World Interfaith Harmony Week to take place annually in the first week of February.

The Rt Rev. Anders Wejrud, Archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden, in the second keynote address, recalled the enormous changes over the last century moving from Christian and western triumphalism through a number of disasters to work of visionary activists whose dreams led to the international and interreligious initiatives which lie behind the current event. But elements of our religious communities have become politicized, and others have suffered by association, while a backlash against religion threatens to marginalize them all. Religion and identity are closely interdependent and both are unavoidably relevant to everyday life. So when marginalized communities fear change, religion too often becomes a tool for conflict instead of a force for justice and reconciliation which are inherent in love of God and love of neighbour.

**Working on the themes**

1. **Beyond majority and minority**

HE Dr Tarek Mitri, minister of Information, Lebanon, pointed out that modern nation-state models have revived ancient hatreds, and the contemporary focus on legal minority rights encourages the development of distinct identities. Concerns for collective survival encourage a turning inwards and open the door for external interference – the example of Christian communities in the Ottoman state illustrates the process. The new nation states often lacked a shared sense of history, resting on a theoretical shared citizenship which in only some cases was able to construct a new shared history. In such situations of uncertainty, when crises destabilize, anger and frustration find release in targeting scapegoats, often religious minorities. Tensions between nation state formations and ethnic, religious and linguistic realities, when they increase, throw minorities back on their own resources and external partners. State governments make things worse by seeking to manipulate such internal differences to maintain power. This disguises the fact that social and economic problems are shared across all such communal divisions.

Prof. Dr Mahmoud Ayoub, Hartford Seminary, U.S.A., started with the reflection that there are non-Muslim countries whose Muslim populations far exceed those of countries regarded as guardians of Islam – which needs no guardians. What are minorities? Some are oppressed, others oppress. In the west a Muslim presence has been continuous since the early 8th century, often as rulers, more recently as colonial migrants. Relationships have often been
disrupted by the appearance of fanatical revival movements. Currently, Muslims in North America and Europe live in a generally favourable situation, but they need to indigenize. For that they need to develop an Islamic scholarship which is relevant to, and grows out of, the western Muslim experience. The resource for such a course can be found in Qur’anic and Prophetic models: Sura 29 verse 46, ‘And do not dispute with he followers of the Book except by what is best, except for those of them who act unjustly;’ and 5:48, ‘…for everyone of you did We appoint a law and a way, and if God had pleased He would have made you a single people…’. The Qur’an wanted all the people of the book to be one ecumenical community, but none of them accepted this role, yet this goal remains a sign of hope. So we need not a *fiqh* of minorities but one of citizenship and pluralism which learns also from secular humanism.

2. From conflict to compassionate justice

Dr Aref Ali Nayed, director of the Kalam Research and Media center in Dubai, focused his presentation on growing ecologies of peace and forgiveness, citing teachings in both faith traditions which require compassion towards our neighbors. He remarked that there is an urgent need to repair, rehabilitate and maintain the scholarly and spiritual institutions that preserve and grow compassion in the hearts of young people.

Furthermore, he said we are called upon to retrieve, rehabilitate and re-articulate the true compassionate teachings of our traditions regarding the divinely ordained value of human personhood and its rights, duties and freedoms.

Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik, president of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, Moderator of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and former prime minister of Norway, began his presentation by saying that it is more difficult to win peace than it is to win war. He named the three ethical values of compassion which arise from his faith – the commandment of Jesus to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves, the understanding that we are all created in the image of God and the principle of sound stewardship of God’s creation.

Dr Farid Esack, professor in the Study of Islam at the University of Johannesburg, suggested that we can never attain compassionate justice, but that we can attempt to move towards this justice. He added that justice is an imperative value and that compassion is a value which stands on its own. He added that justice without compassion is a betrayal of justice, and that we must recognize that each of us has the capacity to become what we hate in the other.

3. Education: The path to understanding, cooperation and active citizenship

Dr Ja’far Abdusalam, secretary-general of the League of Islamic Universities in Egypt and professor emeritus, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, drew attention to the many verses in the Quran that stress human diversity as something important and natural. “Islam establishes equality between all human beings. The Prophet spent a lot of time fighting discrimination and showing that we humans are all equal,” he said. Educating and teaching are key means of affirming equality and non-discrimination among human beings. In relation to this Muslims and Christians should take advantage of scientific progress and learning and in respect for law. Education and science should be in the service of the community and should be open and shared. An important dimension of this is to correct the mutual images of Islam and Christianity, especially in school textbooks.

Clare Amos, speaking as a British Christian woman with many years of experience in the Middle East, asked to what extent our philosophy and understanding of the nature of education itself are influenced by our religious beliefs or theology of revelation. This issue needs to be
named and identified at the start, because if we are seeing education as a tool to promote interreligious dialogue then it is surely important to acknowledge that Christian and Muslim educational philosophies may be different, and may affect and be affected by our theologies of revelation. We need to look at a range of experiences and research accumulated in recent years in a wide variety of international settings, and she referred in detail to some of these. In conclusion she again stressed the importance of remaining alive to the theological foundations of our shared educational reflection and experience.

Recommendations

Preamble

• We have mutual concerns about the issues affecting our world and our communities; we share the consequences of these issues in our lives and therefore we need to address them together.
• The basis of our faiths, as expressed in the call to get to know each other and the two commandments to love God and to love the neighbour provide a solid ground for our common responsibility to act and address common concerns.
• We regard the deepening of our mutual religious and theological understanding as a necessary dimension of our continuing dialogue, exploring both the points where we share common ground and where we differ.

1. Beyond minority and majority

• We commit jointly to work to counter discrimination, abuse of laws and unjust legal restrictions on matters related to religious identity.
• We commit jointly to undo the effects of historical injustices and stereotypes which continue to discriminate against particular religious communities.
• We commit jointly to commend the principles adopted by like-minded international and non-governmental organizations, refusing to allow religious or spiritual authority to justify discrimination and exclusion.

2. From conflict to compassionate justice

• We call for the formation of a joint working group which can be mobilized whenever a crisis threatens to arise in which Christians and Muslims find themselves in conflict.
• Religion is often invoked in conflict creation, even when other factors, such as unfair resource allocation, oppression, occupation and injustice, are the real roots of conflict.
• We must find ways to ‘disengage’ religion from such roles and ‘reengage’ it towards conflict resolution and compassionate justice.

3. Education: the path to understanding, cooperation and active citizenship

• We commend and commit ourselves to the implementation of the World Interfaith Harmony Week as adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 October 2010.
• We recommend that the organizers of this consultation consider establishing a joint project to:

  a) encourage the sharing of experiences of living together constructively in plural societies and urban settings;
  b) collect and disseminate best practices in activities and projects that build a culture of dialogue and interreligious cooperation;
  c) focus on the social and economic problems affecting more than one billion people living in poverty, which are among the most acute causes of racial, ethnic and religious conflicts;
  d) focus on environmental issues and climate change and the challenges they represent to human security.

We affirm the importance of relevant and balanced education about the religion of ‘the other’ at all levels and in appropriate formats, in curricula and text books and the training of
religious and community leaders, teachers, lecturers and researchers, ideally provided by an adherent of that religion.

- We encourage the production of an interfaith resource book and of joint teaching tools on Islam and Christianity for the use of religious teachers, imams and clergy, and their translation and dissemination worldwide.
- We call on those who fund and manage universities and colleges of religious training to support the establishment of teaching and research programmes in the major religions with a view to encouraging positive interreligious relations.
- We encourage the development of programmes designed to strengthen young people’s abilities to play a constructive role in a plural world, to reflect on the values of compassionate justice and mutual respect, and to prepare them for future leadership roles.
- We call on the media to assume their responsibility to provide balanced coverage of the issues which concern us.

On matters of current concern
- The consultation notes with regret and pain the suffering of religious groups in various locations around the world today, where minorities are scapegoated for deeper and more complex problems.
- The consultation coincided with an escalation of tragic and violent events in Iraq, and a statement was issued.
- The participants expressed their concern about the tensions surrounding the forthcoming referendum in the Sudan. It is important that these tensions not be seen as being between Muslims and Christians.
- The participants expressed their concern at the Swiss vote to ban the construction of minarets and noted with appreciation the broad campaign against this vote.
- The consultation reaffirms the value of Christians and Muslims engaging in dialogue as a way of moving forward together.

Statement of WCC general secretary denouncing the burning of the Alliance Church in Jerusalem, 2 November 2010

The World Council of Churches strongly denounces the burning of the Alliance Church built in Jerusalem in 1897, which once hosted the Palestinian Bible College. This attack has caused considerable damage to significant parts of the building.

The WCC rejects all forms of extremism, including religious ones. We have in this incident another example that shows that as long as there is no Just Peace in Palestine and Israel, some groups will take advantage to transform the political conflict into a religious war. We hope that the burning of the church will be investigated by competent authorities and the perpetrators of the crime be brought to account.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

Public statement by WCC general secretary condemning the 31 October 2010 attack on the Sayidat al-Nejat Church in Baghdad, 1 November 2010

The World Council of Churches general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, has condemned the “criminal act of terror” Sunday in Baghdad, Iraq, when gunmen took hostages in the Sayidat al-Nejat Church. The death toll from the hostage standoff rose to some 58 people on
Monday, including priests, women and children and Iraqi security forces who conducted a raid to end the siege.

“The World Council of Churches strongly condemns the criminal act of terror that took place on Sunday in the Sayyidat al-Najat Church in Baghdad and expresses its deep sympathy and solidarity with those who lost their loved ones and pray for a speedy recovery for the injured.

The fellowship of the World Council of Churches is deeply troubled by the continuous suffering of Christians in Iraq and continues to stand in solidarity with all churches as they pass through turbulent and challenging times and witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hatred and aggression.

This is not the first time that such attacks have targeted Christian communities in Iraq. All those responsible need to be brought to justice, and governmental authorities should take their responsibility to bring safety and security to all citizens and particularly to those in vulnerable situation.”

Tveit made these comments shortly before delivering the opening address at a high-level Christian-Muslim consultation, which takes place at the WCC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland from 1-4 November.

Minute of the WCC executive committee on the current situation in Pakistan,
Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010

1. Pakistan currently faces a serious human crisis as the result of heavy floods. More than 17 million people have been uprooted and rendered homeless. More than twenty percent of Pakistan’s agricultural land has been flooded, damaging all crops in an amount greater than the damage of the 2004 tsunami and 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.
2. The United Nations and Government of Pakistan have estimated the loss to be equivalent to $15 billion. It has been reported that the support received as of 16 September was no more than one billion U.S. dollars.
3. The WCC encourages its member churches to actively participate in supporting the humanitarian need of the people through their work with the respective churches or the development agencies.
4. It is noted that religious discrimination due to the abuse and misuse of the blasphemy laws continue to remain a reality, resulting in the recent murder of two Christian pastors. The WCC general secretary has already brought this to the attention to the president and prime minister of Pakistan.
5. The recent plan by a U.S. pastor to burn the Quran was denounced by the WCC and churches worldwide. We consider even the threat of this act contrary to the principles and teaching of the Christian faith. It has resulted in Christians in Pakistan being threatened with attack and damage being done to churches.
6. The WCC regrets the recent destruction of three churches by explosions in the province of Pukhtunkhawa on 11 and 12 September 2010.

Therefore, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010:

A. Reiterates its expression of solidarity and support to the humanitarian needs of the displaced people of Pakistan due to the floods;
**B. Reminds** WCC member churches and related agencies to continue to respond to the urgent humanitarian situation;  
**C. Urges** political and religious leaders of Pakistan to continue making efforts to prevent the abuse and misuse of the blasphemy laws, promoting an environment of peace, trust and justice;  
**D. Requests** churches in Europe and the United States to impress upon their members and societies to avoid hurtful religious sentiments of other faith communities, and in this particular case that of Islam.

**Statement of the WCC executive committee on the situation in Nigeria,**  
Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010  

1. Nigeria – the most populous country in Africa, a global oil producer, a leader in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and a major peacekeeping contributing country – has been wracked by a series of crises. The country has been characterized as deeply divided in which major political issues are violently contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious and regional divisions. Although the nation has annual oil revenues in the billions of dollars the majority of Nigerians live on what amounts to less than a dollar a day.  
2. While democracy permits greater freedom of religious expression in Nigeria in the post-military regime, frictions between ethnic groups have been increasing in several parts of the country. The ethnic conflicts and disputes over land and resources often crystallize as religious conflicts. During the past few years thousands of people have been killed in ethnic clashes and communal violence. Behind these conflicts lie the economic and political interests of the elite in each state.  
3. Many Nigerians consider that the real reason for the violence is not ethnic or religious difference but the greed for land, control of resources and political clout. Poverty, joblessness and corrupt politics drive religious extremists from both sides to commit horrendous atrocities. Politicization of religion and the rise of religious fundamentalism are increasing trends in many parts of the country.  
4. The Plateau State in northern Nigeria is often affected with horrendous inter-ethnic clashes. Earlier in 2010 more than 500 people were killed in communal violence near the city of Jos. What began as a competition between Muslim cattle herders from the north and Christian farmers from the south was portrayed as a religious conflict. Although religion plays a major role in the context, the fact remains that the real reason for the conflict is between settled, indigenous farmers and nomadic herdsmen who belong to different religious groups.  
5. Meanwhile the competition for oil wealth has been fuelling violence between different ethnic groups further south in the Niger Delta. The situation has intensified militarization in the entire region. It is commonly perceived that the militia groups and gangs have sufficient firepower seriously to challenge the authority of Nigeria’s military and police forces. The plight of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta is another major problem, which has yet to be resolved.  
6. The World Council of Churches (WCC), the ecumenical movement and wider international community have been highlighting the ethnic and environmental rights of the Ogoni people at various international fora.  
7. The absence of law enforcement mechanisms and increase in criminal activities and social disintegration are major concerns to Nigerians. Human rights groups and civil society organizations have pointed out serious violations of human rights, especially extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and other unlawful killings in several parts of the country. In any context where human rights and human dignity have been systematically abused, victims
and witnesses deserve to be protected and any evidence gathered needs to be preserved. However, experiences in Nigeria have proved that victims of crimes and human rights violations are fearful of seeking justice because of growing impunity from prosecution enjoyed by those perpetuating crimes. It is imperative, therefore, to determine whether crimes have been committed which fall within the purview of the International Criminal Court (ICC), especially since Nigeria is party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

8. The World Council of Churches and its member churches in Nigeria have been concerned about the deteriorating situation there. On several occasions recently, WCC General Secretaries have expressed their concern to the authorities in Nigeria and also expressed pastoral solidarity to churches in the country. In May 2010 the WCC organized a Living Letter Team visit to Nigeria in collaboration with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). The team visited the conflict-affected areas in the Plateau State and the capital of the country, met with various church and ecumenical leaders in the country and also with the victims of human rights violations in Jos. Nigeria requires honest and capable leadership and good governance to reduce the level of unemployment, poverty, oppression, domination and marginalization and to raise the standard of living for all Nigerians.

While the WCC continues to be concerned about the situation in Nigeria, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Musselburgh/Edinburgh, Scotland, 14-17 September 2010:

A. Calls on all ethnic and religious groups to support and encourage peace and reconciliation, communal and religious harmony, at all levels in Nigerian society;

B. Expresses its grave concern concerning extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and other killings in Nigeria;

C. Urges the government of Nigeria to act promptly to investigate, prosecute and take action against those responsible for the crimes;

D. Urges the federal and state governments to take adequate measures to ensure the rule of law and to reassure the victims on all sides, in order to rebuild the confidence of the communities that government cares about their wellbeing;

E. Requests member churches, ecumenical agencies and councils of churches to keep the situation in Nigeria under close review and to advocate with their respective governments and regional and international governmental bodies to help the Nigerian government make qualitative differences in improving the human rights situation, good governance and democratic principles;

F. Encourages the churches in Nigeria in their witness for human rights, justice and peace in Nigeria through interfaith efforts to promote peace, reconciliation and overcoming of violence;

G. Assures the churches in Nigeria of the fervent prayers and support of the WCC as they continue to bear witness and assume the burden of costly discipleship.

Letter from WCC general secretary to the heads of Muslim religious communities worldwide on the occasion of Eid al Fitr, 8 September 2010

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear friends,

On the occasion of your celebration of Eid al Fitr at the ending of the month of Ramadan, in which the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammad, we greet you in peace and friendship. May the Almighty God bless you in this significant season!
Religious celebrations such as this provide an opportunity for cultivating relationships of trust and respect, compassion and solidarity within our multi-faith communities. Remembering Christ’s commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves, as a fellowship of Churches all over the world we take this occasion to stand by our Muslim sisters and brothers in interfaith solidarity.

The WCC is deeply concerned about reports that a small church in Gainesville, Florida plans to burn a copy of the Holy Quran on the anniversary of the 11 September attacks. This call has been firmly rejected and condemned by the WCC and its member churches, ecumenical partners, including in the United States as well as by people of faith and good will elsewhere.

Religious leaders have a unique role and the moral responsibility to work towards reconciliation and healing within their own communities and between communities. We are encouraged therefore, by the interfaith solidarity expressed by the churches, religious communities and leaders in the United States, including in the State of Florida.

I experienced such an act of solidarity last week, on the last Friday of the Ramadan, while participating in the Iftar hosted by the heads of churches of Jerusalem for their Muslim sisters and brothers, celebrating al-Quds day together and giving signs of genuine cooperation and standing together strongly for justice and peace. In this way the World Council of Churches remains strongly committed to the dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

As companions on the long journey of interfaith dialogue and solidarity, I look forward in the years ahead to renewing such friendships and to developing many new ones.

Blessings,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit General secretary World Council of Churches

Open message from WCC general secretary to Middle East negotiators in Washington, D.C. on the final status of Jerusalem, the future of Palestinian Christians and the need for a Just Peace in the region, 2 September 2010

The message was addressed to U.S. President Barak Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

From the blessed city of Jerusalem I bring you greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

When I visit the Palestine and Israel region I carefully listen to the WCC member churches here and to our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers.

During this visit, the Palestinian Christian cry of faith, hope and love expressed through the Kairos Document has been particularly significant. This document now stands as their proclamation for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel, and a call to Christians around the world to join them in solidarity. Now is the time for a Just Peace. The Christians here pray for that; all peoples here need it desperately. The time of occupation and violence must end.

Equally important on this visit has been listening to the concerns of the local churches here that already has been expressed in their historic statement of 2006 on the final status of Jerusalem. Final negotiations on the status of Jerusalem should involve the heads of the local
churches. Palestinian Christians are also concerned about their future here and about their status in Jerusalem. Their residency rights, as is the case with all Palestinians living in Jerusalem, including the basic human right to family life and family reunification, are threatened by severe restrictions currently imposed by the Israeli authorities. This must come to an end so husbands, wives and children may be together as one family.

They are also very much concerned by the discourse about religious identity of states in this region, which they fear will marginalize not only their presence and witness but also that of all Christians elsewhere in the region.

Any debate over the religious composition of a given state is an internal one. However, it should guarantee the principle of equality of all citizens in their rights and duties as human beings.

As the representative of the World Council of Churches and a brother to our fellow Christians in Jerusalem and throughout the Middle East, I pray that there is enough will to make the negotiations successful so that they lead to a Just Peace. Throughout the region the dignity and integrity of all people will be the highest aspiration of civil society and government.

May the Lord bless your deliberations starting today.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary, World Council of Churches

Letters of concern from the WCC general secretary to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president, and Mr Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, prime minister of Pakistan, regarding the killing of Christians arrested under the blasphemy laws of the country, 23 July 2010

Your Excellency,

It is with great dismay that we received news that two young Christians, Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajid Emmanuel, were shot dead by religious extremists in broad daylight in front of a district court compound in Faisalabad on 19 July.

We understand that the two brothers were arrested by police on the accusation made by a complainant alleging that they produced a handwritten leaflet which was defiling Prophet Mohammad. Reports said that police had brought the accused to a court of law to obtain their remand and as the police and brothers were about to leave the court compound they were attacked by a group of gunmen.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has expressed in the past its concern about the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan, and we do so again in indicating that the introduction of Blasphemy Law in the Pakistan Penal Code touches upon some of the more sensitive aspects of civil and religious liberty. The law is also fraught with danger that can be abused by extremist groups when dealing with religious minorities. It has been proven in the past that the charges of Blasphemy law appear to be arbitrarily applied and at times founded on malicious accusations against individuals and groups.

The WCC has expressed its concern in the past and many others stated the same that the introduction of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan is inimical to and destructive of the harmony and wellbeing of people who live together in a religiously plural society. The misuse of the
Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life within the innocent Christian minority over the years. This is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan.

Your Excellency, we appeal to you to ensure immediate and necessary actions to bring to justice those who are responsible for the killing of Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajid Emmanuel. We also urge Your Excellency to initiate measures towards the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws and to secure the rights and dignity of all individuals in Pakistan society.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Public statement by WCC general secretary welcoming a Turkish government decree allowing for a better protection of the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities, 27 May 2010

The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit has welcomed a recent Turkish government decree allowing for a better protection of the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities in Turkey.

“It is only fair that this new and positive development is commended by all those concerned about the situation of Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities in Turkey”, said Tveit commenting on the news.

According to a 21 May report by Ecumenical News International, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a decree in mid-May ordering local officials “to do more to protect the rights of Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities, such as by returning their confiscated properties and taking action against anti-Christian groups”.

“We hope local Turkish officials will expedite the application of this decree and thus bring about an improvement in the situation of communities which, as the prime minister has said, are an inseparable part of the Republic of Turkey and must feel fully valued as citizens of the country”, Tveit said.

“Of course, more needs to be done, but this is a sign that goes in the right direction”, he added.

“We don’t feel that we enjoy our full rights as Turkish citizens”, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said as recently as 17 December 2009, when he was featured by the U.S. TV show 60 minutes.

During the last week of November 2009 representatives of the WCC and the Conference of European Churches made an official visit to Turkey so as to encourage the authorities to improve the situation of religious minorities.

In Istanbul and Ankara, the delegation met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop Aram Atesian from the Armenian Patriarchate, and the Archbishop Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktas of the Syrian Orthodox Mor Gabriel Monastery. It also met representatives of the Jewish community as well as with government officials. The exercise of religious freedom, the
legal status of churches, including property issues, and the right to religious education were on the agenda.

Amongst the pending issues for the Ecumenical Patriarchate are the obstacles to the reopening of the Theological School of Halki, which was the patriarchate’s main theological seminary until its closure. Situated on Heybeliada island in the Marmara sea off Istanbul, the school was closed by the Turkish authorities in 1971.

“I visited the Halki school during my visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch last March and was impressed by the fact that it has been maintained in complete repair and ready for the day when it will be allowed to reopen”, commented Tveit. “And indeed we pray for this to happen soon.”

Follow-up action on the February 2010 WCC executive committee decision regarding the violation of human rights in the Niger Delta and Northern Nigeria: report from the “Living letters” pastoral solidarity visit to Nigeria, 15-20 May 2010

a) Ecumenical celebration welcomes Living Letters team in Nigeria, 17 May 2010

A Living Letters team travelling on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was welcomed to Abuja by Nigerian church and ecumenical leaders during an ecumenical celebration organized by the Christian Council of Nigeria, (CCN) on Sunday 16 May.

The team arrived in the Nigerian capital city Abuja last Saturday. It was the first stop on their four-day solidarity visit to Africa’s most populous nation. The CCN is an umbrella organization of all Protestant churches in Nigeria.

The service held at the Cathedral of Unity of the Methodist Church Nigeria in the capital city was attended by top Christian leaders from across the country. They included the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Roman Catholic John Onaiyekan, and the head of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Prelate Sunday Ola Makinde. The CAN comprises churches from all Christian traditions present in the country: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Evangelical and African Instituted Churches.

Preaching in front of hundreds of worshipers, Prelate Ola Makinde described the visit of the team as an expression of the worldwide solidarity of churches with fellow Christians in Nigeria. He added that the visit of the team demonstrates the love of Christ.

“By coming to visit the troubled spot in Nigeria you have followed the footsteps of Jesus Christ who went about doing good things, who cared for the marginalized, the homeless, the oppressed, and comforted those with broken hearts”, the prelate said. He lamented that people in the northern part of the country have been neglected and denied basic rights and expressed hope that the visit of the Living Letters would give hope, encouragement, spirituality and strength to Nigerians for their Christian journey.

Later in the evening during a dialogue session between the members of the team and key Nigerian church leaders, CAN president Archbishop John Onaiyekan, speaking on behalf of the Nigerian churches and ecumenical organizations, expressed great delight at the solidarity of the team noting however that religious crises in Nigeria had become too frequent. He expressed hope that the team’s visit would build confidence in the people especially the victims of the crisis.
During a meeting of the team with heads of churches of the Council of Churches in Nigeria, Archbishop Kehinde Stephen, who is the moderator of the WCC Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in 21st Century expressed the view that the WCC should be more dynamic and proactive on issues that concern Christians in Nigeria at this time of crisis. He expressed appreciation, however, for the visit of the Living Letters, which marks the first time people from different parts of the world come to show solidarity with Nigerians on behalf of the WCC.

The Living Letters team also took part in a religious service held for the new president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, and for the family of the former president, the late Umaru Musa Yar’Adua who died recently after a protracted illness.

At the service, the primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, gave a sermon on “Servant leadership”. He said the time had come for Nigerians to think of being productive rather than being consumers of goods brought from the western world. Greatness does not come from buying things for fashion, but from producing things, he said.

The team’s day ended with a briefing on situations and issues related to the conflict in Jos, where more than 500 people were killed in ethnic violence in the early part of this year. The church leaders, including those from the conflict-affected Jos, opined that Jos had known peace for years and the situation in the troubled area could be traced to intolerance on the part of the different factions of people due to various reasons.

The members of the team will visit Jos in the Plateau State during the second part of their journey.

The Living Letters visit is being organized by the WCC in cooperation with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The delegation is accompanied by WCC central committee members from Nigeria.

b) Governor of Nigeria’s troubled Plateau State receives WCC delegation, 19 May 2010

During a meeting with a Living Letters team visiting Nigeria on behalf of the World Council of Churches, the governor of the Plateau state, Jonah David Jang said that “religion is used to cover up all conflicts, although other factors also exist”. While explaining certain reasons for the conflicts, the governor admitted that “I am a committed Christian. As governor of this state, I am elected by the people and God gave me the mandate to direct the people in the righteous way”.

Jang, who is a minister of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), has been governor of the Plateau State for the past four years. Jos, the capital city of the state has seen one of the worst ethnic conflicts in recent years. In March, violence claimed more than hundred lives in the region of Jos. Most of those killed were Christians.

At the meeting, which had in attendance his deputy, Pauline Kedem Tallen, and some members of his cabinet, the governor said that Christianity and Islam had no reason to be at loggerheads. Jang said he was elated when he heard that the WCC team was coming to visit the state. “Your coming shows people are praying for us all over the world and this gives me joy.”

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. One such team is visiting Nigeria 15-20 May.
Jang said that his government had begun to take proactive steps to promote peace. “We have set up an interreligious council of peace and harmony long before the crisis started. Right now we are adopting some other measures that we believe are yielding fruit presently,” he said.

Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen of the Methodist Church Nigeria and Bishop Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, vice-president of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and member of the WCC central committee, told the governor that the group had come on a solidarity visit to all who are suffering due to the conflicts and violence irrespective of their religious identities.

Archbishop Stephen said: “We believe that both the Christian and Muslim religions preach peace and are working for peace. We don’t see any reason why there should be violence in this part of the country if there is tolerance among adherents of the two faiths.”

He observed that the state had been bedevilled with several crises, noting however that religion has been used to cover other factors responsible from the incessant bloodletting in the state. He expressed the hope that the visit of the team would help bring about more unity and cooperation between the different faith communities.

He continued, “We are created by one God who gave us the right to be whatever we want to be. But one day has been appointed when we will account for all that we have done here on earth. We cannot decide for others the kind of faith they should adhere to. We can preach to people based on our beliefs but we cannot force anybody. The day is coming that we will all know who is right.”

The governor, who was quite forthcoming during the meeting, said he had observed that Christianity is going down in the western world. He also added that, “however, it is time for the African continent to take the gospel back to those who brought it”.

In responding to the governor’s statements, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission on International Affairs, spoke to him about WCC programmes related to peace and reconciliation, especially the Decade to Overcome Violence and the forthcoming International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011.

Representatives of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), the umbrella organization of the Protestant churches in the country, accompanied the team to the governor. The Living Letters team is composed of representatives of churches and WCC staff from Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, India and Ethiopia.

c) WCC Living Letters team in Nigeria listens to survivors of violence, prays at mass grave, 20 May 2010

It was a deeply moving experience for the Living Letters team visiting Nigeria on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) when they gathered to pray around a mass grave in Dogonahawa, near Jos, in the Central Plateau State on Tuesday. About 323 locals murdered last March have been buried at the site.

In early March 501 people, mostly women and children from two adjacent villages, Dogonahawa and Bukuru, were killed in their sleep during an outburst of communal and ethnic violence.

Dogonahawa is a hamlet of about 100 houses, all clustered in a circle. It is located just seven miles from Jos, the capital city of the Plateau State. Vestiges of the sectarian clashes still
surround the people. The community has been reduced to a ghost village as only a handful of people now live there.

Some of the villagers who welcomed the Living Letters team to their devastated village said life had not been the same again for them since the tragic events.

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. One such team travelled to Nigeria 15-20 May.

The team also visited the nearby town of Bukuru, which was equally deserted. An entire market had been burnt and hundreds of houses and shops destroyed. The local government premises were also razed. Reconstruction work is yet to begin in most of the affected quarters of Bukuru.

Most members of the team could not hide their grief as they met with men, women and children who lost loved ones. The team offered prayers at the site of the mass grave, where many relatives of the murdered were present.

The community leader David Jik told the Living Letters delegation how he lost his children and grandchildren during the violence. A 60-year old woman, Kumbo Chuwang, who was maimed during the violence, cried and explained how she and her family members had been attacked. A teenage boy, Tebita Danjuma, showed his body, burnt in the fire that was set to engulf the buildings in the hamlet.

The Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Bukuru Jwan B.N. Zhumbes, who accompanied the team to the villages, said several members of his church were killed in the violence, while many escaped and relocated in the wake of the crisis.

Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen, leader of the Christian Council of Nigeria that hosted the visiting Living Letters team, mentioned plans that were underway by the local communities to construct a cenotaph at the site of the mass grave.

Earlier in the day the team visited the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN), an interfaith group based in Jos. Hajia Lantana Abdullahi, a Muslim woman who is the centre’s programme director said her group had been working, especially with the youth, to ensure that various ethnic and religious communities live in harmony.

The chairman of the Plateau State division of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, of the Roman Catholic Church, welcomed the team stating that God wants us to be one. He added that the impression that Christians and Muslims in the state were fighting is not correct. “It is not the religions that are fighting but some people who adhere to the religions that are involved. There is no war between the two faiths,” he said.

The Living Letters team was received at the headquarters of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN). Addressing the delegates to the COCIN 74th General Council, Bishop Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, from Ghana, said Christians should work for peace and reconciliation even when they have been offended.

Aboagye-Mensah, who is the vice-president of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and a WCC central committee member, wondered if Christians in the state have been listening to what God is saying in the midst of the destruction they have found themselves.
Aboagye-Mensah asked: “Do we hear God’s voice. What is God saying to us?” He said: “Christians have a challenge to work for peace. Peace and reconciliation begin with us. The offended one is to begin the process of reconciliation and peace.”

The COCIN president Rev. Dr Pandang Yamsat affirmed the commitment of his church members to work for peace in the troubled areas, a task he sees as a prophetic witness of the church.

The Living Letters team was composed of representatives of churches and WCC staff from Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, India and Ethiopia.

d) WCC Living Letters team calls on religions to work for peace in Nigeria, 26 May 2010

A World Council of Churches (WCC) Living Letters team has appealed to Nigeria’s religious leaders to encourage people belonging to different ethnic and faith groups to take initiatives to promote lasting peace and harmony in violence-affected communities.

The international ecumenical team made its appeal as its 15-20 May visit to the country came to an end. During the visit the members of the team were able to see how ethnic consideration and lack of trust among various ethnic groups prevail while the authorities are unable to ensure security and protection to the people in conflict-affected regions.

After their 4-day visit to the country, members of the team observed that there is an urgent need to strengthen the security of Nigeria’s most volatile regions. The team recommended that “the religious communities jointly appeal to the government and the security agencies to be even-handed in their quest to bring peace to the Central Plateau State and neighbouring states and take measures to ensure that there will be free and fair elections in the upcoming polls”.

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. One such team travelled to Nigeria, where in addition to the Central Plateau State, they visited the country’s capital city Abuja.

At the end of their visit, the Living Letters team met with the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), an initiative of Christian and Muslim leaders set up three years ago to help stem the tide of communal violence in the country.

The council comprises of both Christians and Muslims, with administrative support being provided by the Nigerian government. It is currently headed by the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Roman Catholic Archbishop John Onayekan, and by the sultan of Sokoto, Haji Saad Abubakar who is the spiritual leader of the Muslim communities in Nigeria.

Members of NIREC present at the meeting included Archbishop Onayekan, Samuel Salifu, Hajia Bilikisu Yusuf and Aliyu Ocheje. During the 3-hour meeting the WCC team had the opportunity of sharing experiences and comparing notes with the NIREC members on their visit to the troubled region of Jos.

The members of the Living Letters team told the NIREC representatives that the visit of the ecumenical group had been a time of learning, listening and sharing experiences.

According to Outi Vasko, a WCC executive committee member from the Finnish Orthodox Church, the Living Letters team visit to Nigeria was very successful but also demanding since the team was able to meet victims and understand the difficulties that they are
facing. The visit encouraged and strengthened the commitment of the local churches to work for peace.

**Christians and Muslims are “in the same boat”**

Archbishop Onayekan commended the Living Letters team for having travelled from all over the world to Nigeria. He said the two main religious communities in Nigeria are in the same boat. Nobody feels like minority and nobody feels like majority.

Onayekan observed that there was some kind of disconnect between the NIREC and the clerics of both faiths at the grassroots level: “There are many of my priests who don’t consider my optimism for dialogue and this also applies to the other side. My conviction is that people living in the grassroots don’t have problems living together but the imams and pastors leading them sometimes send wrong signals by the kind of messages they preach.”

He also noted that the situation is somewhat difficult for NIREC because the people in government had sometimes used the perpetrators of violence for their political agendas.

While confessing that NIREC was still in its infancy, Hajia Bilikisu said the group had been instrumental in creating a multi-sector alliance on issues of development. She stated that NIREC had been useful in curtailing the violence in the country but she was critical of the policies of the Nigerian government for its tardy response to security issues in the troubled regions. “The problem we are having is failure of security and failure of leadership”, she said.

Arne Saeveras of Norwegian Church Aid shared experiences of interfaith cooperation in Norway, where religious groups work together for peace and justice. Saeveras suggested that religious communities in Nigeria should “jointly advocate for the government to make immediate and sufficient provisions for security for all communities”.

“Heavy law and order collapse, the security of people is often threatened”, said Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director of the WCC Commission on International Affairs. “Overt and covert alliances between political and religious organizations often lead to conflicts in communities. It is in this context that legal measures to separate politics from religion should be pursued as a matter of state policy through appropriate structural changes or statutory instruments in the country”.

Dr Johnson Mbillah of the All Africa Conference of Churches stated that the way towards sustainable peace depends on overcoming mutual suspicions among divided communities and on restoring confidence and willingness to talk across the religious divide.

The Living Letters Team visit to Nigeria was organized by the WCC in collaboration with the AACC. The members of the team were:

- Bishop Dr Robert Aboagye-Mensah, vice-president of All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), WCC central committee member, Ghana;
- Rev. Dr Volker Faigle, Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD);
- Rev. Dr Johnson Mbillah, general adviser, Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCURA), Ghana/Kenya;
- Ms Mbari Kioni, director of advocacy at the AACC, Kenya;
- Archbishop Daniel Okoh, Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), Nigeria;
- Mr Arne Saeveras, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), Norway;
- Mr Jan Guehne, Mission 21, Switzerland/Germany/Nigeria;
- Ms Outi Vasko, Orthodox Church of Finland, WCC executive committee member;
WCC staff:
• Dr Mathews George Chunakara, director, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs;
• Dr Nigussu Legesse, programme executive for Africa.
The team was accompanied by WCC central committee members and other Christian leaders from Nigeria:
• Ms Iyabo Oyekola, Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, WCC executive committee member;
• Ms Helen Ubon Usung, Presbyterian Church of Nigeria; WCC central committee member;
• Archbishop Kehinde Stephen, Methodist Church Nigeria, moderator of the WCC Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in 21st Century
• Rev. Samuel Obafemi Ogbe, general secretary of the Christian Council of Nigeria
• Rev. Babatunde Olusegun, programme director of the Christian Council of Nigeria.

e) Development and justice needed to address communal conflicts in Nigeria, 27 May 2010

Although it is often portrayed as a religious conflict, the crisis in Nigeria’s Central Plateau State is of social and economic nature, the country’s foreign minister told church representatives. The church delegation advocated for government action to develop the area and to bring to trial those responsible for an outburst of communal violence last March.

For Nigeria’s minister of Foreign Affairs Henry Odein, the country faces “a lot of challenges which are largely misunderstood by the international community”.

The situation in the central Plateau State, where several hundred people were killed last March, is “much more complicated” than it is usually portrayed, Odein argued. According to him, the religious factor compounds a conflict between an indigenous population and an immigrant community in that area. “The issues are of social and economic nature”, he said.

Odein expressed his views at a meeting with the World Council of Churches (WCC) programme executive for Africa Dr Nigussu Legesse and the programme director of the Christian Council of Nigeria Rev. Babatunde Olusegun on 21 May.

The church representatives met the minister at his residence in Abuja on behalf of a WCC Living Letters team that had visited the country 15-20 May. “We came here in solidarity with the people of Nigeria”, Legesse told Odein, explaining the purpose of the WCC Living Letters visit.

“We visited the villages near Jos, in the Plateau State. We were in Bukuru, where houses and markets were burnt and in Dogonahawa, where 323 people killed last March have been buried in a mass grave. We have met the survivors, talked to them, listened to them and prayed along with them and assured them that the global community of churches is with them in their moment of crisis”, Legesse said.

Legesse urged the minister to “help facilitate development in Jos through the federal government”. He pleaded that those responsible for the killings are brought before the court of law, “as the question of impunity was a concern widely mentioned by the people we met during our visits”.

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and help to confront challenges in order to overcome violence, promote and pray for peace. The team visiting Nigeria was made of representatives of churches and WCC staff from Ghana, Kenya, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, India and Ethiopia.
Public statement by WCC general secretary calling for an end to violence against Christians in Mosul and urging the Iraqi administration to bring stability and security to the country, 12 May 2010

Recent violence in Iraq has led Iraqi church leaders to issue a statement calling on “all government officials and political parties in order to give priority to the public interest and the security of citizens.”

The statement, released Thursday 6 May by the Council of the Christian Church Leaders of Iraq (CCCLI), came after an emergency meeting of the council in Qaraqosh. At the time, the church leaders were responding to a 2 May attack in the northern city of Mosul, where buses carrying Christian university students travelling from the center of the district of Hamdaniya to the University of Mosul were bombed. One person was killed and some 188 men and women were injured, some seriously.

Since then more attacks have taken place throughout Iraq according to news reports, although not all were against Christians. Attacks during the past few days have killed more than 100 people and injured hundreds of others.

The wave of violence comes after contentious national elections and at a time when the country is struggling to form a new government.

“As we express our solidarity with the people of Iraq, and convey our condolences to the families of the victims, we are very concerned about the new escalation of violence against Christians in Mosul,” Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches said Wednesday.

“We urge all parties and members of the Iraqi administration to take up their responsibility in bringing security and stability to the country and insuring the safety of Iraqi citizens,” he said.

The church leaders of Iraq closed their statement saying, “We pray to God to give comfort to the martyrs and a quick recovery to the wounded and to protect our country from all harm, and to restore to us the gift of peace and stability.”

The church council was formed in February of this year and includes all patriarchs, archbishops, bishops and heads of churches in Iraq from the 14 Christian communities registered in Iraq since 1982. Their churches belong to the Catholic, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox as well as Protestant traditions.

The aim of the new council is to unite the opinion, position and decision of the churches in Iraq on issues related to the churches and the state.

The council intends to do so by upholding and strengthening the Christian presence, promoting cooperation and joint action without interfering in private matters of the churches or their related entities.

Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. John L. McCullough, executive director and CEO of Church World Service and Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the
Dear John and Michael,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephes. 1:2).

We received with great appreciation the copy of the letter both of you sent to President Barack Obama requesting the end of restrictions on religious travel to Cuba. This fair request has been consistent with the will of many churches, councils and ecumenical organizations both in Cuba and the United States, as well as in the worldwide ecumenical movement, for half a century. Therefore, it has been consistent with the policy and vision of the World Council of Churches, by which the church is the Body of Christ globally and when we are preventing its members to relate to each other, we are attempting against Christ himself. As the Apostle Paul says in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1Cor. 12:12).

Hence, this is a matter that involves the church in both countries and globally. By lifting the travel restrictions, God’s Mission will be carried out in mutuality and in partnership, by which both countries will benefit. The U.S. churches will continue to have the opportunity of supporting the work of the churches in Cuba while receiving the benefits of the faithful testimony of the Christians in the Caribbean island, which has been forged in difficult circumstances. By lifting the travel restrictions on both sides, our brothers and sisters can continue to be the agents of healing, reconciliation and transformation more freely in both contexts.

As we keep on praying for your ministry among the people in the U.S.A. and in many parts of the world, we pray and hope that this request will achieve the results expected by all of us.

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter from WCC general secretary to H.B. Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania, on the occasion of his receiving the Skanderbeg medal in recognition of his merits in the field of interreligious dialogue, 22 April 2010

Your Beatitude,

In the jubilant atmosphere of the Easter season, we have received with great joy the news that Your Beatitude had been awarded by H.E. Bamir Topi, the president of Albania, the medal of “Skanderbeg”.

We are very proud that Your Beatitude, a world-wide known and recognized religious leader and one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches, received this high distinction together with the three spiritual leaders of the Muslim, Roman Catholic and Bektashi communities in the country for your ceaseless efforts and your precious contribution to strengthening the spiritual roots and the religious harmony and coexistence of the Albanian people.

We were privileged in the World Council of Churches to be enriched, very early in your academic journey, with your reflections and findings on interreligious dialogue. Later on, we have
benefitted from your genuine missionary vision and experience highlighting both the challenges and the tremendous spiritual potential of religious pluralism. Now we are happy that all this is embodied, in a tangible way, in your genuine pastoral concern for all people and all religious traditions in Albania.

We are grateful that your ecumenical vision, deeply grounded in the Orthodox theology and spirituality, can inspire, encourage and strengthen all people of good will in Albania and throughout the world for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

May God, the God of love and joy, the God of life and resurrection, you have faithfully proclaimed all along your life bless all your endeavours.

Yours in our common Lord Jesus Christ,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Follow-up action on the February 2010 WCC executive committee decision regarding the current situation of Christians in Iraq, 31 March 2010

Letters with the text below were sent from the WCC general secretary to Prof. Viorel Ionita, acting general secretary of the Conference of European Churches; Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the NCCCSUSA and to all WCC member churches in countries from where troops are or have been engaged in Iraq – Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

I am writing to express our concern and solidarity with the churches and all members of the Christian community in Iraq. We have been following the situation in Iraq and are concerned about the attacks against Christians in the Mosul area, northern Iraq, in which more than 13 Christians have been killed since early this year. We are aware that thousands of Christians were forced, yet again, to flee their homes and leave their properties. In fact, the displacement of so many Christians also affected their participation in the recently held election in Iraq. The election is now over and a long process of coalition-building is expected to follow the final results. The tension which exists between various political forces is creating a climate of mistrust and animosity of which Christians are becoming innocent victims.

In fact, these tragic massacres of Christians prior to the election were not isolated incidents. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, hundreds of Christians have been killed in different parts of the country including bishops and priests, along with the destruction of church buildings and properties. It is painful to hear that thousands of Christians have been internally displaced and hundreds have left the country as they cannot survive in their own ancestral land. We are also aware of the fact that the remaining Christians in Iraq live in constant fear, feeling unprotected and insecure, a feeling further aggravated by the severe economic conditions. The very existence of this ancient community is at great risk.

As you know, long before the war waged against Iraq, the WCC member churches unanimously denounced it as “immoral, illegal and ill-advised”. As part of our prophetic witness, we raised our voice against the war, which clearly warned the international community that the consequences of such a war would be catastrophic for the world order and would affect relations between peoples of different faiths. We also warned that a war against Iraq would dramatically affect the fragile Christian communities and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq. Our
voice did not prevent the war, but it was heartening that the churches joined together to respond to God’s call to be prophetic witnesses.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches held from 24 to 26 February 2010 at Bossey, Geneva, Switzerland discussed the plight of the Christians. The WCC executive committee suggested that the general secretary request member churches and ecumenical councils in countries from where troops are engaged in Iraq, to urge their respective governments to prevent the targeted attacks on minority communities, especially the Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq. The executive committee also suggested engaging in an ecumenical advocacy that seeks:

a. to end violence, ethnic and religious cleansing against minority groups, particularly Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq,

b. to take adequate measures to prevent the exodus of Christians from Mosul,

c. to extend necessary humanitarian aid assistance to the displaced families,

d. to work for a sustainable solution which will preserve religious and ethnic diversities in Iraq,

e. to invite WCC member churches to observe a special day of prayer for Iraq and its Christian communities.

It is in this context that I invite you to take a stand vis-à-vis your government, which has sent troops to Iraq, and urge the decision-makers in your country to do the needful to prevent the targeted attacks on minority communities, especially the Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq where they are living in vulnerable situations. It is important that firm steps be taken at this crucial time to protect the life and dignity of persecuted Christians in Iraq and to support and accompany them in their struggle for life in dignity.

Therefore, I am pleading with you and your church to engage in pro-active advocacy initiatives. We have also sent this letter to the WCC member churches in the European countries with troops in Iraq.

May God Almighty guide us and bestow on us the strength of His Holy Spirit so that we speak in the spirit of truth, peace with justice on behalf of the oppressed and the powerless.

Yours in Christ’s love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Solidarity message from WCC general secretary to the WCC member churches in Nigeria regarding the massacres that took place in three villages close to the city of Jos, 11 March 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with profound sadness that we received the news of the massacres that took place in three villages close to the city of Jos during the past weekend. Together with you, we condemn and deplore such barbaric acts of violence. It is tragic that the people of Nigeria are continuously affected by deadly violence and that innocent people are becoming victims of these conflicts.

I take this opportunity to extend our sincere condolences to the families of all those who have been killed and express our sympathy to all those who are suffering from the after effects
of these traumatic experiences. We shall continue to pray for peace and reconciliation among the people and communities of your troubled region.

It is heartening that Nigerian church leaders have taken several initiatives together with other religious leaders to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected areas. In fact, I appreciate your initiatives as it is essential for us to demonstrate our faith and witness, to be ambassadors for peace and reconciliation in the true spirit of love for our neighbours, irrespective of their religious or ethnic identities.

I have written a letter of concern to His Excellency Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In my letter, I urged him to bring to justice the perpetrators of these massacres; to ensure security and peace with justice for all Nigerians and to preserve human rights, justice and equity for every individual in your country.

As you know that we are reminded of our call to seek justice and righteousness and it is imperative for strengthening our faith. This call also warrants our attention and need to be concerned of all those who are deprived of their inherent and inalienable rights and dignity, fullness of life and equal justice.

May God Almighty continue to strengthen you to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14).

Yours in Christ’s love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Letter of concern over renewed violence in northern Nigeria, sent to H. E. Mr Goodluck Jonathan, acting president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 10 March 2010

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to you to express our deep concerns regarding the recent violence and killings in three villages close to the northern city of Jos. This violence that broke out last weekend claiming many lives is an appalling situation.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of member churches from around the world including Nigeria, has been closely observing the deteriorating situation in Jos with great distress. We have learned that survivors of the recent massacres near Jos denounced the inaction of the authorities, and particularly the army, for their failure to prevent the violence. Seemingly it took the army two hours to react from the time a distress call was put through, which is unacceptable under any circumstances. Furthermore, we heard the news that the eruption of violence in Jos appears to have been carried out in retaliation for the attacks that took place on 19 January 2010 at Kuru Karama.

The ongoing conflicts and violence in several parts of Nigeria demonstrate that these unfortunate events are exacerbated due to various factors such as economic disparities, under-development, ethnic rivalries and struggle to control political power. It is also known that Nigeria’s system of constitutionally classifying its citizens as “indigenes” and “settlers” further intensifies competing interests and conflicts. It is unfortunate that these constitutional flaws increase the violations of human rights and denial of justice and equity to all citizens of Nigeria irrespective of their religious and ethnic identities. This can lead to deepening ethnic and
religious conflicts and as a result, the Nigerians tend to lose their sense of belonging and their spirit of communal harmony which allows them to live in peace.

It is in this context that we urge Your Excellency to bring to justice the perpetrators of these massacres and request that immediate action be taken to ensure the protection and security of every individual in Nigeria. As the violence and human rights violations are systematically orchestrated, innocent human beings are ultimately becoming the victims of these conflicts which result in the deaths of hundreds of people every time. We, therefore, urge your immediate intervention to stop conflict, violence and human rights violations which affect Nigerian society all too frequently. As we fear that this deteriorating situation will ultimately enflame religious conflicts especially in the context that religion is being used for political and economic power struggles, we appeal to all people of goodwill to prevent such an eventuality.

It is our sincere hope that your government will take immediate measures to ensure security and peace with justice for all Nigerians. As members of churches who are committed to peace and justice of all God’s creation, we pray that peace and reconciliation will prevail among all people and communities in your country.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
WCC general secretary

Message from the WCC executive committee to member churches in Egypt regarding the security of Christians in Egypt, adopted at their meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 23-26 February 2010

We, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches (meeting from 23 to 26 February 2010 in Bossey, Switzerland), send you greetings in the precious name of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ!

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches in his letter addressed to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has expressed the WCC’s deep concern over the vicious attack by a group of people on a Coptic Orthodox congregation in Nag Hammadi on January 7th, 2010. This crime injured several people in one of the ancient Christian sites in Egypt leaving six Christians and one Muslim dead.

During the meeting of the executive committee, we again heard about this tragic happening, and we take this opportunity as members of the executive committee to convey our deep concern.

We understand that the timing and cowardly nature of the attack were wholly indefensible, since the act was perpetrated at the conclusion of the celebration of a Coptic Christmas midnight mass. This attack against the churches and the killings of innocent people took on added political significance, as this incident occurred during an important religious celebration and its only purpose was to undermine the historical and natural ties between Christians and Muslims in Egypt.

We, the members of the executive committee of the WCC, convey the concern of the entire ecumenical family and affirm our unequivocal support to the churches in Egypt in these troubled times. We draw courage from knowledge that you in the churches of Egypt stand firm in sustaining your witness through the many trials and tribulations that continue to threaten. We
count your perseverance in faith as a living example of true Christian witness, even to the point of martyrdom.

It is a matter of regret that in Egypt today Christians can easily fall victim to violence and hatred, and that their security is not fully guaranteed. Many Copts, in particular, are made to feel like aliens in their own country. This marginalization is further compounded by sectarian violence and hatred.

We are conscious of the great pain this has inflicted on the churches in Egypt. While we share with you the agony and anguish of the people, we express to the churches in Egypt our deep concern and solidarity with all your members in these troubled times. We believe that whatever happens to one community has a direct bearing on all communities. Notwithstanding the challenges before us, we know that we cannot despair. Rather, as Christians, we must find ways to be messengers of love and to convey the peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hostility and aggression.

We encourage the churches in Egypt to continue to counter negative trends with a proactive engagement in dialogue and partnership for life and for Christian-Muslim coexistence.

We reaffirm our support to the various initiatives of the Egyptian churches aimed at advancing the common good of all people in Egypt regardless of their religious identities.

We pray with all members of the churches in Egypt for the strength and courage to withstand and overcome the immense challenges that confront Christians in Egypt in these difficult times.

**Letter from WCC general secretary to the heads of churches in Iraq welcoming the news that a Council of Christian Church Leaders of Iraq had been established, 18 February 2010**

Your Beatitudes, your Eminences and Excellencies,

Ministers in the service of Christ,

Greetings to you in the precious name of Jesus Christ!

We are deeply encouraged and gratified with news from Iraq about the creation of the Council of Christian Church Leaders in Iraq. This is information we receive with great hope and deep satisfaction. In our view, it is a development that augurs as much for the future of the churches in Iraq as it does for Iraq as a nation. The visible unity we seek in response to the prayer of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (John 17:21) is both a gift and calling. Discovering the presence of the crucified and risen Christ among us, we are coming closer to each other. Overcoming what separates us, we are comforting and strengthening not only each other, but also engaging together for the betterment of our neighbours and societies.

The WCC has repeatedly affirmed that Christians in Iraq are an essential part of Iraqi society and have been an active component of the nation from its very birth. Iraqi Christians have never viewed themselves as simply a minority community who stand for their own interests. They have always shown their deep rootedness in the history and civilization of Iraq.

It is for this reason that we celebrate the formation of the Council of Christian Church Leaders and congratulate the leaders of the Council for formulating a vision that is unequivocally
committed to the advancement of all Iraqi citizens. From this standpoint, the Council’s plan to engage in promoting ecumenical initiatives and dialogue and partnership with Muslims is an essential assertion.

In your statement of intent, you have clearly set out the link between advancing and supporting the Christian presence while, at the same time, promoting Christian participation in public life based on the rights of citizenship and “building the nation as a tent and a house for all”.

The WCC wishes to assure you that we join hands with you in this defining moment of the church in Iraq. Our prayer is that the Council may grow in strength and reach to all peoples in the true spirit of its founding aims and purposes. We commit ourselves as a fellowship of churches from around the world to accompany you in the arduous tasks that face the Iraqi churches in the rebuilding of your nation.

Speaking personally as one newly appointed general secretary to another, I particularly wish to congratulate His Eminence Avak Asadourian on the honour and responsibility that are now his, and I assure you all of my continuing support in prayer.

May God’s blessings go with the Council in this pilgrimage.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter from WCC general secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III expressing distress and concern at the news of the killing of Christians in Nag Hammadi, 14 January 2010

Your Holiness,
Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is with great distress and sadness that we received the tragic news of the attack that took place last week in Nag Hammadi targeting innocent Christians celebrating the holy feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is one of my first official communications since assuming responsibility as general secretary of the World Council of Churches on Monday, 11 January. I write to you now to share with Your Holiness the ecumenical family’s profound concern. I also take this opportunity to offer our prayers and those of the fellowship of churches for the families of the victims as well as for the Coptic Orthodox Church which, through these tribulations, continues to be a living example of true Christian martyrdom.

Your Holiness, I want to assure you that the World Council of Churches will continue to accompany the members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, especially at this time of hardship.

Although this is not an occasion for us to rejoice, I wish Your Holiness a blessed season of the Nativity of our Lord and His Epiphany in the Jordan River. We pray that our Lord and Saviour will grant Your Holiness and all members of the Coptic Orthodox Church strength and courage to withstand the difficulties.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to the churches in Malaysia regarding attacks on churches and church buildings due to the controversy over the use of the word “Allah” for God by non-Muslims, 13 January 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with profound sorrow that we heard the news of churches being attacked in different parts of Malaysia and of the nine church buildings firebombed during the past five days due to the controversy over the use of the word “Allah” for God by non-Muslims.

While Christians in majority Muslim countries all over the world, including your neighbouring country Indonesia, have used the word “Allah” for God for centuries, it is very disturbing to hear about this new controversy generated by a small sector of Muslims opposing the use of “Allah” for God by Christians. In fact, this action will only challenge tolerance and restrict religious freedom as well as negatively affecting the “One Malaysia” policy commitment made by the government which aims to ensure that racial harmony becomes a central policy for the country.

The World Council of Churches, as a fellowship of churches around the world, remains deeply concerned about these developments of communal disharmony. We hope for an immediate action by both the government and civil society to resolve the conflict, in order to avoid renewed hostilities and escalation of violence in society.

While appreciating the statement from the prime minister of Malaysia that ‘violence has not been part of the practice of religion in Malaysia’ we hope that immediate measures will be taken to resolve the problem and that all perpetrators of these acts of violence will be brought to justice. It is heartening to see that numerous Islamic organizations and leaders have publicly condemned these wanton acts of a small group of people.

As you pass through this time of trouble and anxiety, we express our solidarity with all members of the churches and we call upon churches in Malaysia to continue their search for peace. We pray for peace and reconciliation among the people of different faiths and communities in your nation. May God Almighty strengthen you to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14).

Yours in Christ’s love,
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary

Report on visit of ecumenical delegation advocating for religious minorities' rights, 23 – 27 November 2009

An international ecumenical delegation visiting Turkey at the end of November has encouraged the country’s authorities to improve the situation of religious minorities. The exercise of religious freedom, the legal status of churches, including property issues, and the right to religious education were on the agenda.
The five-member delegation representing the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) visited the Muslim-majority Republic of Turkey on 23-27 November.

In Istanbul, the delegation met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with Archbishop Aram Atesian from the Armenian Patriarchate, and with representatives of the Syrian Orthodox community. It also met representatives of the Jewish community. In Ankara, the country's capital city, the delegation met members of the Syrian Orthodox Mor Gabriel Monastery led by their Archbishop Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktas.

Amongst the difficulties faced by churches in Turkey are the non-recognition of the "ecumenical status" of the Ecumenical Patriarch and of his Patriarchate, as well as the obstacles to the re-opening of the Theological School of Halki (Heybeliada). The Armenian Patriarchate reports restrictions to property rights involving several church, school and hospital buildings, as well as neglect and destruction of religious and cultural heritage. The Syrian Orthodox community deplores the dispute over the Mor Gabriel Monastery.

According to the US State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, there is "substantial abuse of religious freedom in Turkey". The Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights has pointed to shortcomings regarding minorities' cultural and property rights. And a report by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation has acknowledged that the country is "failing on minority property rights".

The delegation raised the churches' concerns in meetings with Vice-Prime Minister Bülent Arınç; with officials of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, which is the country's highest Islamic authority; and with the president of the National Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Committee of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

The Turkish authorities expressed their commitment to enabling all religious minorities in the country to fully exercise their right to freedom of religion. Another issue addressed at those meetings was the role churches and international ecumenical organizations can play to actively assist the country's integration into the European Union.

The same issue featured in a meeting at the headquarters of the daily newspaper *Zaman*, where the delegation discussed with Turkish journalists the role of the media with regard to religious minorities.

Members of the ecumenical delegation were: Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik, moderator of the WCC Commission of Churches on International Affairs; Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, former WCC general secretary; Rev. Lena Kumlin, legal adviser on EU affairs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland; Rev. Rüdiger Noll, CEC associate general secretary; and Christina Papazoglou, WCC programme executive for Human Rights.

**Statement on the misuse of the Blasphemy Law and the security of religious minorities in Pakistan, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

1. Conscious of the way that Christians and Muslims have lived in harmony in many times and places, it is with regret that it now seems that the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has become a major source of victimization and persecution of minorities. Since the penal code of the country was amended in 1986, religious minorities in the country have been living in a state of fear and
terror. Under the Blasphemy Law false cases have been brought against religious minorities and Christians in particular have become targets of harassments and persecutions. Due to an increasing trend of the use of the Blasphemy Law, which is often being used as a tool to settle personal scores, attacks on religious minorities have been exacerbated. These incidents have fostered a climate of religiously motivated violence and persecution in several parts of Pakistan. The Blasphemy Law has become a source of friction between the country’s majority and minority religious communities.

2. The subject law is part of the penal code of Pakistan. Its Chapter XV deals with offences relating to religion, which contains sections 295 to 298. The Blasphemy Law was originally introduced during the British rule in undivided India in 1860. In 1927, section 295 was added to the penal code to deal with “deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious belief”. Under this provision, protection was given to all religious groups on an equal basis. Conviction depended on proof that the accused deliberately or intentionally acted to injure or insult a person’s religious feelings. Since the founding of Pakistan in 1947, for forty years the then existing Blasphemy Law was considered adequate and no government during that period felt the need for any changes until General Zia Ul Haq introduced a number of amendments to the Pakistan penal code at the behest of the Islamic parties in the country. The change in the orientation of the state’s polices introduced by General Zia Ul Haq provided an opening to foster intolerance under the label of blasphemy. Since then, the minority Christians in Pakistan have increasingly become victims of humiliation and persecutions through false allegations made under the Blasphemy Law.

3. The Blasphemy Law, while purporting to protect Islam and religious sensitivities of the Muslim majority, are vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary in a way which amounts to harassment and persecution. It has become one of the most stringent laws in the country. As the law itself provides only a vague definition of blasphemy, yet blasphemy carries a mandatory death sentence in some cases. There are also serious flaws in the mechanisms to implement the law. Since the mandatory death sentence was introduced as a result of Amendment Act No. III (1986) to section 295C, many innocent people have lost their lives. In several cases, accused persons have not been brought to trial. Many victims of the Blasphemy Law have had to seek asylum in countries abroad for their security and others are forced to live in hiding.

4. The major flaw in the practice and implementation of the Blasphemy Law today is that on the testimony of a complainant, a person charged with blasphemy is immediately placed in detention. The penalty includes a mandatory death sentence for defaming the Prophet Mohammad and life imprisonment for desecrating the Holy Quran. Under the provisions of the present law, conviction is made possible without proof of deliberate attempt on the part of the accused. This is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution of Pakistan. The common experience of abusing and misusing of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life within the innocent Christian minority over the years. It has been reported, for instance, that between 1988 and 2005, the authorities in Pakistan charged 647 people under the Blasphemy Law. In recent times, the number has been increasing. Human rights groups observed that charges brought against individuals under the Blasphemy Law are founded solely on the individual’s minority religious beliefs or unfounded malicious accusations stemming from personal enmity, often with the motivation to have people imprisoned to gain advantage in business or land disputes. It has been reported that the judiciary also faces threats, intimidation and pressure. As a result of this, the lower courts have often been constrained to convict persons without proper study of the evidence placed before them. It is increasingly becoming difficult to obtain a fair hearing in Pakistan for those charged under the Blasphemy Law.
5. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has followed with concern the killings of Christians in Gojra and other places in the state of Punjab in the past weeks. Recalling the assurances given to the religious minorities by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, that “minorities are a sacred trust of Pakistan”, the WCC believes that the discrimination and attacks targeted against religious minorities in Pakistan are in violation of Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan that guarantees the legitimate rights of minorities. As the increasing trend of the misuse of Blasphemy Law intensifies communal hatred, religious intolerance and persecution against religious minorities, in this context the WCC expresses its serious concern on section 295C of the Pakistan penal code which carries a mandatory death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, 26 August – 2 September 2009, therefore:

A. **Urges** the government of Pakistan to repeal the section 295C of the Pakistan penal code which carries a mandatory death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy.

B. **Calls** upon the government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all religious minorities in the country.

C. **Expresses** solidarity with the Christians and all other religious minorities in Pakistan.

D. **Encourages** WCC member churches to request their respective governments to write to the government of Pakistan and express their concerns on the security of religious minorities in Pakistan and also to **request** that misuse of the Blasphemy Law be stopped.

E. **Calls** upon WCC member churches to pray for the people of Pakistan and that peace and security will prevail throughout Pakistan.

**Minute on the situation facing the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, adopted by the WCC central committee, 26 August–2 September 2009**

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

1. In December 2006 the elected government of Fiji, a Pacific island nation of some 920,000 people, was overthrown in a military coup and an “interim government” was installed, with the head of the military, Commodore Frank Bainimarama serving as prime minister. In April 2009 the Fiji Court of Appeal declared that the coup was illegal. Within days the interim government abrogated the national constitution, dismissed the judiciary, brought in censorship of the media and announced public emergency regulations, which, among other things, require government permits to be issued for meetings to be held, including church meetings.

2. The population of Fiji consists of two main groups – indigenous Fijians, around 55% of the population, and Indian Fijians who are descended from labourers brought from India in the 19th century, around 42% of the population. The vast majority of indigenous Fijians are Christian (over 95%) and Christianity is very much part of indigenous Fijian culture, especially through the Methodist church. The Indian Fijians are mostly Hindu (28% of the overall population) or Muslim (6%).

3. Almost two-thirds of indigenous Fijians belong to the Methodist Church, a World Council of Churches (WCC) member church. Overall around 35% of Fijians are Methodists (327,000 members, including some Indian Fijians). The Roman Catholic Church is the second largest with around 60,000 members. The Anglican Church, with around 8,000 members, is the only other WCC member church in Fiji.

4. Military coups also took place in 1987 and 2000. These earlier coups were regarded as supportive of the political interests of the indigenous Fijians, and it is generally perceived that the Methodist Church, with its strong indigenous membership, supported these coups. The 2006 coup, however, is perceived as favouring the Indian Fijian population, and the interim
government has significantly diminished the place of traditional Fijian culture in Fiji’s national life. One example is that the role of the previously very powerful Council of Chiefs has been terminated by the interim government.

5. Immediately after the 2006 coup, the Methodist Church issued statements deploring the coup and protesting the illegality of the interim government. Many smaller churches joined the Methodists in publicly stating this view, but it is noted with regret that there is little communication between the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches at present. The Methodist Church has maintained its public stance on the illegality of the interim government since 2006. The church has therefore refused to take part in processes initiated by the interim government for community participation in planning for the future of Fiji. While this policy of the church is understandable and perfectly valid, it means the church has unfortunately sidelined itself from processes which may well have a large influence on the nature of Fiji in the future.

6. Since May 2009, the interim government has taken these actions against the Methodist Church:

- banned the church from holding its annual 2009 conference, the chief governing body of the church (and the ban may stay in place until after the planned return to democracy in 2014);
- banned the annual choir festival of the church, which is held in association with the conference and which assists in the annual raising of funds for the life and mission of the church;
- arrested and charged nine Methodist leaders, including the president and general secretary, with breaches of the emergency regulations; all nine have been released on bail, with strict conditions as to what they can and cannot do, including the surrender of their passports;
- ordered the church not to hold a service of induction of its president and general secretary, scheduled to take place on 23 August;
- banned the weekly radio programme of the Methodist Church and the weekly radio program conducted by the Methodist general secretary.

7. In August 2009 the WCC arranged for a team of three church leaders from neighbouring countries to visit Fiji, particularly to express solidarity and support for the Methodist Church at this time. The WCC records its gratitude to the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) for the PCCs organizational assistance and hospitality generously provided to the WCC team. The team met with leaders of the Methodist church and participated in worship in Centenary Church, Suva, on 23 August. The team also met with leaders of the PCC, with Anglican Bishop Apimeleki Qiliho, with several non-governmental organizations, and with Prime Minister Bainimarama. The prime minister asserts strongly that among the leaders of the Methodist Church there are ethno-nationalists whom he regards more as politicians than church leaders, and that it is the ethno-nationalist political aspirations and actions of these leaders that have caused his government to act against the church. The team was pleased to receive an assurance from the prime minister that the interim government is open to dialogue with the Methodist Church.

8. There is a vast diversity of opinion among Fijians concerning the interim government. Viewpoints range from strong support for the interim government, especially for its actions towards a more just multiracial and multi-faith society, to outright opposition to the interim government and all it appears to stand for. Some are concerned that while the interim government states it plans a return to democracy in 2014, that date might be further extended and Fiji might be ruled in the long term by a military dictatorship or military junta. These different viewpoints are present also within the membership of the Methodist Church.

9. The Methodist Church has a firm commitment not to respond to the interim government’s actions in any way that might lead to public protests against the government and to possible violence and bloodshed. The church wishes dearly to find a peaceful resolution of the difficulties they face. The church is open to discussions with the interim government, with or without the
assistance of a mediator, and is open to reviewing its policy of non-participation in community and government processes considering the future of Fiji.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009, therefore:

A. **Expresses** deep concern at the actions taken by the interim government of Fiji against the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma.

B. **Commends** the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma for its careful and measured response to the actions taken against the church by the interim government of Fiji.

C. **Encourages** the Pacific Conference of Churches to facilitate increased dialogue among the churches in Fiji, especially between the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.

D. **Urges** the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma to seek opportunity to engage in dialogue with the interim government.

E. **Encourages** the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, while maintaining its stand on the illegality of the interim government, to consider participating in community and government processes which give consideration to the future of Fiji’s political, economic, social and interreligious life.

F. **Requests** the WCC general secretary to respond promptly to any requests and suggestions from Fijian churches for possible further WCC actions in support of the church in Fiji.

G. **Calls upon** WCC member churches to pray for the nation and people of Fiji, that a peaceful return to democracy and the rule of law, and a vibrant and peaceful multiracial and multi-faith community, will emerge as soon as possible.

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**Minute on the right of conscientious objection to military service adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

1. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and other civil society organizations urged the United Nations in 1973 to recognize conscientious objection to military service as “a valid expression of the right of freedom of conscience” and make alternative means of service available to conscientious objectors. The Statement on the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service from 1973 says that the WCC and its partner organizations “believe that the time has come for the Commission (on Human Rights) to take a decisive step towards the international recognition of the right of conscientious objection to military service”. Four considerations were cited as a basis for that belief: growing concern among religious communities, respect for the right to freedom of thought and for the integrity of the individual, the role of youth in promoting peace, and the fact that the lack of alternatives to armed service leads to a waste of human resources and prison terms of young people with deeply held convictions.

2. Succeeding years have seen recognition granted in international forums and a UN covenant on civil and political rights. The ecumenical movement, through the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, leading up to the 1990, Seoul, Korea Convocation on JPIC, reaffirmed the right to conscientious objection. As a result, conscientious objection to military service in principle has reached new levels of protection under the freedoms of thought and religion, as well as freedom of conscience.

3. A report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2006, however, revealed serious shortfalls in many countries in recognizing and exercising the right to conscientious objection to military service and found that conscientious objectors are often subject to penalization, discrimination and imprisonment. The WCC central committee then called for a study in the light of that report.

4. The WCC study shows that in many places churches face challenges of conscientious objection. Their responses include initiatives to support conscientious objectors in some
countries. Three observations provide an overview of church positions on the issue: Historic Peace Churches strongly encourage their members to refuse participation in any military actions. Meanwhile, they respect the freedom of the individual decision. Other churches consider that both civilian service and military service may be Christian options. Finally, while many, and perhaps most churches, do not have an official position on the issue, the study found no evidence of these churches speaking against conscientious objection.

5. The study suggests that a consensus position among churches is to affirm the right of conscientious objection so that individuals who feel they cannot bear weapons for religious or other reasons of conscience should have the possibility to object without being submitted to discrimination or punishment.

6. It is also noted that in some countries where there is a right to conscientious objection to military service, some Christians have become sensitive to the use of their tax money for supporting war, and in some cases have faced government action against them because of their conscientious objection to paying for war. This development of conscientious objection deserves further study and consideration.

7. As the Decade to Overcome Violence affirms the biblical foundations, especially as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount: The merciful, the peacemakers and the persecuted are blessed in the Beatitudes; and Jesus teaches love even for one’s enemies (Matthew 5: 6-9). Therefore, the central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

A. Reiterates existing WCC policy and reaffirms its support for the human right of conscientious objection for religious, moral or ethical reasons in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other international laws, as churches have an obligation to support those who refuse to take part in violence.

B. Calls upon WCC member churches, wherever they are in a position to do so, to uphold the right of refusal to bear and use arms and to encourage church members to uphold that right as well.

C. Deplores the situation that men, women and children in many parts of the world are forced into armed service under governments and also under non-governmental forces or paramilitary organizations.

D. Encourages member churches to address their respective governments and military organizations to recognize and honour conscientious objection to military service as a human right under international law.

E. Calls upon churches to encourage their members to object to military service in situations when the church considers armed action illegal or immoral.

F. Encourages churches to study and address the issue of military or war taxes and of alternatives to military service.

G. Calls upon all Christians to pray for peace, abandon violence and seek peace through nonviolent means.

Minute on the responsibility of churches for communities enduring anti-Christian violence adopted by WCC central committee, 26 August–2 September, Geneva, Switzerland 2009

1. Christian communities in many parts of the world today are the targets of different forms of religiously motivated violence or find themselves under threat and intimidation. In many cases exacerbated by ethnic conflict and frequently in the midst of war and even following in times of peace, these Christians often find their governments unable or unwilling to fulfil their responsibility to protect. We have noted a decline of religious freedom in many parts of the world and an increase of religious intolerance. Acknowledging the responsibility of each part of
the Body of Christ for the whole Body and remembering the New Testament call to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15), to “contribute to the needs of the saints” (Romans 12:13), and “to bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

A. **Challenges** its member churches to hear the cries of sisters and brothers in Christ enduring violence, threat and intimidation throughout the world and to give voice to their suffering so that their pain will not be ignored; pray without ceasing for an end to violence and a restoration of life; engage in acts of costly solidarity such as pastoral visits, generous sharing of financial resources, sending letters of support and consolation and, when possible, offering hospitality and sanctuary to those who are forced to become refugees while at the same time helping to facilitate their repatriation.

B. **Asks** its member churches to engage in public witness challenging their own and, when appropriate, other governments to protect the lives of citizens in accordance with international standards of human rights.

C. **Lifts up** the programme “Accompanying Churches in Situations of Conflict” and **calls upon** the general secretary and officers of the WCC to stand in the forefront of the witness for religious freedom, monitoring situations of violence and alerting its member churches, facilitating ecumenical responses, organizing ecumenical visits of solidarity, and addressing governments and international organizations calling on them to protect those who are vulnerable.

D. **Requests** the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs to develop policy and proposals for supporting religious freedom in multi-faith contexts and effectively engaging the churches in the defence of Christians experiencing violence.

E. **Encourages** churches in all contexts to demonstrate interfaith sensitivity in their witness, by preaching and teaching against retaliation, honouring the right to religious freedom for all.

F. **Reminds** the churches that their witness against anti-Christian violence is made more credible when it is matched by a clear commitment to protect all vulnerable persons and communities regardless of their religious identity.

**Letter of concern to Mr Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria over the recent violent clashes in northern Nigeria, 4 August 2009**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to you to express our concern regarding the recent violence that erupted in Maiduguri and other areas of northern Nigeria following clashes between members of Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group, and the security forces that left hundreds dead during the past week. It is unfortunate that Maiduguri has seen the worst of this unrest after the uprising that began in Bauchi state and spread to four other northern states of Nigeria.

Nigeria has long suffered from ethno-religious conflicts, communal and political tensions and surges in militant activities, which have frequently led to violence in different parts of the country. It is unfortunate that inter-communal violence has already claimed the lives of more than 12,000 Nigerians during the past decade. We have also learnt that the civilian fallout from clashes between the military and armed militants and from outbreaks of sectarian violence has cost hundreds of lives lost over the past two years. Reports from various sources confirmed the fact that the reasons for this violence are rooted in politics rather than religion. Widespread
poverty, corruption, poor governance and political instability continue to push the country
towards violence and insecurity. All these events are taking place without comprehensive and
drastic measures to address widespread unemployment and poverty in the country. It is also a
matter of concern that these conflicts have been exacerbated by state-sponsored abuses by the
security forces, including extra-judicial killings and torture.

Although it is a known fact that Your Excellency’s government has inherited several of
these problems from the previous administration, we view as promising certain policy initiatives
established under your administration, including the formation of a committee on police reform
and a presidential panel to investigate the 2008 inter-communal violence in Jos. However, it is
our considered opinion that these initiatives have yet to make a tangible impact on the lives of
ordinary Nigerians who are constantly facing blatant violations of their human and fundamental
rights.

We therefore urge Your Excellency to pay serious attention to the situation in the northern
states of Nigeria; to ensure the safety of all citizens in the areas now afflicted with violence; and
to ensure that all perpetrators responsible for these acts of violence and human rights violations
are brought to justice.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

Letter of concern to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
regarding attacks against Christians in Pakistan, 3 August 2009

Your Excellency,

I am writing this to bring to your kind attention a matter of serious concern regarding the
ongoing attacks against the Christians in the Punjab Province, especially the most recent attack
against the Christians in Gojra. It is with great shock and sadness that we received the news that
seven people belonging to the Christian community in Gojra were burned alive and forty houses
of Christians have been torched by militant Islamic groups, following an intensive and organized
attack against the Christian settlements in Gojra Town on the morning of 1 August 2009.

As Your Excellency is aware, this is the third incident of this kind in the last two months
in Punjab Province in which settlements of Christian communities were attacked. According to
reports we received only a few weeks ago, several houses belonging to Christians were set on fire
in Kasur. We have been informed that most victims belong to poor rural folks and security
forces are unwilling to take action against the culprits. The killings and destruction of houses
could have been avoided if the police and security forces were vigilant and had taken timely
action against the militant Islamic groups who constantly threaten the Christian minorities with
false allegations of "desecrating the Quran", and try to use the controversial blasphemy laws
against them. Various local and international human rights groups and civil society organizations
have repeatedly confirmed that that the blasphemy laws in Pakistan are being used as an excuse
to victimize the minority Christians in your nation. Several innocent Christians who have been
charged under these controversial laws continue to languish in jails pending trial.
The Gojra carnage of 1 August, the latest in a series of organized attacks against Christians reconfirms the fear that the government is constantly failing to protect its citizens who frequently face attack by militant Islamic groups. The Federal Minister for Minorities himself stated that there was no truth to allegations that the Holy Quran had been defiled and accused the police of ignoring his appeal to provide protection to Christians under threat in Gojra.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches views the Gojra massacre and the riots that took place over the last three days as a matter of serious concern. We believe that it is the responsibility of the State to provide security to all its citizens in the country, particularly in a region where communal tensions and chances for violence run a high risk. We appeal to Your Excellency to take necessary actions against the perpetrators who are responsible for committing grave and unjustifiable attacks against innocent Christian minorities in Gojra. We also appeal to Your Excellency to ensure the safety and security of the victims of the riots. It is our fervent hope and prayer that the situation in Gojra will return to normalcy very soon.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia WCC general secretary

Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Iraq expressing condolences and sympathy over the loss of life following the wave of attacks on churches and communities in Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk, 14 July 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We have been deeply troubled and saddened by the brutal wave of violent attacks on the churches and Christian communities in Baghdad, Mosul and Kerkuk over this last week, which have left four people dead and 32 others injured.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I am writing to express our deepest concern over the loss of life and the constant threats you have suffered over the past six years. At the same time, I am writing to assure you of our support as you pass through these turbulent and challenging times, and to encourage you to continue to witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hatred and aggression.

It is with this spirit that we are organizing a visit to the churches in Baghdad, Mosul and the North of Iraq by representative members of the WCC fellowship of churches, to demonstrate our solidarity and support, to share your concerns and hopes, and to work with you for peaceful solutions.

On behalf of the ecumenical family, we express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the people of Iraq, especially to the families of those who were killed and injured. We pray for peace and reconciliation in Iraq, and for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of violence and for all who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

You are constantly in our thoughts and prayers as you pass through this tragic and critical time.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
Address by WCC general secretary at the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions: The role of religious leaders in building a peaceful society based on tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation, Astana, Kazakhstan, 1 July 2009

1. Your Excellency, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, your Eminences, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I am honoured to be a part of this august gathering of religious leaders at the Third Congress of World and Traditional Religious Leaders and want to congratulate you on your successful efforts at bringing world religious leaders together once more.

2. At the outset, I wish to acknowledge that Kazakhstan has a distinguished history of being at the cross-roads of many cultures and religions. Today it is home to large Muslim and Christian communities as well as a rich variety of other religious communities, all desiring to worship and practice their faith in freedom and peace. As you well know, Your Excellency, while it is in the interest of the state that religions live harmoniously in a society, interreligious cooperation cannot be imposed by the state. Religious communities themselves must work with each other to discover effective ways of dialogue and cooperation. Of course the state can encourage collaboration by creating the conditions that are conducive to such cooperation by assuring the opportunities for the free exercise of religion. You have helped this course as recently as March this year, by agreeing with your supreme court's determination that the restrictions that were proposed by a parliamentary bill were unconstitutional. I want to support your efforts in ensuring such freedom for all religious communities in Kazakhstan.

3. Your Excellency, it has been a well-established practice for religious leaders to call each other for dialogue. However, lately government leaders like you are calling us for interreligious dialogue. The idea that in order to establish Astana as a city of peace, its foundation must be interreligious dialogue is good and right. Our presence here as religious leaders signifies our support for that cause. As well this congress offers us the opportunity to engage in the important work of meeting and building relationships with each other to strengthen our joint work for peace.

4. I am grateful to be able to offer my reflections to this summit of distinguished religious leaders. The World Council of Churches, which I serve as general secretary is the world's premier Christian ecumenical organization. It has a membership of 349 churches across the world in the Protestant and Orthodox families of faith, and numbers some 560 million Christians. Every Sunday, these faithful people gather for worship in large urban centres and in small rural communities in countries across the world, including here in Kazakhstan. The gathering of millions of ‘captive audience’ every week provides the rarest of opportunities for spiritual and ethical formation.

5. One of the roles of religious leaders in building peace is that of convening; bringing others together to deliberate on concerted efforts in overcoming violence and resolving conflicts. Here I wish to share an example of how effective this convening role could be. In 2007, as part of its work on peace-making in the Middle East, the World Council of Churches called for a conference in Amman, Jordan. This was a unique opportunity where, for the first time churches from Jerusalem came together with one single voice, expecting costly solidarity from sister churches all over the world. The WCC could, because of its credibility among the different churches, call together diverse church leaders and representatives to address thorny and difficult issues. The wide spectrum of participation and representation in Amman was an encouraging example of ecumenical solidarity. It gave us the courage to keep hope and not despair vis-à-vis international politics. We learnt that churches together in solidarity can make a change.
6. The Amman call continues to have an impact in many parts of the world. Last month in San Anselmo, California, U.S.A., Christians, Muslims and Jews involved in supporting Palestinian-Israel peace process invited WCC to speak about the Amman experience. In a couple of public speaking engagements I shared about the Amman experience with scholars, activists, religious community leaders whose common course is to contribute to peace in Israel-Palestine. The inspiration drawn from our discourses was that hope grounded in true change can emerge, and from it just peace when people of different faiths in the USA engage their leaders and call on them to implement a peace rooted in justice and respect for the aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis.

7. Religious leaders can also assist in building a peaceful society by being a living model of dialogue and cooperation. In such opportunities as this one, we come to meet, talk, build and renew relationships with each other. This sends a powerful message to our constituencies as we show that it is theologically proper and in keeping with our religious traditions to meet with other religious persons for dialogue and cooperation. Track II diplomacy is the "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve conflicts." This cooperation among religious leaders gives us the opportunity to engage and share experiences in faith-based diplomacy as a contribution to Track II conflict resolution. In this way we can think together about creative alternatives to what Track I is able to produce.

8. Any encounter's success depends on the participants' getting to know each other which in turn leads to breaking down psychological barriers and stereotypes. This humanizes "the other", provides an opportunity to demythologize the narratives about the past and evaluate threat-perceptions. Indeed, facing "the other" can help each of us to recognize that the one who may seem at first like an adversary may actually share many of the same fears and constraints, and similar experiences.

9. Recently there have been many attempts, both by governments and religious leaders to create opportunities for this kind of conversation. The WCC's programme on interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation itself has done substantial work to prepare our churches to engage with other religious communities. Even as the WCC's goal is to foster visible unity among the churches, these efforts need to be commended to our churches and religious communities.

10. I remain convinced, however, that the real action is not at this table, but at the ground where churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, guruduwaras and communities that gather in other houses of worship not only build relationships for cooperation, but engage with each other in real action that leads to peace and reconciliation. We hear many stories where joint action by churches, mosques, synagogues and temples helps to change local public policy towards social justice, to create programs that alleviate hunger and help the homeless, to provide new initiatives for health and education and to stand in solidarity with each other when one community is threatened. Dialogue that arises out of situations of tension – when we learn to appreciate the tension and manage it properly – lead to effective cooperative action.

11. It is still necessary and important that religious leaders and scholars gather for interfaith dialogue. But let us recognize that too often, we are the very ones who stand in the way of grassroots communities organizing for peace. Sometimes the theologies, the doctrinal traditions, our religious practices, our bureaucracies, keep our people from doing the right thing – engaging in dialogue, cooperating in common action, organizing for peace. Our coming together must find ways of releasing, supporting and energizing grassroots and community initiatives for peace and reconciliation.

12. The third role is that of providing opportunities for the younger generation both to learn from us, religious leaders, as well as to challenge us. Many of us who are here as religious leaders
are considered the "older generation" by those in our constituencies. The younger people of today are not as burdened as we are with the differences they see in the other. In a more globalized society and in communities which are much more pluralistic than when we grew up, they are getting to know people from different religions already from a young age. Just as they have been taught by us, we must also learn from them. As religious leaders we must give them the opportunities that we did not have to work with and enter into dialogue with those in other faiths.

13. Your Excellency, allow me to share a concrete example from our experience. For several years now the World Council of Churches, in conjunction with Muslim and Jewish partners, has provided such a chance for younger people in our one-month-long programme entitled Building an Interfaith Community. The course is open to younger people with the goal of learning about each other and challenging and overcoming stereotypes. While fully respecting and affirming each particular faith identity, the course focuses on what we, as people of faith, do to respond and to overcome the pressing challenges of our time and build together a mutually accountable society based on respect and cooperation. The programme integrates spiritual exposure and sharing, the study of the sacred scriptures from each tradition and lectures and workshops given by specialists from Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.

14. The WCC staff person who is responsible for youth often says "youth are not the future, they are the present!" These younger people in our congregations and in our communities are particularly skilled in networking. Because of the internet they are able to make friends, to work on projects with others and share their concerns – including peace-making – with people all over the world. In all our traditions, the younger people of today are uniquely placed to facilitate links between very different kinds of people in a way that we never could. As religious leaders our role in building peaceful societies necessitates encouraging our younger people to understand people of other faiths that can lead to mutual respect with the other that can help prevent intolerance and conflict.

15. With the privilege of leading our communities also comes responsibility, not only to our own constituencies but to all. By bringing people together around building peace and tolerance, we make more progress than by going alone. By providing living examples to our communities through intentional interaction with those of other traditions we build mutual respect as a forerunner of peace building. By encouraging our people and being open to what they have to offer in terms of concrete gifts and action each context, we as religious leaders can contribute to building peace and cooperation. Given time and more creative work we can provide the opportunity for interfaith dialogue to emerge as a key ingredient to make a difference in transforming our societies and our world.

Formation of a coalition of 45 religious, inter-faith and value-based organizations from around the globe to advance a “United Nations Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace”, New York, USA, 2-4 March 2009

Faith and values organizations form coalition to advance United Nations Decade for Interreligious Cooperation for Peace

Some forty-five religious, interfaith, and value-based organizations from five continents agreed to form a coalition to advance a "United Nations Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding, and Cooperation for Peace." Coalition members expressed the hope
that the UN Sixty-Fourth General Assembly, which will begin its deliberations in September 2009, will approve a resolution establishing such a decade from 2011-2020.

The meeting took place at Maryknoll, New York, on 2-4 March. Participants included Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Sikh, Zoroastrian as well as indigenous traditions.

A provisional steering committee promoted the decade with UN member states during 2008. The UN General Assembly took the first step on 14 November 2008 by adopting resolution 63/22 which calls for exploring the feasibility of such a decade. The resolution was co-sponsored by 78 states.

On Monday, the president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann, reiterated his previous calls for a "new spirit of solidarity and a powerful injection of moral and ethical values into our business and political lives." He urged the religious leaders to work together with the United Nations since these concerns require "life-long commitment" and religious institutions have the "staying power in the face of these challenges."

The coalition elected a steering committee – composed of organizations representing religious communities, interfaith and value-based civil society organizations – to strategically promote the decade idea among member states of the UN.

**An opportunity to work for peace**

Stein Villumstad, deputy secretary general of Religions for Peace, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious organization, will chair the coalition steering committee. "This is a unique opportunity for religious traditions, so easily hijacked for destructive purposes, to work with the United Nations and jointly mobilize their communities and organizations for urgent and compelling actions for peace," he said. "Time and space created by the decade should make a difference for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed peoples of the world."

The World Council of Churches (WCC) – host of the initial gathering of this coalition in Bossey, Switzerland in January 2008 – continues to promote this initiative, said Shanta Premawardhana, WCC director for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. "Our churches, through the Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) have a long history of working with the UN and its agencies on a variety of projects that contribute to sustainable peace," he said.

The coalition will meet next in the context of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009. Dirk Ficca, the executive director of the Parliament, himself a member of the steering committee welcomed the initiative.

Coalition members hope the proposed UN decade will be launched on 21 September 2010, the International Day of Peace. This would immediately follow the current 2001-2010 International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World and the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

**Final statement from the meeting of representatives of the churches in Iraq, Dar Sayedat al-Jabal, Lebanon, 9-11 February 2009**

In a meeting organized by the World Council of Churches in Dar Sayedit Al Jabal, Fatka, Lebanon, between 10 and 11 February 2009, 12 church leaders from all over Iraq discussed the current situation of its Christians community. Representatives from different Iraqi churches participated in the meeting together with bishops from the Syrian and Armenian Orthodox Churches and the Chaldean Church in Lebanon, and the general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches.
They discussed the current situation of Christians in Iraq, focusing on the following three main themes:

1. Addressing the common challenges facing Iraqis, particularly Christians today, above all the issue of safety and security as well as forced migration. And defining their expectations from the act of solidarity and advocacy by the ecumenical family.

2. Strengthening the Christian presence in Iraq and affirming its role in bearing witness to the faith. Highlighting the role of Iraqi Christians in building educational and social institutions that contribute to national reconciliation, peace building and stability based on respect of diversity and co-citizenship within Iraq.

3. Revitalizing Christian-Muslim dialogue in order to promote constructive and peaceful coexistence.

Participants agreed on the following points:

- Christians have belonged to Iraq since the nation’s birth; they are not merely a minority but an essential part of Iraqi society and deeply rooted in its history and civilization. As authentic children of this land, they have the right to live freely in it and enjoy equal rights and responsibilities along with all other citizens.

- The participants called upon Iraqi Christians to stay in their homeland and participate actively in its rebuilding and its development.

- They also called on the churches in the West not to encourage migration and resettlement programs for refugees outside Iraq, rather to focus their efforts on bringing back security and stability inside Iraq for all Iraqis to live in it. The solution to current conditions lies not in emptying Iraq of its human resources, but in providing a peaceful and safe environment, infrastructures, job opportunities, and in protecting all citizens. The goal is to enable Iraqis to work together, healing wounds and building a better future for themselves.

- It is essential that dialogue continue among Christians and their Muslim brothers and sisters in order to promote a constructive and peaceful co-existence based on mutual respect and good citizenship.

- Participants pledged to work together on establishing an ecumenical forum that allows all Iraqi church leaders to speak in a common voice with a unified message.

At the closing of the consultation, participants expressed their gratitude to the World Council of Churches for organizing this meeting and to the Middle East Council of Churches for their presence. They also thanked all the churches who expressed solidarity and provided support to the Iraqi people in their sufferings.

Joint communiqué on religion and peaceful co-existence issued by the WCC and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization on the occasion of their fifth symposium, Tehran, Iran, 13-14 December 2008

The World Council of Churches (WCC, Geneva, Switzerland) and Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) held their fifth symposium in Tehran on 13-14 December 2008.

Representatives of Islam and Christianity found new points of commonality during a two-day high level symposium of scholars and spiritual leaders in Tehran, and discussed models of co-existence between Christians and Muslims in different contexts. They explored further the conditions and principles that foster peaceful coexistence between communities of faith. The symposium, held at the invitation of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Relations in Iran, was a continuation of a dialogue between Iranian Muslim and Christian scholars related to
the World Council of Churches (WCC) which began in 1995. Participants from the WCC included six Christian scholars from Europe, North America and the Middle East, together with representatives of the WCC member churches in Tehran. From Iran, participants included some fifteen scholars and religious leaders from Tehran and Qom. During the two-day dialogue the symposium discussed issues related to the concept of salvation in relation to other religions, the religious understanding of human dignity, conversion, the status of religious minorities in different contexts, the common values and shared principles between religious communities, the role of education in promoting peaceful co-existence, the concept of cultural and religious identity, and the role of religion in the public space. The dialogue reached agreement on the following points:

Co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Iran has its roots in the history and culture of Iranian society. In this context, both Islam and Christianity have the sources to provide the common ground for this coexistence.

Peace requires mutual understanding among the followers of different faiths. This entails learning about each other’s faith, and dialogue can pave the way to achieving this objective.

Constructive dialogue between Christians and Muslims can build bridges of mutual respect based on clear understandings of one’s own religion and the religion of the other.

Muslims and Christians share the Abrahamic tradition of faith, and therefore they share responsibility for promoting peaceful coexistence in their respective communities.

Peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims should be based on their equal participation and shared responsibility towards society and each other. This includes recognizing and respecting one another’s religious and civil rights, and taking a common stand whenever the rights of religious communities are violated and whenever irresponsible media try to present a distorted image of any particular religion, offending its symbols and followers.

Preserving one’s own religious and cultural identity should not be in contradiction to respecting the religious and cultural identity of the other. In each religion and culture we can discover the common fundamental principles for peace and respect. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims must promote these principles and obligations towards each other in order to strengthen the peaceful coexistence.

Through dialogue and cooperation Christians and Muslims can together discover their common principles and values, and renew their joint commitment to them.

The symposium agreed that the experience of dialogue should not be confined to the level of scholars and spiritual leaders, but should be brought into everyday life of believing communities, wherever they may be.

At the end of this symposium the organizers felt that it is important to deepen the dialogue in the time to come by academic research, exchange of concerns, and common projects. At the same time, all participants were encouraged to engage with their respective communities to correct prejudices and enhance mutual understanding.

**Signing of the statement “Faith in Human Rights” by WCC general secretary at the international interreligious conference on Faith in Human Rights on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Hague, Netherlands, 10 December 2008**

By adding my signature to this Statement I affirm the basic values and principles inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights even as I reiterate that human rights are a matter of faith.
1. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in the aftermath of the Second World War was a decisive milestone with regard to the protection and promotion of human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms. This Declaration finds its roots in the strong desire for peace of the Member States of the United Nations, and has been commonly adopted despite their differences in ideologies, political systems, religious and cultural backgrounds.

2. In its Preamble, the Declaration starts by recognizing that the "inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" and links human dignity to the recognition of fundamental rights towards which every human being aspires: the right to life, liberty and security of individuals; the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution; the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment; etc. to name only a few. Sixty years after its adoption, the Declaration still remains the Magna Carta for all humanity and has created a benchmark for state conduct at national and international levels, and helps us realize our shared vision of a religiously and culturally diverse world community striving to promote and defend the rights and dignity of all.

3. The primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights belongs to States. In addition, States have duties to the wider communities to which they belong, and bear the responsibility to promote and proclaim the universality of human rights. Today, thousands of innocent people die, face hardship and are victims of ill-treatment due to mere violations of their basic human rights, thus making the enjoyment of basic human rights a mirage for many.

4. The Declaration is by no means a 'pick-and-choose' list: it is a document that should be accepted comprehensively. There is an urgent need for a thorough reflection on the acceptance of each right as an integral part of the whole. The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Declaration are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. Despite the national and regional particularities, as well as historical, cultural and religious backgrounds of many, arguments regarding the cultural relativity of human rights should not be encouraged. Rather, a dynamic interpretation of human rights should be welcomed, and ought to highlight States' duty in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. In these times when many in the world are fascinated by violence and its various forms, we – religious leaders – should relentlessly promote peaceful means to redress and refrain from the use of violence. With regard to the increase in religious intolerance, and without denying the importance of the freedom of expression, special sensitivity and respect should be shown to the portrayal of objects of religious veneration.

6. As religious leaders, our role is to study carefully our respective holy scriptures and teachings so as to find grounds for theological rationale in defense of human rights. We need to address situations where harm has been done in the name of religion, promote forgiveness, reconciliation and healing in order to foster mutual respect and understanding among our communities, and stimulate interfaith co-operation with mutual respect.

In conclusion, I wish to underline the World Council of Churches' deep commitment to continue to uphold, promote and advocate for human rights and human dignity for all, and towards that end to seek cooperation with leaders of other faiths.

Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches
Keynote lecture given by Catholicos Aram I: “Living as a Community with Islam – Concerns, Challenges and Promises” at an ecumenical consultation of church leaders and experts on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Geneva, Switzerland, 18-20 October 2008

Christians and Muslims have co-existed for centuries in different geo-political contexts and under changing circumstances. This co-existence has taken multiple shapes, generating coherence and tension, harmony and conflict. A realistic assessment of the present predicament of these relations is imperative. We must go beyond cosmetic approaches and clichés to discern the core issues and emerging challenges.

**Salient features of Christian-Muslim relations**

Looking at the present landscape of Christian-Muslim relations, it is important to identify four inter-related trends:

a) Ambiguous perception of religion

In the course of history religion has frequently been misused creating division and conflict. Christianity and Islam have not been exempt from this tendency. Some believe that religion has a public role to play, while others feel that it should be a private affair. For some, religion provides the basis for political governance and ideological orientation, while others believe that it has been hijacked by a political agenda; hence, while some people believe that ‘de-politicization’ of religion and ‘de-religionization’ of politics are imperative, others believe that there should be no demarcation line between religion, nation and state. Because of these opposing perceptions, religion has become a source of conflict in societies. The concrete implications of these contradictory images of religion are identifiable in many areas of society life.

Referring to this present predicament of religion, Charles Kimball reminds us that "several best-selling books have agreed forcefully that religion is the problem."\(^2\)

In my view, religion is not the problem. It was made part of the problem. The very vocation of religion as a moral authority is to seek solutions to problems that we face in the world today. In order to fulfil its vocation, the two dimensions of religion, namely, as a God-given truth and as a human response, need to be distinguished. Tension between the "other-worldly" and "this-worldly" manifestations of religion, and the incompatibility between the teachings and practice of religion need to be reconciled. Both absolutizing and relativizing religion may have negative consequences. Can we break these misperceptions and ambiguities and articulate the true image of religion? Christianity and Islam have rich resources to engage in such a process.

b) Misconception about Islam and Christianity

In spite of the significant growth of Muslim-Christian dialogue and relations, Muslims and Christians continue to misconstrue each other’s religion. Generally speaking, Islam is portrayed by the West as a source of hatred, fundamentalism and violence. Deep in the consciousness of many Muslims, Western Christianity is the cause of moral decay, and is identified with the Crusades, colonialism, and secularism.

These memories and images pertaining to Islam and Christianity have generated a crisis of confidence. Furthermore, manipulation of religious symbols, slogans and banners to promote non-religious agendas has deepened the intolerance. Therefore, allegations, stereotypes and prejudices must be seriously addressed, and collective memories must be purified. This is an extremely urgent task facing Christian-Muslim dialogue.

c) Collision of values

Religion is not only faith in a transcendent reality, it is also a value system that governs human life and provides the basis for self-understanding. Rooted in belief systems, values are perceived as forces of cohesion and integration in societies. They may also become forces of destabilization.

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and tension when used for ideological, nationalistic and political ends. Values carry with them memories and thus condition attitudes and determine relations. Exclusive religious claims lead to exclusive expressions of values, which in turn lead to intolerance.

A number of incidents that have occurred in the last decade in different parts of the world, along with their ensuing reactions and counter reactions, point to a deepening malaise in Christian-Muslim relations: exclusive and reductionist attitudes towards each other provoke tension; values conditioned by extremist religious claims and ideologies expose societies to confrontation; even indirect remarks "in the name of freedom of speech" spark outright rage; and the fear of an "evil other", whether identified by a name, country or religion, creates distrust and divides people. What is happening is not a "clash of civilizations" or "clash of fundamentalisms". It is a clash of values, deeply rooted in our belief systems and stirred by bitter memories. Differences imprison us in mutual fear unless we transcend them to discover our common eco-centre. Bitter memories deepen the divide unless they are healed through a transformative process. Rather than opting to confront each other, we must strive together to pull down the wall of ignorance, arrogance and suspicion. Dialogue should challenge us to accept each other the way we are.

d) Self-contained or interactive self-understanding?

Identity is sustained by values and religious beliefs. Faithfulness to identity implies strong attachment to values and religious beliefs. Globalization has destroyed the fences that used to protect this specific identity and, in its place, has produced its own identity. As a result, we see two contradictory reactions: one is characterized by the defining of one's self-understanding in opposition to the other; the other, which is proactive, is marked by creative openness and dynamic interaction with the other. The first way of being is labelled today as radicalism or fundamentalism; it rejects the other. The second way of being is labelled as moderate and tolerant; it accepts the other.

These two ways of self-understanding are in collision in many societies. This collision is identifiable both in intra-religious and interreligious contexts. Dogmatic approaches, ossified thinking and frozen attitudes will only enhance alienation. Islam and Christianity are called to redefine their self-understanding, as well as the way they understand each other in a new world context.

A serious and frank Christian-Muslim dialogue cannot ignore these trends and tendencies outlined above. The prevailing misperceptions, ambiguities, polarizations, tensions and collision, hijacked and sharpened by politico-ideological agendas and geo-political strategies, can be transformed only through a shared life in community (ayysh-el-moushtarak). I believe that for both Christians and Muslims, living-in-community must become the real objective of their dialogue.

On the way towards this common goal, there are problems and challenges. Neither the "war on terror" nor self-alienation is the right path to follow. We must not deal with symptoms, but with deeply rooted wounds, through a careful diagnosis and in the spirit of mutual respect and trust.

Living together as community: a critical urgency

"Dialogue stems from a profound recognition of the mutuality of our common life". Mutuality builds community and community presupposes and imposes mutuality. Indeed, living together as community is a human necessity. Growing awareness towards common interests, concerns and destiny in a globalized world gave an acute urgency to living together. Because of their common roots and a long history of cohabitation, Christians and Muslims have further reasons to share a common life together.

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For centuries, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East have lived as co-citizens sharing a common history. Together they have developed Arab nationalism and have fought against Ottoman-Turkish hegemony, Western colonialism and Zionism. Yet, they have not been able to transform cohabitation into a wider community. Nation-building has acquired predominance over community building.

In Western societies, Muslim migrants have established their own communities, preserving their own values, religious beliefs, traditions and language. These communities have remained self-contained on the fringes of society life, and have not been integrated into the total fabric of society. Integration remains an acute problem in Europe.

Community-building with Islam is a great challenge and an urgent necessity. Community building must take place on the basis of equal rights and obligations, as well as full and active participation in all aspects of society life, including decision-making. In this context there are conflictive issues and crucial questions which require frank discussion and a comprehensive scrutiny. Our divergences must be neither concealed nor absolutized, neither ignored nor dramatized. We must spell out converging as well as diverging points and identify concrete areas of tension. These two monotheistic faiths are not monolithic. Therefore, generalizations must be avoided; contextualization is the right way of assessing and organizing Christian-Muslim dialogue and relations. In my view, these are the most divisive issues to be treated in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

a) Inter-complementarity of faith and reason.

Christianity and Islam recognize the specific place and role of revelation and reason in their belief systems. They have however different perspectives as to the inter-connectedness of the cognitive and transcendental dimensions of faith. God's revelation is perceived by Islam as absolute. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is literally the word of God and as such is immutable. This is not the way many Christians consider the Bible, which contains the revelation of God. Being written by divinely inspired people the Bible needs interpretation. These quiet different perceptions as to the nature and the scope of infallibility of these two sacred books have concrete implications on almost all aspects of the life and practice of these faiths.

The ethos of Islamic thought, action and life is theological. Islam has even, in a sense, "theologized" reason and has not developed a rationalistic tradition. Rationality is at the heart of the ethos of Christianity. Even spirituality and mysticism have given way to rationality, especially in Western Christianity.

Both rationalization and de-rationalization of faith is full of dangers. Calling into question the certitude of truth may threaten the foundation of religion. Governing human life by transcendental truth claims may question the credibility and relevance of religion. Reason has a role in the human search for truth. But when reason overwhelms the faith, then reason becomes an instrument of evil. When the imperatives of faith are considered beyond the purview of rational discourse, then faith becomes exposed to the ambiguities and polarizations of the world. Christianity and Islam hold that their beliefs are not simply human constructs, but that they have a transcendent source. They believe that reason and faith are partners rather than rivals. Criticizing the "exaggerated rationalism" and "extreme fideism", the papal encyclical Fides et Ratio (2001) has emphasized the necessity of reconciliation between faith and reason. In a recent open letter to the Pope a group of Muslim scholars stated that "there are two extremes which the Islamic intellectual tradition has generally managed to avoid: one is to make the analytical mind the ultimate arbiter of truth and the other is to deny the power of human understanding to

address ultimate questions 48. The relation of faith and reason is a critical area of deeper investigation.

b) Islamic law (Sharia) and human rights

Majority-minority relations either in a predominantly Muslim or Christian country raises basic concerns and questions.

The Islamic society is governed by Islamic law (Sharia), which through rules, laws, values, criteria, ethics, worship and practices outlines the way of life that Muslims are supposed to follow individually and collectively. Sharia also includes a system of jurisprudence (fiqh). Sharia is considered by Christians to be a system of governance, which creates socio-political marginalization and threatens religious freedom. Originally meant to safeguard the rights of Christians in a country of Muslim majority, Dhimmi too is perceived by Christians as denoting a category of second-class citizenship.

Perception and implementation of Islamic law has different connotations and implications in Muslim countries. When Dhimmi was introduced the concept of citizenship did not exist. Today, there is a new system of governance based on citizenship. For some Muslims the problem is that citizenship is not applied and respected as ensuring equality between people belonging to the same country. The discriminatory policies at home of some countries, such as Turkey, contradict their teachings of tolerance abroad 49. Some Muslim countries are democratic in form but dictatorial in essence and Muslims and Christians are equally affected by it.

According to many Christian scholars, contradiction between Shariah and basic human rights is evident 50; hence, this matter needs in-depth discussion. There are voices in Islam that emphasize the necessity of accommodating the basic principles of human rights to the Muslim context. For example, the recent open letter of Muslim scholars stressed the importance of "freedom of religion". This ambiguity and fear need to be addressed by Muslim leaders 51.

In the West, because they believe that many public laws are incompatible with Sharia law, Muslim communities feel isolated. For Muslims the culture of being a minority is a new reality. Because Sharia is a law to rule Muslims wherever they are a majority, in lands where they are a minority, a new understanding of Sharia is necessary. Recently, some voices have also raised the question of establishing a special jurisprudence for Muslim communities in order to seek that new understanding. In order to ensure a just basis for a pluralist society as well as to enhance integration and encourage participation in Europe, some believe that plurality of legal systems may be applied within one society having at the same time one basic law to all.

These are complex issues, which require on-going discussion. Reciprocity will significantly help Christians and Muslims to seek consensus on conflictive issues, to reconcile dilemmas and to build community. Our common humanity, common history and destiny will remain mere concepts if they are not supported by the crucial urgency of living together as community. Often religion fails to provide shared human rights values and hampers participation and integration. Therefore, without jeopardizing the specificity and integrity of religious belief systems,

48 http://www.ammanmessage.com

49 In 1993 the UN declared the "International Declaration of Minority Rights" emphasizing that the protection of minority rights in a country is no longer an internal affair but a matter of international concern. In the Muslim world, this was considered a sort of pretext for the Western powers to interfere in the internal affairs of a Muslim country.

50 In 1948 when the UN proclaimed the International Declaration of Human Rights and in 1989 the International Declaration of Children's Rights, several Muslim countries expressed their reservation in respect to some articles considering them conflicting with Islamic Sharia.

promoting a culture of human rights is a vital necessity and a common responsibility, and must be considered one of foci of Christian-Muslim dialogue.52

c) Responding to secularism

Christianity and Islam affirm that human life cannot be understood without reference to the Transcendence, but they respond to this common challenge differently. Secularism is generally understood by many Muslims as anti-religious, a source of evil and rejection of God. Generally Christians avoid making a sharp dichotomy between secularization and Christianity and opt for a critical dialogue. Muslims resist secularism and Christians resist political Islam as an ideology and a system of governance. Both faiths affirm that governance must be sustained by ethical values. Islam does not make a separation between temporal power and religious power. According to Islam, temporal authority needs religious legitimacy. For Christians a religious state cannot function democratically in a plural society, and separation of religion from state does not mean separation of religion from society. In the West religion is perceived as a private affair; while in Islam all aspects of human life are conditioned by religion. Western secularism stresses the individualistic understanding of a human being, a view that is challenged by Islam.

The reaction of the Muslim world to secularism has been articulated in different ways: self-isolation to protect religious identity; going-back to the original roots of Islam (radicalism); and the Islamic revival movement. Expressed in different forms, this movement aims to apply Shariah law, develop a socio-economic and political system based on Shariah law, defend Muslim identity according to Islamic principles and promote Islamic moral and spiritual values.53 There are significant differences among Muslims in respect to perception, methodology and implementation of these objectives. For some, progress and modernity are considered to be criteria for being a moderate Muslim. However, openness, shown particularly by some oil-rich Muslim countries, are not appreciated by conservative circles. There is also a growing trend in Islam to be receptive to modernity, but with an Islamic core.

In the West, the aggressive growth of secularism and uncritical openness to secular values have generated among Christians a forceful "return" of religion to public life as well as the emergence of spiritual-charismatic movements, some of them with syncretistic tendencies. The clash between the sacred and secular, the spiritual and material and theocentric and anthropocentric approaches is identifiable in many aspects and spheres of society life. This concern is commonly shared by Christianity and Islam. Therefore, responding to secularism in a more effective way must occupy a prominent place on the agenda of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

d) Mission: conversion, witness or co-habitation?

Christianity and Islam are both missionary religions; they have an eschatological vision and claims for absolute truth and universality. Although missionary outreach is an essential dimension of Islam, it leaves the space to coexist with others within the framework of dhimmi. Christianity considers mission as Missio Dei; hence, it cannot surrender its missionary vocation and compromise on this fundamental affirmation of Christian faith. These competitive claims may lead to confrontation if they are not discussed seriously and seen in the right perspective.

We have always affirmed that plurality of religious traditions is "both the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations, as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity of human response to God's gracious gift".54 Respecting others' identity, claims and conviction does not mean compromising our own. Exclusive claims and uncompromising

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52 D. Muhammad Sammak, a prominent Muslim scholar with a rich experience in Christian-Muslim dialogue, in a recent lecture on "Human Dignity: An Islamic Perspective", says: "Human rights and minority rights pose fundamental challenges that face the normalization of relations between Islam and the West during the post-Cold War period".


attitudes must not be opposed with confrontational spirit. We should approach this extremely sensitive issue proactively. Both religions have painful memories in this respect. Christianity has always made clear the distinction between witness and proselytism. Witness to the Christ-event is the essential vocation of a Christian under all circumstances. We have also stated on many occasions that Christ may encounter us in the faith of our neighbour and that the Holy Spirit may lead us to discern the divine presence in the faith of others. We have recognized that Christ may use us to transform the other. He may also use the other to teach and transform us. Therefore, how can we develop a Logos-centred, not church-centred, theology of mission that embraces the "otherness" of the other? I believe that both faiths can engage in a creative interaction on the basis of their common affirmation that mission belongs to God, and that their intention is neither Christianization nor Islamization but transformation of the world and humanization of humanity.

From co-existing to living together

In my judgment, living together in community must take the centre stage of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Both faiths have common values and resources that promote life-in-community. The solid foundation of such a community is laid in a local context. Indeed, Christians and Muslims can build a shared life that encompasses and transcends differences at the local level:

a) By moving from isolation to integration

A community defines its self-understanding either in relation or in opposition to the other. Religion is regarded as an enemy of integration since its value system is uncompromising. Often religious identity generates isolation and threatens national unity. In the globalized world the other is no more a distant or undisclosed reality; he or she is our neighbour. Unconditional love of neighbour and hospitality towards the stranger are essential features of the two faiths (Mark, 12: 29-31; Quran 3rd Sura). We must therefore build a quality of relationship with our neighbour that enhances a deeper and holistic self-understanding and a greater understanding of the other, and which leads us from estrangement to a common life together.

A society is composed of multiple identities. Co-existence of these identities remains a potential source of conflict when they are not integrated into a coherent whole. Community building presupposes a quality of integration that provides equal opportunity, ensures diversity and enhances mutual acceptance. Ethnic, political and cultural factors and considerations establish demarcation lines; religions with their common values must become bridges of interaction. A harmonious interaction between religious identity and national loyalty is crucial. This is the most effective way of arriving at integration.

b) By moving from exclusion to participation

When minorities are considered as outsiders, there is no community. When in a society there is a centre and a periphery, there is no community. When there is lack of mutual trust, there is no community. Rejection leads to isolation and isolation breeds hate and violence. Alienation or marginalization leads to radicalization. Community means full participation; it means inter-connectedness and inter-dependence, underpinned by mutual understanding and trust.

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55 See "Religious Plurality"; Aram I, For a Church, pp. 95-121. Cf. also the conferences of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).

56 The concept of "other" is crucial in interreligious dialogue. The otherness of the other is a source of enrichment. The more we take a distance from ourselves and discover the other, the more we discover ourselves. To identify commonalities in respect to the concept of "other", it is worth reading the following Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives: J. Sacks, The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations, London, 2002; Aram I, For a Church, pp. 108-112, 253-285; M. Sammak, "Human Dignity".

57 The recent letter of Muslim scholars, "A Common Word between Us and You" has emphasized the crucial importance of neighbourhood as a basic value. The idea of hospitality has been spelled out as a common value in "Religious Plurality".
Religion protects identity and promotes security. In situations where identity is threatened and participation denied, religious loyalties are enforced. Such situations develop insecurity, isolation and hate. Hence, full and active participation of all members of a society, irrespective of their colour or religion, in all aspects of society life, including decision-making, must be ensured. Where there is participation, values interact and identities are integrated to build a community of reconciled diversities.

c) By moving from reaction to interaction

Religions used to define and protect themselves by reacting to the other. The interdependent world imposes new paradigms, new criteria of self-understanding. Indeed, a genuine self-understanding implies engaging in creative dialogue with the other, and moving from a self-centred to an interactive self-understanding. Identity based on exclusive claims threatens the other and generates alienation. Identity defined exclusively in religious terms becomes a source of tension. Openness, dialogue and interaction do not create vulnerability; rather, they test the credibility and relevance of identity, and help community building.

We must create open spaces where dynamic interaction may take place. Creative interaction of perspectives, concerns and expectations will undoubtedly challenge and help us to move towards building a common life together on solid ground. We must endeavour together with our Muslim neighbours to consolidate our commonalties, which ensure wholeness and integrity, and we must preserve our diversities, which enrich community.

Concluding remarks

The ecumenical movement has always emphasized the "urgency" of dialogue. The present world, in which walls are destroyed, distances are reduced and the other has become neighbour, has created a new quality and form of dialogue: dialogue of life. We are all engaged, in one way or another, in dialogue of life. The ecumenical movement has also emphasized the "uniqueness" of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is true for historical, theological and geo-political reasons. Wresting with ontological and metaphysical questions is not a priority for Christian-Muslim dialogue. In a world marked by confrontation and polarization, the top and urgent priority is how we should live together as a community.

We should not impose our values on each other; we must strengthen our common values, respect our differences and together strive for a common life in community. Unrealistic expectations and aggressive reactions, disrespectful attitudes and arrogant behaviour will only produce alienation and distrust. Learning from each other and sharing our concerns will help us to grow together towards a harmonious life together.

In my response to the Islamic letter of "A Common Word between Us and You", I said: "Relationship, reciprocity and accountability build community. Sharing life together implies building community. Human beings cannot live without community. As an expression of love towards God and towards neighbour, community building has been central to both Muslim and Christian teachings and ways of life. We firmly believe, as we have stated on different occasions in ecumenical meetings, that a strong commitment to living together would help us to destroy the walls of prejudice, reassert that each religion has integrity, and generate mutual accountability and common responsibility". I believe that we must accept and respect the way we are, by

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59 The growing openness of the Muslim world towards West is, indeed, a positive step forward. In this context the initiatives taken by the Muslim countries of the Middle East and Asia must be warmly welcomed. In this regard I want to make three observations: 1) These initiatives need to be more organized in terms of agenda, methodology and representation. 2) They must not become one-time event but a continuous process with a clear focus and objective. 3) A particular attention need to be given to the churches in the Middle East because of their centuries of co-existence with Islam.
suspendering our desire to emphasize differences and committing ourselves to becoming communities of living together with the fear of God and not with the fear of one another”60. In conclusion, I want to make a few suggestions for the future work of WCC.

1. Religious plurality and Christian self-understanding must remain a major item on the agenda of the ecumenical movement. Issues related to this area need to be tackled with interdisciplinary in approach and holistic in perspective. Insights and experiences gained through the studies of "Gospel and Culture" and "Christian Anthropology" must be taken into consideration in this process.

2. The ecumenical movement has a rich history of Christian-Muslim dialogue. A critical evaluation of the Christian-Muslim common journey is imperative at this time, as we seek new ways of living and working together in a new world context.

3. The agenda of Christian-Muslim dialogue must be more focused, touching issues that pertain to the life of people. The concepts of "broader community" and "holistic mission", as well as "global ethics" based on shared values are critical areas which require deeper scrutiny and further discussion. In this context we must make us of the rich debate that Faith and Order and CWME had in the last two decades.

4. Finally, the process that the WCC started with the Critical Moment Conference (2005) and the Christian-Muslim Conference (2002) must continue with renewed pace. As a global ecumenical fellowship, the World Council of Churches is called to play a leading role in Christian-Muslim dialogue, engaging in working relationship with Muslim Centres and Institutions, which enjoy a high degree of representation.

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Open letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Iraq expressing the condolences and solidarity of Christians world-wide in reaction to the violence against Christians perpetrated in Mosul, 14 October 2008

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with anguish and great concern that we have followed the news concerning terrible acts of violence in Mosul during the past week. We have heard that people are being killed, houses bombed, thousands are fleeing their homes, and churches and church properties are being destroyed. You are constantly on our minds, and in our prayers.

The fellowship of the World Council of Churches is deeply troubled by your suffering and calls urgently for solutions. We have been in contact with officials of the United Nations and the Iraqi government, as well with our member churches and ecumenical partners throughout the world, lobbying for swift action to quell the violence in Iraq and to thwart activities aimed at the expulsion of Christians and other minority populations.

We are also organizing a visit to Mosul and Baghdad by representative members of the ecumenical movement, to demonstrate our solidarity with those who are under threat. We in the World Council of Churches are urging all our member churches and partners to pray for peace and reconciliation in Iraq, to pray for the families of those who have lost their dear ones, for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of violence and for all who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

On behalf of the member churches and partners of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to express our support as you pass through these turbulent and challenging times, and to encourage you to witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hatred and

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60 http://www.acommonword.com
aggression. I also write in order to convey our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathy and solidarity to the grieving families of the victims and all who are affected by this calamity. Even as we suffer, the apostle advised, we have the opportunity to overcome evil with good (Rom.12:21). Let us pray for harmony among religious communities, and let us work together to build trust and mutual respect.

Knowing that your situation is extremely difficult in this moment, we encourage you – in so far as it is possible – to remain in your land and to bear witness there. You are “living stones” in the Middle East, the region where the foundations of the Church were laid and from which the gospel was carried to the ends of the earth. Your presence in the land is an assurance that Christianity continues to endure; you are a sign of hope to people of faith everywhere. May the God of peace fill our hearts and minds with the love of Christ, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that we may strive in unity to establish God’s reign of peace, justice and life for all.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia General secretary

Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN general secretary, regarding targeted attacks on the Christian community of Mosul, 14 October 2008

Your Excellency,
The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned about the recent targeted attacks on the Christian community of Mosul in Iraq.
Since September 28, 2008, fourteen Christians have been killed, three houses destroyed and 1,500 families were forced to flee their homes in fear of their lives. We greatly appreciate the strong words of the UN special representative, Steffan de Mistura, in condemning this violence and denouncing the killing of civilians. The UN through Mr de Mistura rightly stressed the legal and political rights of the Christian community and their important place in Iraqi society as one of the oldest indigenous religious communities. In addition, we are particularly grateful for the emergency aid provided to over 500 families. While valuing the UN’s pledge to continue to monitor the situation, we believe even more is required. We urge the Security Council and the secretary general to do all in their power to ensure that the coalition forming the Multinational Force assumes their responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to provide for the safety and well-being of all civilians living under the current state of military occupation in Iraq. We also call on the Iraqi government to assume its responsibility to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for these targeted attacks against civilians.
These attacks, and the resultant death and displacement, represent one small part of an overall pattern that is forcing the Christian community to leave their homeland. The international community has a responsibility boldly to address this existential threat to the viability of this ancient indigenous community in Iraq.
We stand ready to collaborate to the fullest in responding to the emergency needs of the Christian community while recognizing that the real solution lies in the end of the occupation and the installation of the rule of law. In the meantime, the international community must ensure the safety and security of all Iraqi civilians, and among them the Christian community of Mosul.
Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the NCCCUUSA, informing member churches in the US of appeals the WCC had made to leaders of the UN and the government of Iraq, seeking a swift end to the persecution of Christians and other minorities in Iraq, 14 October 2008

Dear Michael,

As you know, this week there have been targeted killings of Christians in Mosul, Iraq. Since September 28th, some 14 Christians have been killed, three houses were bombed and 1,500 families have been displaced. Reports from churches in the region suggest that these acts may be part of a systematic campaign to drive Christians from the country. Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, more than 200 Christians have been killed, dozens of churches bombed and more than half the Christian population has left Iraq.

I want you and your member churches in the USA to be aware of appeals that the World Council of Churches is making to leaders of the United Nations and the government of Iraq as we seek a swift end to the persecution of Christians and other minorities in Iraq. These letters, as well as an open letter to the Iraqi churches, are posted on the WCC website, www.oikoumene.org.

In addition, the World Council of Churches is organizing an official visit of ecumenical representatives to Mosul and Baghdad, in the tradition of “Living Letters” demonstrations of solidarity. I very much hope that one or more delegates from the NCCCUUSA will be able to join us in this journey. Members of our staff will be in touch with you soon to discuss the details.

The World Council of Churches deeply appreciates the firm and courageous stance taken by the US churches to protest the war in Iraq, from its inception until now. I trust that the NCCCUUSA is using its good offices to protest the failure of coalition forces in Iraq to fulfill their responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to maintain the safety and security of Iraqi civilians, and particularly the rights of Christian citizens during the occupation of their country.

We in the WCC have felt called to witness for peace and the defense of the rights of our brothers and sisters in Iraq. It is a tragedy that the violence of recent years now threatens the very survival of a 2000-year-old Christian community. We are grateful to all who join us in this witness.

Michael, please know how much we in the WCC appreciate your work and that of the NCCCUUSA as a whole during these difficult days. Keep us in your prayers, as you are in ours.

In Christian solidarity,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nuri al-Maliki, prime minister of Iraq expressing support in opposing the victimization of Iraqi citizens based on their faith or ethnicity, 14 October 2008

Your Excellency,

Greetings in the name of almighty God.

I write on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to express support for the government and people of Iraq in opposing the victimization of Iraqi citizens based on their faith or ethnicity. We join you in calling all Iraqis – Christians, Moslems and Iraqis of every faith community – to show solidarity with one another for the common good.
It is with particular concern that the World Council of Churches (WCC) received the news of the brutal wave of violent attacks on Christians in Iraq in general, and especially in Mosul and Baghdad. While we condemn all violence against people of any faith or ethnicity, we are alarmed by recent attacks on the Iraqi Christian community because we believe this represents a threat to their very existence. The WCC is appalled by targeted killings of innocent civilians and by the forced displacement of the indigenous Iraqi Christian population that has been a major component of Iraqi culture for two thousand years.

On behalf of the worldwide Christian community I write to express our deepest outrage and condemnation over the killing of some 14 Christians in Mosul and the displacement of 1,500 Christian families. We urge you swiftly to bring to justice the perpetrators of these crimes. If this matter is not urgently and effectively addressed, such behaviour may spread to other parts of the country.

In this, we echo the voice of the churches’ leaders in Iraq, affirming the historical fact that Iraqi Christians are an integral component of Iraq’s national ethnic and religious groupings. Unfortunately, to many of us it seems that some people are taking out their anger at the coalition forces on the local Christian community. As you well know, the Christians of Iraq have lived in the region for two millennia and have no connection to those countries that have caused this war. I urge you to make these facts crystal clear to all Iraqis in your public statements, speeches and pronouncements.

As the World Council of Churches appreciates the efforts made by Your Excellency in ordering police brigades to protect the Christian areas in Mosul, we call on the Iraqi government to carry out its responsibility in protecting all its citizens. We also call on the multi-national forces in Iraq to defend rights guaranteed to all communities by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

For the past five years as your country has suffered a grievous war, ecumenical Christians have stood in solidarity with you in prayer and action. Our churches in Europe, the United States and other countries that formed the coalition forces tried hard to encourage an alternative to war. When war came, they continued to work hard to bring it to a quick and reasonable conclusion. The pain of your people has been ours as well.

I urge you, Mr Prime Minister, to do all in your power to provide the humanitarian assistance that is necessary to those Christians who are displaced from their homes and villages. We ourselves stand ready to help.

Finally, I want to let you know that the World Council of Churches is organizing a visit by church representatives from many countries to show our solidarity with the people of Iraq. This visit will include meetings in Baghdad and Mosul with leaders and members of diverse communities, including Christians. We hope that it may be possible for us to meet with you in order to learn more of the challenges and opportunities facing your nation.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

International dialogue between religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions and political figures exploring faith perspectives and the role of religion regarding global issues, 25 September 2008

Religious and political leaders dialogue on the role of religions in peace

The United Nations Liaison Office of the World Council of Churches (WCC) co-sponsored an international dialogue on September 25 between some 300 religious leaders and political figures – including Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – aimed at exploring faith perspectives
and the role of religion regarding global issues such as poverty, war and prejudice while deepening mutual understanding.
The event, which was called “Has not one God created us? The significance of religious leaders contributing peace” included Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the United Nations General Assembly Rev. Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann, former Norwegian Prime Minister Rev. Kjell Bondevik, and Jewish Renewal movement leader Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb.
Aimed at exploring faith perspectives and the role of religion regarding global issues, “the event demonstrated both the power and potential of religious leaders contributing to peace” said Rev. Christopher Ferguson, WCC Representative to the United Nations.
The evening which brought together religious leaders from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and other faith traditions was co-sponsored by the WCC United Nations Liaison Office, Mennonite central committee, American Friends Service Committee and Religions for Peace.
Critical questions of how religions inform human rights and concerns over human rights violations, nuclear arms, religious oppression, and environmental abuse, in countries including the United States, Israel, Palestine and Iran, were all part of the evening’s dialogue.
“While there were points of contention and clear disagreements, the event reaffirmed that religious traditions insist on dialogue, respect and love for peace making,” Ferguson said. Prayers from various faith traditions were offered to begin the discussion. A panel of religious and political leaders, using sacred texts, offered what their respective faith tradition brings to the struggle to eliminate poverty, injustice, global warming and war.
D. John Brademas, a former U.S. congressman and president emeritus of New York University, served as the event moderator. Brademas, along with several of the evening’s speakers, called for direct negotiations between Iran and the United States.
"We believe that war is not the solution to the differences that divide peoples," Brademas said. "Dialogue can make a real difference."
Rabbi Gottlieb spoke of the place of peacemaking and nonviolence in Torah and tradition and her work between Muslims and Jews and Palestinian and Israelis.
“Torah counsels us that no matter what problems face us, we are to engage in solutions through dialogue, reconciliation and peace building measures, as it is written, the entire Torah is for the sake of peace,” noted Gottlieb. “Dialogue brings many perspectives together, gives special attention to minority opinions and must be conducted by treating everyone with respect.”
Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, emphasized Islamic principles to alleviate poverty, care for the environment, affirm the equality of all human souls, and work for peace and justice.
The Rev. Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann, president of the UN General Assembly, said that love was a guiding principle common to all religions. “When we do not see each other as brothers and sisters, we reject God,” he noted.
Pres. Ahmadinejad spoke of the commonalities of religions, the fundamental place of justice, and the essential role religion plays in the spiritual, moral and legislative fabric of society. He stressed the dire situation facing the world and called with urgency for religious groups to contribute to peace building.
Ferguson, who presented the evening’s summation, noted the commonalities presented by the panel – all affirmed the place of dialogue for engagement, the fundamental place of justice to people of faith, and that our religious traditions direct us to love, dialogue and defend the rights of all persons.
Ferguson also noted that the evening was an example of the place of religion in dialogue and peace building. “In the midst of the current international crisis and tensions it became clear that religious leaders have much to contribute in peace making,” he noted.
This dialogue was the fourth in an ongoing series of bridge-building encounters since 2006, which faith groups are developing with Iranian political, religious and academic leaders to encourage respectful conversation about the need for religious involvement in peacemaking. The WCC has a long history of dialogue and relationship building with religious, cultural and political leaders in Iran.

**Statement on religious violence and intolerance in India, adopted by the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008**

“Open your mouth for the mute, or the rights of all the unfortunate.

Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy”.

(Proverbs 31:8-9)

1. Religious tolerance has been the basic tenet and hallmark of India’s ancient civilization and history. For centuries, people practicing various religious faiths have lived side by side in peace. India’s rich tradition of religious plurality has been a symbol of social and religious harmony. However, that situation has been changing in recent years as religious intolerance has emerged as a dominant factor in conflicts. Religious violence has increased in recent years in several parts of India. The organized violence, inhuman acts and atrocities against religious minorities were carried out with full impunity under the eyes of law enforcement authorities. The growing environment of religious intolerance and violence has already claimed many lives in India.

2. The new wave of attacks against Christians was triggered by the killing of a Hindu leader, Swami Laxanananda Saraswati, along with five other people at Tumudibandh, Kandhamal District, in Orissa on 23 August 2008. The rebellious Maoist Naxalite groups prominent in this region have admitted responsibility for the murder of Swami and his followers. In addition, the state police authorities have stated that the killing was carried out by the Maoists. However, leaders of certain fundamentalist Hindu organizations blamed Christians for these killings. Despite the condemnation expressed by Christian groups and churches at the killing of the Swami and his associates and their demand for the culprits to be caught and punished, in retaliation, the extremist Hindu organizations have engaged in a series of attacks against Christians throughout the State of Orissa. The minority Christians in Orissa have been experiencing various forms of atrocities in recent weeks including looting, destruction of churches and church-run institutions, brutal attacks against priests, nuns, church workers and other members of the Christian community, most of whom are Dalits and Adivasis (tribals). Reports from various sources confirmed that at least fifty thousand Christians in Orissa have been displaced; hundreds of Christians have fled their homes and taken refuge in forests; many others are living in 18 relief camps, and find themselves threatened in the camps as well. The plight of the victims and survivors of this communal carnage, the fear and trauma they are experiencing, the poor and unhygienic facilities in the government-run relief camps, the inefficiency of government machinery in tackling the violence, continue to be a serious concern. The upsurge of religious extremism in Orissa in recent weeks has left many Christians in Orissa virtually defenceless.

3. This new wave of organized violence against Christians, which started in Orissa, has now spread to other States such as Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Attacks orchestrated by Hindu extremist groups against the Christians are considered as an organized plot and just one link in a long chain of events that have continued to strain communal harmony and interreligious relations in the country. Although the attacks against Christians are interpreted as religious violence, in most circumstances the under current is based on socioeconomic factors. Christians
in the country have been repeatedly accused of encouraging conversion to Christianity. Various churches have been unequivocal in their official documents and statements and go on ad nauseam that conversion to Christianity by force or fraudulent means is strictly prohibited. 

4. The violence and threats against the Christians of India is an assault on the Constitution of India. The Indian Constitution declares India to be a “sovereign socialist secular democratic republic” which secures to all citizens “justice; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; and equality of status and opportunity”. Under articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution, discrimination based on religion is prohibited. Article 25 guarantees the right to freely practice and propagate religion. In addition to these constitutional guarantees at the domestic level, India is also party to several international treaties that stipulate human rights obligations. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights establishes the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Article 26 bar discrimination on the grounds of religion while Article 27 stipulates that in “those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion...”. However, the rights and freedoms of the people are not merely guaranteed but also protected by various States in India. India now has seven states, which have legislation banning religious conversions. The seven Indian states with anti-conversion legislation (known as the Freedom of Religion Acts), include Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Hindu extremists commonly use anti-conversion legislation to falsely accuse Christians of converting people through force or allurement; thus justifying subsequent attacks on Christians. They also deflect prosecution away from themselves by pressing charges of “forcible conversion” without any evidence.

5. The churches and Christian leaders in India have been making considerable efforts for appealing to people to strive for peace and reconciliation. The call given by the Untied Christian Forum comprised of the National Council of Churches in India, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India and the Evangelical Fellowship of India to observe a Day of Prayer and Fasting for Peace and Reconciliation was very well received by Christians all over the country. People at large have appreciated the efforts by various churches to promote and restore trust and goodwill among people of all religions and communities. The church leaders in the country appealed to all members of Christian community in the country to work for the welfare of all sections of people in society in spite of such horrendous experiences of violence and death of some members of the community. As the World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by these developments of religious violence in Orissa and has expressed its concern in a letter by the general secretary addressed to the prime minister of India. A pastoral letter from WCC general secretary expressing sympathy and solidarity to suffering Christians in Orissa was sent to WCC member churches in India and the National Council of Churches in India.

6. As the growing religious extremism and increasing violence against religious minorities in India is putting the secular credibility of India at risk, all religious groups in India have the responsibility to desist from spreading communal hatred. People should be reminded of the value and guiding principle in life that “Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour’s life”. (Leviticus 19:16).

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Lübeck, Germany from 23-26 September 2008, therefore:

A. Expresses its concern about the alarming trend of growing communal violence and religious intolerance in India;

B. Expresses its concern about the organized violence and atrocities against Christians in Orissa and other parts of India;
C. **Appeals** to the central and state governments to take necessary measures to bring back hundreds of Tribal and Dalit Christian villagers in Kandhmal, Orissa who are still hiding for their lives in forests;

D. **Urges** the government of India to take steps to prevent violence, and harassments against the Christian minorities in Orissa and other parts of the country and take appropriate actions against actors responsible for attacks;

E. **Urges** the Orissa government to take immediate steps to rehabilitate the victims in their own villages and provide compensations and grant for them to rebuild their houses;

F. **Appeals** to the government, civil society organizations, religious groups and political parties to initiate confidence building measures to restore mutual trust, peace and reconciliation among people of different faiths in affected areas;

G. **Supports** the initiatives taken by churches in India to ensure peace and reconciliation in spite of their struggle, pain and agony;

H. **Commends** the role played by church leaders at various levels, especially their readiness to be engaged in dialogue with other religious leaders and the appeal made to Christians to be restrain from any retaliation;

I. **Urges** the government authorities in India to meet its constitutional obligations to ensure that religious minorities may equally enjoy freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess practice and adopt religion.

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The Amman Call, issued in June 2007, as the result of the World Council of Churches international peace conference in Amman, Jordan, put forth the urgent plea from Palestinian Christians to their brothers and sisters in Christ: “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.” Through the Call, the churches were challenged to not remain silent in the face of suffering.

This international and broadly ecumenical conference within the framework of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, held in Bern, Switzerland, co-hosted by the WCC with the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and the Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn, was convened to help different parts of the body of Christ join together in the work of addressing biblical and theological issues in Christian discourse about the conflict in Palestine-Israel. The theme of the conference – The Promised Land – provided both grounds for exploring scripture and a material foundation for engaging with the contemporary conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

The 85 participants in the conference discerned the need to spend time and energy attending to the diversity of perspectives within the Christian family. The early planning process determined that a significant proportion of participants would be invited from Palestine-Israel and the Middle East. One aspect of this was the opportunity to hear Palestinian Christians speak of their experience as well as their theological understandings of land and the promises of God.

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After decades of dispossession, discrimination, illegal occupation, violence and bloodshed in Palestine-Israel, Christians are challenged to continue to study, critique and re-vision theologies of land in order to promote life-affirming Christian visions and responses to the
conflict. This process explores both the contexts in which our theologies were created and their consequences for millions of human lives.

This conference gave preferential option to the voices of Palestinian and Middle Eastern Christian theologians. At several points, participants were made painfully aware that because Christians worldwide have differing vocations, situations, perspectives, interests and solidarities, they also hold to different views of land. Because of our shared hope in the risen Lord, we are confident that these differences do not preclude mutual transformation.

During the conference Christian scholars from diverse perspectives presented papers for discussion on a variety of topics, including land and God’s promises, the Abraham paradigm, the Church and Israel, and the “people of God.” Together we have witnessed the transformative potential of the encounter among Christians holding vastly different views.

A central issue for the conference was how the Bible is read. We are called to acknowledge the context of our interpretations and to recognize distinctions between biblical history and biblical story as well as distinctions between the Israel of the Bible and the modern State of Israel. In these distinctions, we are challenged to comprehend the philosophical underpinnings of our interpretations and their ethical implications. The contemporary conflict in Palestine-Israel resounds with biblical metaphors. However, there was significant consensus in the conference that the Bible must not be utilized to justify oppression or supply simplistic commentary on contemporary events, thus sacralizing the conflict and ignoring its socio-political, economic and historical dimensions. We are called not only to expose manipulations of Scripture that ignore context and complexity, but to offer readings of the text that promote the values of God’s kingdom: justice, peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

Throughout the conference, we were made aware of the significant contribution of European and North American theologies for Jewish-Christian healing, and their opening of new horizons for Christian theology. It is our hope that these theologies would be enriched by ongoing dialogue with the realities of the situation in Palestine–Israel and dialogue with Muslims worldwide. Christians from within the context of Palestine–Israel, who also have their own relationship with Jews, must be welcomed as companions in theological reflection on these matters as we discern together, in a spirit of mutual enrichment, the mission to which we are called.

As with many ambitious conferences, we sought to accomplish too much in too short a time. There was more information than transformation.
Let us continue, then, to build trusting relationships that will allow for transformation which can come about only through continued dialogue and constructive confrontation in the spirit of Christian unity.
Let us continue in developing a theological discourse about land, life on the land and living together in the land that is sensitive, promotes respect among ourselves and with others within both intra-Christian and interreligious contexts, particularly in dialogue with Jews and Muslims, and which avoids any kind of teaching of contempt. One important focus of this development will be theological reflection on international law and human rights.
Let us affirm that a new discourse on these issues develops as a new generation emerges. Therefore, our churches should commit themselves to ecumenical and interreligious formation.
Let us continue to critically and creatively examine notions of the “Promised Land”, rediscovering in the Bible and in our traditions life-giving metaphors for promoting justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness for the fullness of the earth and all its inhabitants. Let us open this dialogue to include approaches to reading the Bible and doing theology that have emerged from other contexts of conflict, landlessness, dispossession, oppression and exclusion so that we might more rigorously analyze the conflict, interrogate ideologies like antisemitism and Christian Zionism, and contribute toward peace making and peace building in Palestine-Israel.

Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in India, NCCI, Utkal Christian Council and Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church expressing the solidarity and prayerful support of WCC member churches and partners following the violence being perpetrated against Christians in the State of Orissa, 3 September 2008

Dear partners in the ministry of the Lord,

It is with great concern that we have been following the news about the unfortunate events of violence in Orissa during the past three weeks. We have heard that people are being killed, houses burnt, thousands are living in relief camps, and churches and church properties are being destroyed. Religious fanaticism has once again broken the lives of the poor, who are largely Dalits and Adivasis.

We have also heard about the efforts of the churches and Christian leaders across the length and breadth of India appealing to people to strive for peace and reconciliation and to pray for all victims of this violence. We welcome the call given by the National United Christian Forum to observe 7 September 2008 as a Day of Prayer and Fasting for peace and goodwill. We are urging all our member churches and partners worldwide to join in this initiative by praying for the families of those who have lost their dear ones, for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of this violence and for all those who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

On behalf of the member churches and partners of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to express our solidarity and extend our prayerful support to you all as you go through these turbulent and challenging times, and encourage you to witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ amidst hatred and aggression. Even as we suffer, as we are told, let us overcome evil with good (Rom.12:21). Let us pray for harmony among religious communities and let us work together to build trust and mutual respect.

May the God of peace fill our hearts and minds with the love of Christ, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that we may all strive to establish God’s reign of peace, justice and life for all.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Address by Metropolitan Emmanuel (Adamakis) of France speaking on behalf of the WCC at the World Conference on Dialogue, Madrid, Spain, 18 July 2008

The importance of dialogue in contemporary multicultural society

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Dear Participants,
First of all, please allow me to congratulate the organizers of this important initiative, and especially express my gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques of Islam, King Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as the Muslim World League. Such conferences highlight the need we all have to communicate with one another despite our differences in creed. Please allow me also to extend my warmest congratulations to His Majesty, King Juan Carlos of Spain and the hospitable land of the kingdom of Spain for the organization of this important event. Our multicultural world together with its religious pluralism has brought us all together and the only way we will be able not only to peacefully coexist, but also to understand each other, is by listening to one another. Therefore, it is a great pleasure and honour to address all of you here today and extend the greetings of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, as well as of the World Council of Churches, an international organization of Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant churches worldwide, both of whom I represent here today.

Interreligious dialogue has been at the top of the pastoral concern and agenda of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for a long time. The Orthodox Church, and in particular the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for years has shown its dedication and support of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the possibility of the coexistence of the peoples who come from different cultural traditions. The same applies of course to the World Council of Churches that continuously works for the promotion of interreligious dialogue throughout the world.

There are certain circles in the world today which believe that churches and religions should have no say whatsoever in society and that in religions lies the source of conflicts on an international level. We cannot deny the fact that there are people who wish to use and abuse religion as a source of conflict. As His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said, addressing the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, “It is well known that the inhabitants of our planet confess many religions, and that on many occasions a variety of tendencies and denominations have developed within each religion, at many times with contradictory beliefs. It is also known from history that often in the past, and on certain occasions even in our times, religious reasons were put forth to provoke individuals, or even entire peoples, to warfare or to enliven the militancy of those involved. However, we at least – the people of so-called western civilization – have been convinced that pure religious faith in itself does not find any pleasure in engaging its followers in warfare and conflicts with the faithful of other religions, for the truth does not walk along either with militant power nor with numerical, or any other, superiority. “The truth is known through the Word and the personal experience of it in a pure and selfless heart.” Let us not forget the statement of the 1992 Berne Declaration, the 1994 Bosphorus Declaration and the 2001 Brussels Declaration that “a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion.”

Our deep and abiding spirituality stands in stark contrast to the secularism of modern politics. The failure of anthropocentric ideologies has left a void in many lives – the frantic pursuit of the future has sacrificed the stability of the past. Communities of faith can balance secular humanism and nationalism with spiritual humanism and ecumenism – and we can temper the mindless pursuit of modernity with our own healthy respect for tradition. But we can only do this if we are united in the spirit of the one God, "Creator of all things visible and invisible": Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, as well as all other religions and communities of faith who are present here. And although we cannot deny our differences, neither can we deny the need for alliance and teamwork to help lead our world away from the bloody abyss of extreme nationalism and intolerance. For it is precisely when we disagree that we have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate tolerance.
Furthermore, allow me to highlight several points that manifest our guidelines for interreligious dialogue in general. We believe that:

1. religions are not and should not be at the disposal of peoples to disturb the heavenly peace of God with the unacceptable hysteria leading to warfare on earth;
2. religions are not willing to ignore their teachings regarding the unity of mankind in order to serve recent ideologies of division and social conflicts;
3. religions are not willing and are not at the disposal of those who believe that they should replace exegesis of their teachings on peace and justice in the world for the sake of contemporary ideologies, such as “war of all against all”;
4. religions are willing, through the means of interreligious dialogue, to find ways to serve together with more efficacy and responsibility the suffering humanity of our times;
5. religions are willing to bring together their contributions for educational programs which will promote the mutual respect and sincere understanding among peoples of different cultures and religions in order to progressively overcome the unhealthy phenomena of blind fanaticism and religious intransigence;
6. religions are willing to collaborate within the context of the contemporary ecumenical dialogue in order to defend peace, social justice, and human rights in the relations among peoples regardless of their religions, nationalities, races, social status or other kinds of discrimination;
7. religions are willing to support the governments of their peoples and the international organizations for a better understanding of the fundamental principles for the peaceful coexistence of all peoples.

In a culturally diverse Europe it is vital that we engage in authentic and sincere dialogue, such as this one, built on respect for the dignity of every human person created – as we Christians firmly believe – in the image and likeness of God. The faithful of all religions manifest their obedience to the Creator, who wishes all people to live in the dignity that the Creator has granted them. Interreligious challenges are part not only of Europe’s multi-faith societies, but of multi faith societies around the globe, in which we seek to advocate and protect the dignity of the individual. Let us all keep in mind our common Abrahamic roots, as well as the common desire of all religions to safeguard our world, so that we can realize a future worthy for the generations to come, all of us together, regardless of our different religions and cultural backgrounds. Let us all stand united in the face of our globalized world.

Thank you very much.

Synthesis report of “Living Letters” ecumenical team visit to Indonesia, 17-24 July 2008

Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim state with a population of about 241 million. The Muslims comprise about; 86.1%, Protestant 5.7%, Roman Catholic 3% and Hindu 1.8%.

Politically, Indonesia has had a bumpy past. It has been ruled by dictators and military juntas. In 1966 Sukarno who was named president for life was eased out of power by General Suharto who put out an attempted military coup in 1965. The counter reaction to the coup was a violent anti-communist purge that left over half a million people dead. General Suharto was named president in 1968 and ruled Indonesia for 32 years. His regime had been able to contain ethnic, religious and political tensions in the country. The financial crisis in the late 1990’s in East Asia gravely affected Indonesia. This led to popular protests against Suharto. The protests mounted pressure, forcing him to resign in May 1998. The political instability surrounding his resignation led to ethnic and interreligious conflicts in 1999 through to 2001. This was witnessed in; Aceh, Irian Jaya, the Moluccas Islands, Borneo, among other provinces of Indonesia.
It is such situations of conflict that the Decade to Overcome Violence seek to be in solidarity with churches and people in seeking long lasting solutions toward just-peace. Living letters visited Indonesia in 2008. They shared their prayers, thoughts and pledged their ecumenical solidarity with the churches. They learnt the effects of the conflict and the churches interventions and works to restore the interreligious fabric and ensure harmonious coexistence. Like in any conflict the effects were devastating as the Living Letters learnt. Strained Christian-Muslim relations would be an understatement. The conflict left intense hatred between people of these two religions. This was especially in places where there were relatively many Christians. One residence told Living Letters in Ambon that Christian children could not go to the same school as Muslim Students.

**Churches and mosques responses**

Protestant churches in Ambon (in the Moluccas) established capacity-building and advocacy programmes to promote peace and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. When the Living Letters visited; a ceremony in accordance with the peace programme was organized. It brought together children from the islands of Moluccas. Both Christian and Muslim children were involved. They sang, danced and role played demonstrating their rich traditions and cultures. This is an enriching programme. It does not only help them relax and have fun but also gives them a psychosocial therapy from the consequences of the conflict. It is a child friendly opportunity to grow and interact without prejudices. It is a unique and positive programme for children.

Muslim leaders, whom the team met, kindly shared their efforts of encouraging Muslims to work and live together with Christians in peace as citizens of one nation. Their peace programme at Al Fateh Mosque was inspiring. “The programme is coordinated by Christians and Muslims. They are determined to train young people between 15 – 18 years old, to embrace peace” *(Living Letters’ Indonesia report)* and nurture a strong bond of cordial and friendly relations in future. This is a big step for the community in Ambon, to promote worth interreligious relations. I.E.P.C provides a good forum to share this classic example.

The programme has had a positive impact as witnessed by Weemy Tutuiha, an IDP in one of the camps that the Living Letters visited in Ambon.

Weemy’s brother was killed and his grandfather lost his legs during the conflict. He believes that the Muslim did it and developed a deep hatred for them. Despite the rage, he joined the training and spent 7 days with young people like him who were Muslims. They too lost loved ones. His interactions with his new found friends changed his attitudes towards them and Muslims in general. He is a living testimony of the transformation that the programme is making.

The team met with the Synod Board in Ujung Pandang (Makassar.) The place is predominantly Muslim. During the conflict Christians were mistreated. They were beaten and even thrown out of public transport vehicles. “Nevertheless, the churches unilaterally proceeded to seek reconciliation with Muslims.”

In West Papua, one of the aims of the advocacies and capacity building programmes is to enlighten people to educate their children. Through education, young Papuans will increase their capacities for a better future. At the time of the visit, the World Council of Churches is establishing a youth learning programme for Papuans.

**What does this mean for both the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) and the WCC?**
• Efforts by WCC support education such as the aforementioned youth learning programme in West Papua are commendable. They continue to enhance relations not only with the churches but also with the people. It is a practical way for W.C.C to “live” the themes of IEPC whose core message is peace. Once majority of people are educated, it will be easier to inculcate peace in the society.

• The IEPC provides a unique platform for the churches to continue harmonizing Christian Muslim relations. The Al Fateh Mosque peace programme is a good example and a worth experience to share. If such initiatives are embraced by a majority of people of the 2 religions, it would help heal many afflictions and mend many divisions. For, there is much that unites people of all religions than divides them. The child friendly programme by the churches that brings together children from both religions compliments the religious efforts of peace. The children in the peace programmes are living testimonies and models of peace. They should be invited well in advance, to perform at the IEPC.

Joint letter from WCC and LWF to Dr Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India, regarding the violence against Christians in the State of Orissa, 4 July 2008

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation have been monitoring with deep concern the situation in the State of Orissa, in India. We have been told by our member churches in India that the indiscriminate killings, burning of church buildings and destruction of institutions continues in Gajapati and Khandamal districts and other parts of the state. We are aware that it is the most vulnerable sections of the population who are worst affected by the violence.

India is a country with a long heritage of harmony and peace and has enshrined into its constitution religious freedoms as well as commitments to uphold the rights and dignity of all its citizens.

We therefore appeal to you to use your good office to intervene in this situation so as to ensure an immediate cessation of violence, the restoration of law and justice, and sanctuary for the displaced. We request you to also ensure more long term support to the communities most affected so that they can reconstruct their lives.

We pray for your great country and its people, especially for the people of the State of Orissa.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia  Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko  
General secretary  General secretary  
World Council of Churches  Lutheran World Federation

Joint letter from the WCC and the WSCF regarding the rapidly deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, 24 June 2008

Letter sent to: H.E. Ban Ki-moon, secretary general, United Nations ; H.E. Levy Mwanawasa, chair, SADC, H.E. Jakaya Kikwete, chair, African Union

Excellencies,

We welcome the statement of 23 June by UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, and the preliminary action taken by the UN Security Council on Zimbabwe; we also welcome the statement of 23 June by the chair of SADC, H.E. Levy Mwanawasa.
It is now with profound concern that we call on you to increase your efforts to address the rapidly deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. As church leaders representing more than 550 million Christians around the world, including members of many churches in Zimbabwe, we request that you direct urgent attention to the humanitarian needs of the people of Zimbabwe, their freedom to exercise religion, the destabilization of the political situation and the need to end human rights abuses.

Reports from those in and outside Zimbabwe persuade us that international intervention is now needed to distribute much-needed food aid. The government’s decision to end food distribution by international agencies has led only to political isolation and increased suffering. Food and medicine are in particular demand, with the imminent threat of starvation in some areas. Education has also been disrupted, with some schools now housing government troops.

We have learned from our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters that some churches have been kept from offering worship while other church services have been violently dispersed. This situation, which is underreported in the media, is unacceptable and must receive urgent attention from the world community.

The much more publicized disintegration of the political situation can no longer be overlooked by the world.

We are concerned that Zimbabweans have been denied the right to choose their own leader in a free and fair election. The sovereignty of the people has been violated and must be restored.

The party that has created this violent situation on the ground now seems poised to be awarded the presidency, and with it the power to appoint additional senators who will sway the balance of parliament. Such a manipulation of the election process can have no legitimacy in the eyes of Zimbabweans or of the world. This precedent must not be set as the norm.

Charges have been made that serious crimes are being committed. These allegations must be investigated; if found to be substantial, alleged perpetrators must stand trial. The current election cycle has been reduced to a shambles. If the perpetrators of violence are not brought to account, attempts at a political solution will be fundamentally undermined. There can be no impunity.

The international community must insist on a political solution to the question of leadership in Zimbabwe. This may involve a postponement of the election, giving the time for the establishment of control mechanisms based on internationally accepted standards that would guarantee the unhindered expression of will of the people of Zimbabwe through truly free and fair elections. It is essential that the international community reaffirm the integrity of democratic elections as the means by which Zimbabwean citizens choose their leaders.

National governments clearly have the primary and sovereign responsibility to provide for the safety and well-being of their people. However, when there is egregious failure to carry out that responsibility, whether by neglect, lack of capacity, or direct assaults on the population, the international community has the duty to assist peoples and states, and in extreme situations, to intervene in the internal affairs of the state in the interests and safety of the people. When the State can no longer provide protection to its own people, the principle of non-intervention (art. 2.7 of the UN Charter) yields to the responsibility of the international community to protect them. This is the responsibility to protect (R2P).

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At one time, Zimbabwe stood as the breadbasket of Africa. Its strengthening economy and growing freedoms served as a beacon of hope to all Africans who pursued the promise of a new Africa. Today Zimbabwe represents only suffering and hardship.

The people of Zimbabwe deserve better, and we as church leaders pray that the deep faith and perseverance of a proud people will once again emerge and be put in the service of rebuilding this society that is so tragically ravaged by distrust, dissension and violence.

The biblical prophet Amos proclaimed the coming of a day when “justice” would “roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). Our prayer is for the speedy arrival of that day in Zimbabwe, and our hope is that the international community will accept this prophecy as a vision and a goal.

In peace,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia Rev. Michael Wallace
General secretary General secretary
World Council of Churches World Student Christian Federation
CC: H.E. President Thabo Mbeki, Republic of South Africa
Rev. Dr Mvume Dandala, general secretary, All Africa Conference of Churches
Mr Eddie Makue, chair, FOCCISA

Visit of a WCC delegation to Egypt to learn about the situation of churches in the country and to discuss WCC activities in the Middle East, specifically promoting a just peace and interreligious dialogue, 16-21 June 2008

Egypt visit to highlight WCC Middle East focus

The necessity of peace in the Middle East will be highlighted during a 16 to 21 June visit to Egypt by the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia.

During encounters with leaders of WCC member churches as well as other religious and secular figures in Cairo and Alexandria, a WCC delegation led by Kobia will learn about the situation of the churches in Egypt and discuss WCC activities in the Middle East.

Impetus for the talks comes from the Amman Call, a document about how churches must commit to working for peace in the Middle East. The document was signed by over 130 representatives of churches and Christian organizations from six continents in June 2007. The document includes a commitment of the churches to work for peace in the region and to observe three guiding principles: the ethical and theological imperative for a just peace; the ecumenical imperative for unity in action; and the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity.

The visit will be an occasion to promote interreligious dialogue, especially among institutions of religious education. In this spirit, the delegation will meet Muslim leaders and pay a visit to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

The promotion of a just peace in the Middle East has been a focus of WCC work during the last several years. The visit to Egypt comes 7 days after a worldwide "week of action" for peace in Israel and Palestine initiated by the WCC. Previous visits had brought the WCC General Secretary to Lebanon, Syria and the Gulf region as well as to Israel and Palestine since 2007.

Members of the WCC delegation visiting Egypt:
Church unity and interreligious dialogue discussed at WCC visit to Egypt

Challenges facing Christians today are too strong for a divided church, said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia in Egypt recently as he called for church unity both locally and globally. Kobia was speaking during a 16-21 June visit to WCC member churches in the country.

Among the most urgent challenges for Middle Eastern churches are the regional peace process and the migration of Christians, both of which are addressed by the 2007 Amman Call, a document in which some 130 representatives of churches and Christian organizations from six continents agreed on guiding principles for their work in the region.

A WCC delegation led by Kobia was welcomed to Egypt by the Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette, from the Coptic Orthodox Church. He greeted the visitors on behalf of Patriarch Pope Shenouda III who was abroad for health treatment.

The group met Rev. Dr Safwat al Bayady and chairpersons of the different councils of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, also known as the Synod of the Nile. Kobia expressed appreciation of the Synod’s contribution to the ecumenical work in the country.

The WCC general secretary greeted the Faith and Order Standing Commission, whose members were meeting in Cairo from 16-22 June. The delegation attended a session of the Commission, in which they discussed a study project on moral discernment.

The WCC delegation as well as the members of the Faith and Order Standing Commission was received by Pope Theodoros II, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. Pope Theodoros bestowed on Kobia the Cross of the Patriarchate and congratulated him upon his contribution to the WCC. Kobia will be leaving the WCC at the end of 2008.

Interreligious dialogue must aim to preserve human dignity

The delegation met the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar University and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque Dr Mohammad Sayyed Tantawy with whom they discussed the prospects for Christian-Muslim dialogue. "An accurate mutual understanding of religions can only be achieved if Christians and Muslims see each other as human beings rather than as representatives of different faith groups," said Kobia.

Tantawy briefed the delegation on cultural and interreligious dialogue initiatives between the Coptic Orthodox, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches and the Al Azhar Mosque, considered by many one of the most influential Sunni Muslim institutions. "Preserving human dignity and procuring a safe environment for living together should be the aim of all interreligious dialogues", Tantawy said.

The Minister of religious affairs Dr Mahmoud Zakzouk met the delegation and emphasized the importance of communication in order to modify negative perceptions of Islam. "Islam is a religion of love, respect and peace; we reject all aspects of violence", stated Zakzouk.

In turn, Kobia emphasized the role of interreligious dialogue in overcoming misunderstandings and prejudices. "Christians and Muslims form together more than 55% of the world's population. If we find ways of dialogue and we live peacefully together then we will contribute to global peace", he said.
For this goal to be achieved, Kobia and Zakzouk agreed, interreligious dialogue cannot be confined to leaders, scholars and intellectuals only. Ordinary people living in interreligious settings need to be involved in interreligious dialogue if this is to have an impact on people's lives.

A meeting with the secretary general of the League of Arab Nations, Amro Moussa was an opportunity to discuss a possible cooperation in the search for peace and justice in the Middle East and in Palestine/Israel in particular.

Members of the WCC delegation that visited Egypt:
• Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary
• Mr Guirguis Saleh, Middle East Council of Churches general secretary
• Ms Sophia Shokry, WCC commission on youth in the ecumenical movement (ECHOS) member
• H.G. Bishop Gregorios of Mesaoria, Church of Cyprus
• Mr Michael Spyrou, Church of Cyprus
• Ms Carla Khijoyan, WCC programme consultant for Ecumenical Solidarity and Regional Relations

Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr Bashar al-Asad, president of the Syrian Arab Republic, underlining the WCC's support for the steps the Syrian Government has taken in promoting inter-faith dialogue and in providing a safe haven for Iraqi, Palestinian and other refugees, 23 May 2008

Your Excellency,
Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

With this letter I convey our profound thanks for the very warm reception that you accorded our delegation when we visited you in your palace in Damascus last month. Thank you also for giving us sufficient time to bring up a number of issues for discussion.

Our delegation was very much impressed by the distinctive Syrian example of the harmonious living dialogue between Christians and Muslims. We were equally impressed by the hospitality that your Government and the Syrian people have extended to Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, and above all by your wise leadership to the country and its religious diversity that maintains the Christian presence in the cradle of Christianity.

We felt privileged that you confided in us that Syria and Israel had decided to resume peace talks through the mediation of Turkey, and we highly appreciate your vision for a just and comprehensive peace in the region. It is hugely encouraging to learn that now the talks have started in earnest. We wish to assure you of our prayers for a successful outcome of the talks.

Throughout the meetings the delegation had with Your Excellency as well as with Christian and Muslim leaders we heard the same message: Better understanding between religions can only be achieved if Christians and Muslims see each other as human beings rather than as representatives of one faith group.

We support you and join you in addressing the concern of how to help other countries to have the same multi-coloured face as Syria has. We highly recognize your efforts and those of the Syrian Government in providing a safe haven for Iraqi, Palestinian and other refugees. We particularly appreciate your decision to open Syrian public schools to Iraqi children, a step that
reflects your insightful vision by focusing on education to confront ignorance, closed-mindedness and extremism. And we at the World Council of Churches hope that under your leadership the Syrian Government will continue to support the Iraqi families, especially those who need to renew their permanent stay in the country, and that their children will be able to attend Syrian schools. We count on your support to continue providing a safe haven for these families in Syria until they find a permanent solution. For our part as World Council of Churches, we shall advocate for the Iraqi refugees with the international community and our member churches in different countries.

I am very happy to share with you our policy document on the Middle East that includes statements and positions taken by the World Council of Churches on the issue of just peace in the Middle East, and on migration.

Before concluding this letter, allow me to reiterate my invitation to Your Excellency to visit the World Council of Churches and address us, especially on the prospects for a just peace in the Middle East and the role of religious leaders. It will be a great honour to receive you at the Ecumenical Centre here in Geneva at your convenience.

With best wishes,
Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Joint communiqué issued by the WCC, WARC and CWM following a workshop on the spirituality of resistance, liberation and transformation, Matanzas, Cuba, 15-20 May 2008

Preamble

We are in Cuba, a country that approaches the celebration of 50 years of its revolution. Cubans describe the present period as a “Kairotic” passage, a time of crisis and opportunity. The people’s suffering is acute because of the U.S.-imposed blockade and the general forces of empire. By “empire” we mean the complex and dynamic international regime of power anchored by the United States, with its military power, neoliberal globalization, racist and patriarchal ideologies and policies of environmental degradation. In spite of these forces of empire and Cubans’ relentless suffering, isolation and impoverishment, we have been inspired by the ways Cubans persevere in struggle, embodying joy and resistance, dignity and self-esteem.

In the present moment, for example, Cubans’ earlier revolutionary successes in agrarian reform have been set back by the empire’s brutal blockade, other international developments, and by tensions within the country. Still, Cubans press forward with ongoing reform, inventively crafting new modes of agro-ecology.

Our meeting in Matanzas has thus been blessed by having Cuba as a present point of reference throughout all our discussions of the crises of empire. This workshop was originally planned to take place in Beirut, Lebanon. The explosion of conflict there, and the continuing illegal occupation of Palestine by the forces of empire, remind us that this is a Kairotic moment for so many other groups worldwide.

We have gathered as a workshop, responding to the initiative of the “Oikotree” movement, an ecumenical project that has as its special goal the task of identifying and living out those spiritualities that put “justice at the heart of faith”. Our workshop was convened by the
The wide array of justice movements in Cuba and around the world, and whether or not they draw upon religious organizations and leadership, challenge us to re-think and re-envision what spirituality is and what it must become in the present time.

Members of this workshop, as a people of spiritualities and traditions from many continents, both Christian and non-Christian, achieved a consensus on the following points. We set them out here to stimulate further reflection and action on the kind of spirituality that energizes and sustains justice movements.

On the multiplicity of spiritualities

• We affirm that the problems of empire, amid which justice movements struggle, are **not only political problems but also spiritual challenges**. Empire spawns its own destructive spiritualities, such as the “religious right,” and thus it seeks always to co-opt the powers of religion for imperial aims. New spiritualities are coming forth to oppose imperial spiritualities, and these should be supported.

• All organized religions have a special challenge of resisting the tactics of division, such as forms of denominationalism and fundamentalism, which often fuel ethnic, racial, nationalist and regional strife, and so strengthen the powers of empire.

• Justice movements require a new solidarity among religious groups and all peoples of conscience (secular and religious), and thus we affirm and honor the full multiplicity of spiritualities that enliven such movements.

Religious groups and all peoples of conscience should recognize a leading role for indigenous peoples, honouring especially their earth-centered spirituality, focusing on interdependencies of body, mind, land, community, and spirit, as resources for a liberating justice for all creation. We affirm the struggle of all First Nations peoples for their land and for their rights to self-determination.

• In this time especially, the empire’s worldwide “war on terror” has created a virulent form of Islamophobia that compounds other related racisms. Emergent spiritualities must stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers and work with them for a more just world for all peoples.

• The spirituality of justice movements is strengthened by the mobile, boundary-crossing spiritualities of immigrant and displaced peoples’ struggle and vision.

• In order to sustain justice movements, spiritualities should affirm the outrages of rage and grief from those wounded by injustice, for these are positive values that can energize and focus revolutionary change.

• Justice movements require, and also themselves create, new communities of wonder, joy and mystery. In these movements, peoples’ pain and gratitude, their sadness and hopes, all break forth for new spiritual solidarities.

• Participating in justice movements’ arts (music, dance, painting, sculpture, drama, street theatre, and more) is essential to people’s survival and to realizing a liberating spirituality. Leaders in the arts are thus co-partners in nurturing and strengthening the spiritualities that can resist regimes of injustice.

On Christian spiritualities

• Justice movements challenge Christians to relinquish the hegemony of their Christian language and rituals in movement work, even when this means leaving the comfort zones of Christian belief and practice. New acts of Christian humility and confession – due to Christians’ construction of empire building, colonization, racism and patriarchy – must entail a new
collective and variegated spirituality forged from among all peoples, recognizing especially the initiatives of long-colonized and oppressed peoples.

• Christian leaders and institutions, when participating in justice movements, must foster liberating spiritualities by re-interpreting their Christian stories, beliefs and practices to challenge forthrightly the forces of empire.

• For all religious traditions, the demands made upon us by justice movements lead us toward spiritual openness to diverse readings of oral and written sacred texts and traditions, and even to a willingness to question and contest some emphases in these sources.

A closing word

• All newly emergent spiritualities need a special vigilance about ways that neo-colonial, neo-imperial, racist and patriarchal styles of thought and action can reconstitute themselves, even in communities claiming to be in struggle against injustice.

• We affirm that the call to participation in justice movements is so demanding that we proceed in a spirit of humility and tentativeness, confessing that the spirituality we most need is not yet completely known to us, still to be birthed by our common work, struggle and celebration of life.

Letter from WCC general secretary to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church about resolving the status of Kosovo, 24 April 2008

Your Holiness,
Your Eminence,
Your Graces,

We are in receipt of your letter of 27 February 2008 wherein you urge us “to impress upon all interested parties in the international community that the only way to resolve the status of Kosovo is by equitable, constructive dialogue and peaceful negotiations.”

Relative to the same, kindly allow me to inform the esteemed members of the Holy Synod of Bishops that the World Council of Churches has been carefully following and monitoring, when and wherever possible, and reporting on the situation in Kosovo. Most recently, at our meeting of the central committee from 13-20 February 2008 in Geneva, we unanimously adopted a recommendation recalling a “Minute on Kosovo”, previously adopted at our September 2006 meeting. That same “Minute” calls for repatriation and peaceful co-existence as the only way forward to the implementation of “a sustained effort toward an enduring and just peace, while securing freedom and tolerance in a truly multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kosovo”.

Therefore, from that meeting, through the office of the general secretary, the WCC offered its support to the appeal of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, issued at its extraordinary session of 17 February 2008, to its hierarchy, clergy, monastics and faithful to remain steadfast and to abide in peaceful co-existence.

The WCC remains committed to encourage the religious leaders of Kosovo to continue to work toward reconciliation, while offering to ask of all relevant authorities to support these efforts for reconciliation. The WCC will commit itself, in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), to monitor the maintaining of human rights and religious freedom, as well as the preservation of religious and cultural patrimonial heritage.

As general secretary, I would like to assure the Holy Synod of Bishops that due consideration will be given in identifying appropriate courses of action. If it is deemed necessary
in order to confirm the reality of the situation in Kosovo, perhaps even an ecumenical delegation of “living letters” could be sent to you. In this way we can keep our member churches informed of further developments and express support internationally for reconciliation and justice.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Statement from the WCC director of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation criticizing the movie Fitna, released online by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, 28 March 2008

WCC criticizes Islamophobic film, calls for mutual respect

The movie Fitna, recently released online by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, was criticized as "a clear case of Islamophobia" by Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana, director of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation.

"Through graphic images the filmmaker depicts violent extremism without any attempt to distinguish it from mainstream Islam. Extremism is a problem for most religions and needs to be countered through interreligious dialogue," Premawardhana said.

Dutch church representatives have also voiced their criticism of the right-wing politician turned filmmaker, stressing that his views were opposed by most of the Dutch population, the ecumenical news-agency ENI reported today.

Seeking to encourage churches to initiate such dialogues, particularly in the interreligious environment of Europe, the central committee of the WCC in February issued a "Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in shifting society." It encourages churches to "actively generate a climate of deep respect" that would lead communities "not only from hostility to peaceful co-existence, but also to celebrations of our common life".

The central committee's statement also calls upon religious leaders "to work towards reconciliation and healing"; and urges Christian leaders "to speak directly, consistently and self-critically to their own communities, holding them to the highest ethical standards of loving one's neighbour, and in extending a hand of reconciliation to communities other than one's own, whenever a community, its people and their beliefs have been attacked or insulted."

Commentary from WCC general secretary to member churches in response to the letter A Common Word Between Us and You, written by 138 Muslim scholars and sent to Christian leaders worldwide, 20 March 2008

LEARNING TO EXPLORE LOVE TOGETHER
Suggestions to the churches for responding to “A Common Word”

Preamble
On 13 October 2007 a group of 138 Muslim scholars addressed an open letter to Christian leaders. Among those addressed was the general secretary of the World Council of Churches. Based on initial responses from member churches, the WCC initiated a process of responding to the letter. Since November 2007 the WCC commenced consultation with its member churches and ecumenical partners, a number of whom responded with great enthusiasm. This was followed by a meeting of scholars and church experts engaged in the field of Christian-Muslim
relations. Their deliberations produced the following commentary on the letter entitled “Learning to Explore Love Together”. The commentary is intended to assist the churches in reading and responding to the letter “A Common Word”. The document includes suggestions to encourage member churches and ecumenical partners in their reflection on the letter and in its invitation to explore together with Muslim fellows the love of God and the love of neighbour in their respective contexts. Churches and ecumenical partners are then invited to share their reflections with the WCC as a contribution to a common understanding of and a common response to this initiative. The ongoing process of reflection and the desire to create a common response to the letter through an initiative of dialogue is described below.

A letter from 138 Muslim scholars

The letter, entitled *A Common Word between Us and You* (drawing upon an invitation to conversation in common between Christians and Muslims that appears in the Qur’an), sets out key dimensions of belief and action that in its authors’ understanding followers of the two faiths hold in common. They sum these up in the two-fold commandments of love expressed in the Bible: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself’. To this end, by citing verses from the Bible, the Qur’an and Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), the letter briefly shows how Christians and Muslims share similar teachings about love for God and love for neighbour. On the basis of these shared teachings, the authors then issue an invitation to Christians to join together with them ‘on the common essentials of our two religions’. They also make clear that there are differences between Christianity and Islam, and counsel that ‘there is no minimizing some of our formal differences’. But they recall that since 55% of the world’s population belongs to these two religions, “making the relationship between these two religious communities [is] the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace.”

This invitation marks an encouraging new stage in Muslim thinking about relations between Muslims and Christians. Throughout their shared history, followers of the two faiths have too often misunderstood one another. In recent times, a new way of thinking about the other took place; the churches have begun to think afresh about the relationship between Christianity and other faiths, including Islam – prominent among the outcomes of this thinking are the Roman Catholic Church’s *Declaration on Relations between the Church and non-Christian Religions*, 1965, and the World Council of Churches’ *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, 1979. Here, in *A Common Word* is a clear indication that leading Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders are committed to fresh thinking about the relationship between Islam and Christianity. The courage of their action must be applauded – and since then around one hundred more scholars have signed the Letter – and the sincerity of their gesture must be welcomed in the warmest terms.

Ways towards a response

After consultation with its member churches and ecumenical partners, and with the advice of specialists, the World Council of Churches proposes to initiate a process that, with patient reflection and mutual exploration between the people of the churches and the people of the mosques, can lead to fresh awareness one of the other, abandonment of stubborn prejudices, and new ways forward in respect and cooperation.

The following steps summarize the process:

- The World Council of Churches encourages its member churches and ecumenical partners, to recognize and welcome the serious intent of *A Common Word* and prayerfully consider its
invitation to dialogue and cooperation. It also invites them to reflect ecumenically on the content of the letter in their own unique contexts. While acknowledging that some churches have already begun this journey, the present document is aimed at facilitating and deepening such endeavours.

- The Council will call on its Muslim partners – especially the signatories to the letter – to create a joint planning group to prepare steps towards common action, and seek joint Muslim and Christian initiatives of dialogue and cooperation at both the regional and global levels.
- The Council will propose to this group, the organizing a series of consultations between Muslim and Christian leaders, scholars and practitioners which, based on this new opportunity, will reflect on points of mutual understanding, work on a theological and ethical framework for future joint initiatives and establish new means of exploring further in both matters of faith and life.

These steps are taken on the understanding that the invitation in the letter is issued by its signatories in full awareness of the difficulties that have accompanied past efforts, and that it signals a new and vigorously energized desire for a fresh start.

**Exploring together the love for God and love for neighbour**

The letter eloquently underlines similarities on the key points of love for God and love for neighbour which both Christians and Muslims respect. However, the differences between the ways in which they each understand these imperatives and put them into practice cannot be ignored.

The testimony of past and present writings by Muslims and Christians about and against the other serves as a clear reminder that misunderstanding can easily arise when followers of each faith try to explore the other’s beliefs without proper care and attention. Therefore, it must be stated unequivocally that Christians should be ready to learn about Islam by listening closely to what Muslims themselves teach, and that Muslims should be ready to learn about Christianity by listening closely to what Christians themselves teach. Presuppositions are to be put aside, and followers of both faiths must be ready to seek the learning and wisdom of the other as the other imparts it according to their own unique insights.

Exploration of love for God together will undoubtedly yield startlingly instructive insights for both Christians and Muslims. In the same way, exploration of love for neighbour together will reveal many points on which Muslims and Christians will recognize commonly held principles and actions. But these signs of similarity must be held in tension with real divergences and hard to reconcile differences.

Thus, for example, while both Christians and Muslims say they perceive God as one, what is actually meant in Islam by the doctrine of *Tawhid* (Unity of God), and what is actually meant in Christianity by the doctrine of the Trinity? Are these contradictory doctrines, as the history of engagement between the two faiths attests, or is there a way in which they can be seen as complementary insights into the mystery of God?

Similarly, while both Muslims and Christians claim to receive revelation from God, what is meant when Muslims claim to perceive the will of God revealed in the Qur’an – what has been called the Word of God become book-, and what is meant when Christians claim to perceive God’s self-revealed in Jesus Christ – who is called the Word of God become flesh?

In the same way, the love of neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God in both religions. Both Christians and Muslims obey God by seeking to respond to need in society. In Islam loving one’s own neighbour is expressed in acting with responsibility and generosity towards the needy within the community. In Christianity the love of neighbour is
seen as a reflection of God’s love to humanity through Jesus Christ. This love transcends geographical and religious boundaries and thus embraces humanity in all its components without exception as it is expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The concept of love of God and love of neighbour is but one bridge and point of dialogue for action, at the same time Christian-Muslim dialogue and cooperation should explore a common ground in the search for justice and peace.

**Agreeing and disagreeing in respect and love**

While Christians and Muslims may often be surprised to recognize in the utterances and explanations of the other what can appear to be reflections of their own beliefs, they will also see stark divergences in emphasis and some clear differences that resist all resolution by mutual efforts. Not the least of these will be the Christian difficulty of appreciating Muhammad as a prophet, and the Muslim difficulty of appreciating Jesus as God incarnate. These spring from sincerely held views that have been keenly defended for centuries, and as keenly questioned and rejected.

It is therefore a pressing necessity that while Christians and Muslims must find ways of enhancing what they hold in common, they must also find ways of acknowledging and respecting the differences between them, of attempting to understand these, and of not allowing them to fuel hostility. The degeneration into mutual recrimination and condemnation is a pattern that has been repeated in the past to the sorrow of people of good will, who would also acknowledge with regret the ways in which religion has been misused. This may easily continue in the future unless careful steps are taken to prevent it.

With understanding the plurality and complexity of their shared history, both Christians and Muslims must work hard to develop respect where understanding is difficult and trust where differences do not yield to inquiry. In full recognition of the long history they hold in common, while recalling examples of humane mutual respect, they must recognize the need to work actively to heal hurts both local and global, and to change attitudes and stereotypes. Member churches are encouraged to recall and learn from each other’s experiences, and examine how these might inform and challenge their future actions.

More than this, even when Christians and Muslims continue to disagree on matters of belief, they should strive to reach the point at which they can recognize and endorse what they hold in common with sufficient integrity to allow them to work together in the world. Thus, they should make it a priority to understand how the precious heritages they each hold can direct and even impel them to work together for justice and peace, recognizing their joint goals and responding to the call of the One they worship and obey to come together not only in a common word but also in common action for the greater glory of God and the wellbeing of all.

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**Letter from WCC general secretary to HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan in response to the letter A Common Word Between Us and You, 18 March 2008**

Your Royal Highness, Eminent signatories of *A Common Word Between Us and You*,

Greetings in the name of the One God, whom we love and who loves us.

I received your letter to Christian leaders, *A Common Word*, with great joy and hope. I read it as a representative expression of the Muslim will to engage with the Christian community in dialogue for the sake of justice and world peace. I recognize and welcome the serious intent of *A
Common Word and your invitation to explore our shared concerns and visions for our common humanity.

The member churches of the World Council of Churches have for several decades been engaged in relationships with people of other faiths, especially with Muslims. The outcomes of the joint work include Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action (2001), which notes:

While it is true that the complex history of Christian-Muslim relations has known much rivalry and war, it is often forgotten that there were rich and fertile encounters in the realms of life and ideas alike. Unfortunately, one of the features of our historical memories has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and accusations drown the voices of understanding. Something similar happens at the level of religious views, when perceptions of difference displace common or shared principles.

The WCC welcomes the initiative and opportunity A Common Word represents, and will encourage our member churches and ecumenical partners to engage constructively and positively with their Muslim neighbours in the various local situations throughout the world, and in the light of your letter we confidently look forward to you and your colleagues to reciprocate. Striving Together confirms that:

Relations between Muslims and Christians are usually strongly influenced by local and regional histories and events. But broader developments also have a significant impact, especially when they contribute to destabilising societies previously characterised by peaceful relations of mutual acceptance. In situations where uncertainties of change begin to be felt, suspicion and fear can build up between communities leading to tension and possibly conflict.

Since my letter to you of 6 December 2007, we have commenced consultations with member churches and ecumenical partners, a number of whom responded with great enthusiasm. In the spirit of your invitation to a shared endeavour, I called a meeting of scholars engaged in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, representing member churches and wider ecumenical circles. Their deliberations produced a document entitled Learning to Explore Love Together, which I have sent to the member churches. This document is intended to encourage the churches to read and reflect on your Letter and engage constructively with their Muslim neighbours in exploring common concerns.

I have also offered the World Council of Churches’ good offices to support our member churches’ engagement with their Muslim neighbours. Specifically, I have asked our Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation programme staff to make a response to your initiative a top priority. I want to take this opportunity to initiate a conversation with you about face-to-face dialogue events between you, the authors of A Common Word, and your Christian counterparts in order to expand and deepen the understanding between us of loving God and loving neighbour.

As a first step in preparing for such dialogue events, I would like to suggest that we together create a joint Muslim-Christian working group that will produce the plans, create the agendas and issue invitations.

I have instructed my programme staff in Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation to be in contact with your staff to explore further how a constructive cooperation might take shape so that we may move into the next phase of our relationship based on shared principles and a shared agenda.

Given the tremendous opportunity A Common Word presents, let me offer to send a delegation to Amman later this spring, perhaps in April or May, to meet with you to discuss further how a constructive cooperation might take shape so that we may move into the next phase of our relationship based on shared principles and a shared agenda.

I look forward to your response, and to the possibility of meeting face-to-face in the near future.
With my sincere wishes for peace,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Open statement from WCC general secretary “strongly condemning” the shootings at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva and expressing sympathy to families of those killed or injured, 10 March 2008

"We express our sincere sorrow and sympathy to the families of those who were killed or injured in the shootings last week at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem," said World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia on 10 March, joining his voice to those of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. "An attack on a Jewish seminary has a profound impact on all people of faith. The World Council of Churches strongly condemns this attack."

Referring to a statement issued one week ago condemning the attacks on civilians in the Gaza strip and Israel, he reiterated his call for the "incessant violations of life and human rights to stop." "Such acts of terror are abhorrent," he said. "A grim reminder of the continuing cycle of violence, they increase the sense of grief, sorrow, anger and outrage among both Israelis and Palestinians."

"Despite the tragic consequences of this situation, rather than allow it to inflame more violence, we pray that it will encourage all those concerned to redouble their efforts, to all the more vigorously pursue peace." said Kobia.

Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in a shifting society, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008

1. In recent years, there have been intense social upheavals emerging from insult, injury and offence aimed at religious communities. The causes of these conflicts are complex and often result from migration and other effects of globalization. Some, in once stable communities in Europe for instance, view these shifts in cultural and religious identities as a threat, leading to xenophobic reactions.

2. Migrants, quite often deeply rooted in religious traditions and practices, bring new dimensions to public debates that both enrich and challenge established secular patterns of life. These new challenges, including those occasioned by the displacement of traditional religious communities, find expression in intensive debates about the role of religion in the public and political realm, and in particular in the tension between freedom of expression and respect for religious symbols and values.

3. In this context, we echo the concern expressed in the Netherlands and in other parts of the world following rumours of the release of a film against the Qur’an by a Dutch member of parliament.

4. As a fellowship of churches we recall the clear and unequivocal biblical injunction to “love the stranger” in our midst (Deuteronomy 10:19) and that in Jesus’ teaching to love our neighbour, the neighbour is often the one we do not recognize (Luke 10:25-37).

5. We affirm that it is imperative that we address the fears and insults that are experienced by all the communities involved in such situations. The “Minute on mutual respect, responsibility and
dialogue with people of other faiths,” approved at Porto Alegre in 2006, provides a framework for those churches who wish to do so.

Recalling also that some of our churches, particularly those in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have centuries-long experience living in communities of religious and cultural diversity, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

A. **Recommends** to churches facing such challenges to seek opportunities for networking to share the expertise and wisdom of the member churches with experience in living in religious and cultural diversity;

B. **Encourages** member churches to actively generate a climate of deep respect, communication and mutual understanding in the public sphere by engaging opinion leaders, mass media and other community leaders to emphasize the positive contribution that people of religious faith make to national and community life;

C. **Affirms** the unique and strategic role, as well as the moral responsibility, of religious leaders to work towards reconciliation and healing within their own and between communities, and **encourages** Christian leaders to initiate and facilitate processes that lead communities not only from hostility to peaceful co-existence but also to celebrations of our common life;

D. **Urges** Christian leaders to speak directly, consistently and self-critically to their own communities, holding them to the highest ethical standards of loving one’s neighbour, and in extending a hand of reconciliation to communities other than one’s own, whenever a community, its people and their beliefs have been attacked or insulted;

E. **Calls** upon Christian communities to seek common cause with other religious communities to respond to crises that occur in such a way as to model a non-violent and respectful solution.

**Presentation of WCC general secretary “Can churches be peacemakers in a world racked by violence?”, Washington DC, USA, 16 December 2007**

Be "leaders in peace", WCC invites churches

Can churches be peace-makers in a world racked by violence? This is the question to be addressed by World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia at the Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC, on Sunday, 16 December 2007.

"For too long the church has been a willing participant in the violence of the world", Kobia said in an interview recently. "Christ has called the church to be a peace-maker and a reconciler. This is not just a message for the season, but one the church must take to heart if it is going to truly minister to the world. The church must be a leader in peace."

Kobia will be the guest at the Cathedral "Sunday Forum", a 50-minute discussion hosted by Dean Samuel T. Lloyd III and open to questions from the public. Addressing "critical issues in the light of faith", the forum takes place every Sunday in the nave at 10 am, prior to the 11:15 am service, and is webcast live on the Cathedral website (see below).

Kobia is visiting the US from 12-18 December. His schedule in Washington DC includes a two-day retreat with heads of churches and an encounter with young ecumenical leaders (15 December).

On 18 December in New York City, Kobia will be guest of a Pan-Orthodox gathering hosted by Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America, a member of the WCC executive committee and the president of the US National Council of Churches.
An outstanding expression of WCC’s commitment to peace-making is the Council's Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) 2001-2010. A global church movement that strengthens existing efforts and networks for overcoming violence, and inspires the creation of new ones, the DOV is to achieve its culmination at an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to be held in May 2011.

In the three years prior to the convocation, international ecumenical teams called Living Letters are visiting churches around the world exploring how they are addressing peace-making in their context. This past September a Living Letters team visited several locations in the U.S., while in August another team visited Sri Lanka. Some forty additional visits around the world by Living Letters teams are to take place over the next three years.

Expression of concern by WCC general secretary regarding the worsening human rights situation in the Philippines, Manila, Philippines, 21 November 2007

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been following and monitoring the situation in the Philippines for more than three decades. Over the years the WCC has been accompanying its member churches and the member Council – NCCP in their efforts to ensure justice and peace, protection of human rights and human dignity of the people of the Republic of the Philippines. The WCC has been deeply concerned on the deteriorating situation in the Philippines in all these years. From time to time, we conveyed our concerns to the respective bodies and authorities, and we voiced our concerns on several occasions about the worsening human rights situation in the country.

The central committee of the WCC which is a representative governing body of the global ecumenical fellowship with high profile leaders belong to its member constituency from different parts of the world in its last meeting held in Geneva in September 2006 devoted time to discuss once again about the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. The members of the WCC central committee unequivocally condemned the extra-judicial killings in the Philippines and expressed grave concerns on the increasing militarization.

I have been meeting with various people and organizations in the country during the past four days along with a team of ecumenical delegates from different countries – Australia, Canada, Ghana, India, Japan, Korea and Thailand, We heard about the escalating fear and anxiety of people from different quarters that the situation will exacerbate with the implementation of the Human Security Act (HSA) enacted in July this year. I heard stories about how paramilitary groups armed by the military, and even members of the military and police have been involved and implicated in human rights violations especially in extra-judicial killings. During my meetings, it was shared that the government has increased its military action against insurgents resulting in an increase in the number of civilian deaths. As militarization in the Philippines has been on the increase the fear of the people are deepening. This fear of the people supported with my own information about the killings of several church workers and pastors in recent months including the brutal stabbing of Philippines Independent Church bishop Alberto Ramento in October last year.

As the WCC central committee has expressed its grave concern on the alarming human rights situation in the country, I reiterate some of our concerns expressed and the Appeal, we made to the Philippines government that:

- An immediate and impartial investigation of all recent extra-judicial executions. We have been following the Report of the U.N special rapporteur Philip Alston and his observation that the
governments measures don't address the fact that the brutal killings are encouraged or facilitated by certain aspects of its own counter insurgency strategy”. It is in this context we also share the concern and appeal to the government of the Philippines expressed by the churches in the country that an independent inquiry commission to be set up to investigate the extrajudicial killings rather than one made up of the government appointees. At the same time, we hope not only for an investigation but to put an END to Extrajudicial killings.

- Our call is not to use the militarist approach in solving the problems – not just revising the military strategy for resolving the insurgency, but to ensure the resumption of the stalled peace talks between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front. In order to solve the insurgency, the government should address the root causes of the problems in the country, especially the long awaited land reforms and poverty alleviation which will lift up millions of Filipino masses who are struggling in their day to day life for freedom from hunger and poverty.

- It is our considered opinion that the Philippine government should take necessary action to stop the Enforced Disappearances in the country and the government should fulfill its obligations under the international human rights instruments and take immediate initiatives to ratify the International Convention of Protection of All Persons from enforced Disappearances.

- It seemed that the Philippines government is resorting to terrorist means in conducting its "war on terror". The Human Security Act (HSA) took effect recently, under the pretext of countering terrorism in the country or "war on terror", could have a negative impact in the Philippines society as many of its provisions are not in accordance with international human rights standards. As HSA defined terrorism broadly, it gives justification to put forth legal procedures and punishments for people branded as 'enemies of the state'.

- We condemn the ongoing practice of the Philippine government and the military of labeling and persecuting the churches, pastors and church workers who work for justice, peace and protection of human rights as subversives or communists.

While we reiterate our commitment to accompany the churches in the Philippines in their ongoing struggle for justice, peace and protection of human rights of all Filipinos, we assured the churches and the NCCP who stand with the poor and marginalized in their struggle that we will continue to be engaged in our global advocacy on Philippines human rights situation at all levels in the international arena.

During my recent meeting with the secretary general of the U.N at its headquarters in New York, I openly appealed to the U.N secretary general for his intervention in the precarious situation of the extra judicial killings in the Philippines. The WCC has a consultative status with the UN ECOSOC and in that capacity, we attend, monitor and participate in the discussions and debates at the U.N. bodies and also we accredit representatives from our constituencies to the UN Human Rights Council. While we continue this effort in collaboration and cooperation with other ecumenical organizations in WCC constituency and networks around the globe, WCC will continue to call the intervention of the HRC to look into the escalating human rights violations in the Philippines and this will be a priority engagement of WCC in the coming months. WCC will facilitate to present the cases of the human rights abuses in the country when the Philippines situation will be reviewed by the UN Human Rights Council in early 2008 through the new mechanism of the UNHRC – the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

Again, I reiterate our commitment that the global ecumenical movement will continue to be in solidarity with the struggling Filipinos and their churches who are engaged in the ministries of prophetic witness and struggle for the marginalized and the poor.
Participation of WCC general secretary in panel discussion on “Faiths, War and Peace”, Naples, Italy, 23 October 2007

WCC takes part in interfaith dialogue for peace

At a high-profile interfaith dialogue for peace in Naples, Italy, earlier this week, gathered religious and political leaders and intellectuals from five continents. The event which was called "For a world without violence" was organized by the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio and included a eucharistic celebration conducted by Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday, 21 October.

In a panel discussion held Tuesday morning about "Faiths, war and peace," Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary, said he sees "three major threats to world peace today," namely: nuclear proliferation accompanied by "intense struggles for resources in an increasingly polarized world and the gradual weakening of the global institutions of mutual accountability"; "the increasing impact of climate change"; and "the threat of deepening injustices at all levels".

Kobia also emphasized the positive role religion can play in such a context: "Faith communities are not defined along racial or ethnic lines, or by national borders, but cut across these divides. We can therefore help to find new ways to express our faith, to be able to talk to our neighbours of other faiths, and to forge common visions and goals for the sake of life," he affirmed.

The event echoes a decade-long peace initiative of the WCC, the Decade to Overcome Violence. This effort to focus churches on the issue of violence and peacemaking ends in 2011 with an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

Among the personalities attending the Naples event were the chief rabbi of Israel Yona Metzger, the founder of the University of the United Arab Emirates Ezzeddin Ibrahim, and the Buddhist monk U. Uttara from Myanmar, as well as the Italian premier Romano Prodi and the presidents of Tanzania, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, and Ecuador, Rafael Correa Delgado.

Signs of goodwill among religions and denominations at the Naples meetings included a relic of Saint Andrew being handed over to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It is believed that the larger part of St. Andrew's remains were taken from Constantinople in the early 13th century and brought to Amalfi in southern Italy.

WCC Welcomes letter from Muslim leaders entitled “A Common Word between Us and You,” 15 October 2007

"This letter is most welcome," said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, especially at a time when "all of humanity is looking to religious leaders for guidance as to how to respond to the situation of violence in the world". Kobia was commenting on the letter "A Common Word between Us and You," saying that it "gives a lot of hope".

With the signature of some 140 Muslim leaders, the letter was addressed to a number of world Christian leaders including Kobia last week, and arrived on the occasion of "Eid al-Fitr al-Mubarak", the festivity that marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslims' holiest month.

According to Kobia, the letter "is significant in that it is signed by such a large group of Muslim leaders and scholars from around the world, which makes it unprecedented. Such a rare
unity of purpose gives a lot of hope as to what people of faith can achieve together." The WCC
general secretary stressed that "the timing of this letter is also important. Today all of humanity is
looking to religious leaders for guidance as to how to respond to the situation of violence in the
world."

Kobia affirmed that "the WCC is ready to cooperate with those who have sent this letter
by participating in putting together a concrete process to implement what is being suggested." With over 30 years of work in interreligious relations and dialogue, the WCC is today turning its
emphasis to a cooperation which strives to constructively address religion-fuelled conflicts in
contemporary plural societies.

Statement on Iraq and its Christian communities by the WCC executive committee,
Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007

The basic well-being and human rights of substantial portions of Iraqi society are heavily
degraded after decades of wars and chaos, and remain under grave threat. Yet the suffering of
the Iraqi people remains largely unrecognized and unresolved. The executive committee of the
World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September, 2007, is deeply
troubled by their suffering and calls urgently for solutions. Amid the many suffering
communities there, we note that the fate of Iraq's Christian communities gives churches around
the world particular cause for concern and reason to respond.

Churches of the WCC have raised many warnings and sought to provide hope to the
people of Iraq. We recall inter alia:

The central committee urging sustained diplomacy instead of war (Geneva, 2002); that the
current war is immoral, ill-advised and in breach of the United Nations Charter, that the UN
Security Council withdraw the open-ended mandate it had given to the occupation of Iraq, for a
collective international commitment to support the people of Iraq including reparations by the
occupying powers for damages caused by the unlawful use of force (Geneva, 2003); and that the
US-led military presence be reduced and terminated, the US adhere to international law on the
treatment of prisoners and churches overseas advocate for and assist Christians to stay in Iraq
(Geneva, 2005);

The executive committee judging the sanctions imposed on Iraq to have failed to meet the
necessary criteria while causing serious violations of human rights (Geneva, 1998); and that the
impending war “will cause a humanitarian crisis of grave magnitude with untold suffering...loss
of life, property, environmental damage and waste of precious resources” and “polarise division
and hatred between communities resulting in further destabilization of the regions” (Bossey,
February 2003).

The Iraqi people
Today one-third of the Iraqi population is in need of humanitarian assistance. More than half of
Iraqis live in abject poverty or worse (54 percent), according to a recent Iraqi government survey.
One Iraqi in six is internally uprooted or among the two million people who have fled the
country. All of these groups experience severe and chronic deficits in food security, in access to
clean water, sanitation, health services and education, and in possibilities to earn a livelihood.
Poverty, deprivation and human insecurity are extremely high in Iraq. Effective allocations of
national and international resources to remedy these ills are very low. Exploitation of the
country’s vast petroleum resources provides little overall benefit to the Iraqi people.
Nevertheless, massive expenditures for military and security programmes continue with no end in sight to the conflict and insecurity at which they are directed. Iraq’s dire humanitarian situation developed during the latter years of Saddam Hussein’s regime and the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Its national traumas include dictatorship, the Iran-Iraq war, and the first Gulf War. Since the current US-led invasion, public health surveys indicate that conflict has caused hundreds of thousands more deaths and driven more than four million people from their communities.

The prevalence of violence by non-state armed groups, regular armed forces and criminal groups affects people in most parts of Iraq, causing heavy casualties, fear, deprivation and emigration. Based on experiences with the chronic insecurity that has set in since the invasion of 2003, national and international NGOs including church organizations have limited but still significant opportunities to deliver effective humanitarian assistance under current circumstances. However, international recognition and action on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq is lacking. Internationally, a climate of silence about their fate prevails instead. The silence is punctuated by daily reports of casualty figures but appears to be sustained by the reluctance of governments to engage in the difficult international political task of working out solutions to the Iraq crisis.

**Iraq’s Christian communities**

Although Christians represent only four percent of Iraq’s population, they make up 40 percent of its refugees. Their fate speaks twice, informing overseas churches about both the general humanitarian needs in Iraq and the urgency of saving Iraq’s Christian communities.

On the one hand, the current Christian exodus is but one of many warnings that radically new approaches to Iraq’s crisis are needed. Strategies based on the use of force have driven the country into chaos. To continue them has the effect of adding new fuel to a raging fire. The flight of Christians from Iraq is a sign of the failure of policies that were purported to bring stability and peace to Iraq and even the region.

Traumas that affect Christian communities – violent attacks, incessant fear, frequent kidnappings, social upheaval, economic collapse and attacks on houses of worship – also affect Iraqi society at large. Members of all religious communities in Iraq are now displaced or have fled the country. The fate of Christians must not be seen in isolation from the fate of Muslims, or of other minorities such as the Yazidees and Mandeans, or used to worsen relations with Muslims or other groups.

Iraq’s leaders and the foreign governments involved must find ways to install the rule of law. Intolerance between social groups has grown markedly as an outcome of the conflict there. The rule of law must include re-establishment of a multi-cultural equilibrium in society.

On the other hand, a living Christian presence is a positive reminder that peace, pluralism and tolerance are things that work together for good, in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. The continuing presence of Christians in Iraq is a witness to the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that are an essential part of the Middle East.

Like other Christians of the region, Iraqi Christians affirm that the future of Christianity does not lie in emigration but in peace. Their churches are some of the oldest in the world, but foundations laid in biblical times are being torn up in our day. As they strive to meet the present challenges and show great strength, they also look to churches overseas and especially in the West to do more to influence governments to find even-handed solutions for Iraq and for other crises in the region.

Credit is due to the leading Muslim clerics who are using their authority to contain the violence in Iraq despite the presence of factional, foreign and criminal armed forces. These leaders understand and acknowledge the fate of the churches. Multi-religious initiatives to resolve conflicts there and promote reconciliation also give cause for hope.
Joint Christian-Muslim advocacy overseas for tolerance and co-existence in Iraq would send a powerful signal to Iraqis of all faiths. It would also be an investment in the best interests of an increasingly polarized region.

Recommendations:

Whereas dangers and deprivations confronting the Iraqi people give cause for great concern, those suffering are not beyond the reach of God's plenteous mercy. Members of the body of Christ are called to reach out in similar spirit with acts of compassion, demonstrations of solidarity and embassies of peace. Accordingly, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007, calls the member churches of the WCC to take direct actions:

A. Keeping the people and churches of Iraq in their prayers and providing increased assistance to them for church life and for service to a society in great need. Support can be channelled through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches, WCC-related specialized ministries and church families present in Iraq.

B. Raising awareness in their parishes and in their countries concerning the general suffering of the Iraqi people including its Christian communities.

C. Providing support to displaced people inside Iraq and to Iraqi refugees through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches and WCC-related specialized ministries.

D. Demonstrating their solidarity with the Christian communities and people of Iraq. Church-only actions and joint initiatives with Muslims are both needed in order to show support for the people of Iraq and to make clear once again that policies of occupation do not have international church support.

Whereas the core problems of the Iraq crisis remain largely unresolved, namely, the failures to meet basic needs, ensure public security and provide essential infrastructure; the low levels of multilateral support for government institutions and civil society groups; the on-going presence of occupation forces; no balanced sharing of national resources; increased alienation between communities and loss of religious freedom; therefore the executive committee calls WCC member churches to advocate with governments:

E. Contacting the governments whose forces occupy Iraq to remind them of their obligations to the people of Iraq under the Geneva Conventions and, at the same time, to remind these governments of the unconscionable losses of human life from more than four years of war in Iraq, condemning all causes of civilian casualties – from the as many as one million ‘excess deaths’ now documented by public health surveys, to the ‘collateral damage’ caused by military action, to the countless suicide attacks.

F. Engaging their own governments over the need to break the international silence on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and provide greater assistance to displaced and refugee Iraqis through organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

G. Informing their governments of the fate of Iraq's Christian communities and the importance of protecting all minorities there to preserve the pluralistic, multi-faith character of Iraqi society.

H. Raising with their governments the importance of having open debate and broad multilateral engagement in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1770 and of agreeing further measures that assist the people of Iraq in building a viable, independent state.

Summary of “Living Letters” ecumenical team visit to the United States, 14-24 September 2007
• The Living Letters team was encouraged by the people of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church to make their church a place of welcome for people of all faiths. This “living” model of interreligious harmony has greatly accomplished peaceful coexistence. It can be learnt and used by others to promote good relations among members of different faiths.
• The churches through the leadership of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA were opposed to the war in Iraq.
• The Living Letters team visited Nickel Mines Amish community whose story of forgiveness provides a practical lesson for all Christians.

It was six years after “September 11” and two years after Hurricane Katrina when Living Letters visited the USA. The attack which is commonly remembered as 9/11 and the Natural disaster (Katrina) left hundreds dead or gravely affected. The terrorist attack ushered in an era of aggressive military actions on what the then USA administration called “war on terror.” The war has left many affected around the world.
Living letters visited the USA in September 2007. They observed that apart from terrorism, people are faced with many other challenges. At the time of the visit, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania had the highest homicide rate of cities in the USA. Despite the odds, the team noted valuable roles that churches and their communities play to intervene especially towards a just and peaceful society.

Excerpts from Living Letters U.S. report

We were deeply impressed by the faithful commitment of Rev. Khader El-Yateem and the people of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church (www.arabicbible.com/salam/) in Brooklyn, New York whose decision to make their church home a place of welcome and a safe space for people of different faiths to find common ground, has enabled a whole community to live in peace against all odds. Because of this faithful commitment to the Gospel's call to love one another, Muslim, Christian and Jewish neighbours had already come to know and trust each other before the crisis of 9/11 threatened to irreparably tear the fabric of interfaith tolerance in this Brooklyn neighbourhood. On that terrible day – because of the relationships already established over time between religious and civic leaders through meetings hosted by Salam Arabic Lutheran Church – the church became a literal sanctuary for a community fearing for its well-being and braced for retaliatory violence. On the day that the Living Letters delegation visited Salam Arabic Lutheran Church, it was very evident that Muslim and Christian leaders alike, gathered in that place to greet us were mutually committed to overcoming violence and setting an example of respect and peaceful coexistence.

In a discussion of the Iraq War, the faithful commitment of the leadership of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA was seen to be a key influence in rallying the churches and other faith communities in first opposing the war in Iraq, and then in speaking out against the war – despite the fact that originally nearly fifty percent of those in the pews of the NCCCUSA’s member churches supported the current Administration in invading and occupying Iraq. Ultimately, the NCCCUSA’s faithful commitment to advocacy and education and in helping bear witness to the position of the churches in the Middle East in opposing the war has helped to shift the balance so that the majority of those in the pews and in society now oppose the Administrations’ policies on Iraq.

Living Letters met with the members of the Amish community who in 1996 made world headline because of their acts of faith. In the fall of 2006 gunman shot 10 girls aged 6-13 in the West Nickel Mines Amish School. Five of them died while the others sustained serious injuries. To date one of them is still semi-comatose. Also dead was the gunman who committed suicide after the gruesome act. The parents of the victims forgave the gunman. During his funeral, moaners of the Amish community outnumbered the family members of the murderer and even
went to comfort the family. Forgiveness and other core teachings of Jesus which all lead to Just-Peace connect with the IEPC. The IEPC is an arena not only to celebrate but to remind each other about the core message of Christ. The story of forgiveness by the Amish community who live upon and practice Christ's teachings would be a practical teaching to share with others at IEPC.

Letter to the general secretary of NCCK on the release of the Korean hostages held in Afghanistan, 31 August 2007

“Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.” (Psalm 97:11)

Having engaged in a season of prayer for the Korean hostages during their captivity, and having joined you in visiting and praying with members of their families in Bundang on August 14, 2007, I receive the news of their return to the Sammul Community Church with gratitude to God and admiration for those who contributed to their liberation from captivity. May the success of the contacts and dialogue that led to their safe release provide encouragement to peace-makers in troubled regions everywhere.

I am writing to express my joy and thanksgiving for the 21 church-related humanitarian workers whose lives have been spared in Afghanistan. Of equal importance, I write to assure the whole community, and especially the families and friends of the two hostages who lost their lives, of continued prayer and concern on the part of Christians in every part of the world.

The apostle Paul, who had personal experience of both joy and sorrow, understood that our hope in Christ often co-exists with great human sacrifice. As he wrote to the church at Philippi, “But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you – and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:17-18).

With people and churches around the globe, I wish for you and the churches of Korea the sure and certain hope of the resurrection that brings comfort to those who mourn, hope to all and renewed dedication to our common pursuit of unity, witness and service in this world.

Samuel Kobia General secretary

Letter to His All Holiness Bartolomew I, ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople regarding the challenge to the use of the title “Ecumenical”, 29 August 2007

Your All Holiness,

“Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love!” (2 Jn).

Warmest greetings to you from the World Council of Churches. This letter comes from the headquarters of the WCC and the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva as a sign of support in a time of concern for Your All Holiness. It is an expression of the worldwide solidarity that exists among WCC member churches of every continent for the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.

We write as a result of recent developments, especially the decision of the Supreme Court of Appeals and subsequent acts by judicial authorities in Turkey which have again challenged your Patriarchate's long-established use of the title 'Ecumenical'. We also recall our letter of May 2007 to the Turkish ambassador in Geneva, when violence and threats against church members
there included threats to your person. Please know that amid these troubles you have our firm support in the fulfilment of the Patriarchate’s important religious ministries.

The term 'Ecumenical' holds great significance for Christians. It is precious to all who understand the call of churches to affirm life, seek unity and serve their neighbours. It has a unique and historic importance to the world's 300 million Orthodox believers. The title 'Ecumenical' is given only to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as 'first among equals' among those entrusted with the leadership of the Orthodox world. In consequence and over many centuries, it has become the name by which the Patriarchate is known throughout the world.

Your ecumenical standing was amply recognized when the moderator and officers of the World Council of Churches met in your Patriarchate in Phanar, Istanbul, in December last year. As officers of the world's largest ecumenical organization, they especially noted the historic role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in promoting fellowship and cooperation among Christian churches and confessional families around the world.

They noted that the Church of Constantinople's “ecumenical” commitment has been tangibly manifested in your Patriarchate’s historic standing and its many initiatives:

• A leading role since the earliest centuries of the Christian church with recognition of the title 'Ecumenical' since the 6th century;
• The establishment of relations by the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah with Reformation theologians in Europe in the 16th century;
• The development of relations with the Church of England in the 19th century;
• Becoming the first church in the world to plan for an international ecumenical institution such as the WCC, with the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920 (at the time when the modern state of Turkey was being formed);
• Bringing together in the name of Christian unity, after centuries of separation, the Primates of the churches of Rome and of Constantinople, including the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI with Your All Holiness in Phanar, Istanbul, in 2006;
• Facilitating and coordinating theological dialogues between the Orthodox churches, other Christian churches and confessional families, thus creating bridges across denominational borders.

The many “ecumenical” initiatives undertaken by your Patriarchate are not limited to promoting dialogue only among Christians. Your All Holiness has personally become a leading figure of the contemporary ecumenical movement by continuing the long-standing tradition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and playing an especially active role in the fields of:

Interreligious dialogue and collaboration between Christians, Muslims and Jews, including your emphasis on the multi-religious character of the great city where you live;

Reconciliation among peoples and cultures;

The protection of the natural environment, a matter that is poignantly ecumenical in the current era.

For all these we are grateful. We cherish your leadership in the global ecumenical movement. We are also grateful for the permanent support offered to the World Council of Churches by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
We wish you to know of our whole-hearted appreciation of the authenticity and importance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as an institution and the Ecumenical Patriarch as an office within the wider church world.

By copy of this letter member churches of the WCC are being invited to pray for you and to offer other expressions of solidarity. Meanwhile, we note that the Conference of European Churches has also assured you of their support and intends to raise the present concern at the forthcoming Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania.

Finally, we note with satisfaction that, despite the current difficulties, there is also recognition and appreciation being accorded to you and to the Patriarchate from within Turkish society. These sentiments are well placed. They are a credit to the nation.

They are a reminder of the high regard in which many around the world hold the Turkish people. We pray that such positive estimations may be widely heard and clearly understood. We trust that these attitudes will eventually carry the day as a true reflection of the constitution of your country and of the outlook of its people.

Yours in our common Lord,
Samuel Kobia
General secretary

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**Living Letters ecumenical team to visit to Sri Lanka, 4-12 August 2007**

War-torn Sri Lanka is to receive the first of a series of ecumenical "living letters" teams which will visit Christian communities facing situations of violence in different regions of the world in the run up to the 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation being organized by the World Council of Churches.

The ecumenical team will be in Sri Lanka from 4-12 August. "Living letters" is a mission by church representatives to express solidarity with and learn from the peacemaking efforts of local churches. The team includes four church representatives – from the USA, Kenya, Indonesia and South Korea. They are to meet major church and civil society players, as well as people from the grassroots in areas affected by the fighting.

"We want the delegation to be exposed to the stark realities of war in the North and East before they meet church leaders and civil society representatives based in Colombo," says Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris, general secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka which is hosting the "living letters" team.

The programme of the visit includes exposure trips to areas in the northern and eastern regions of the country (Mannar, Batticaloa and Jaffna); meetings with church leaders and officials of the National Christian Council; encounters with members of congregations in the country's capital Colombo and other areas and meetings with human rights activists.

Conflict in Sri Lanka has over the past 25 years claimed thousands of lives on both sides of the ethnic divide between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Thousands of refugees have sought asylum abroad while many thousands are internally displaced. The civilian population has been put through tremendous hardships due to summary executions, torture, illegal detentions, embargoes on essential items and the forced recruitment of children as fighters.
Despite a cease-fire agreement signed in February 2002 between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a lethal escalation of armed violence between the two parties since early 2006 has been a source of deep concern to the ecumenical family. On September 2006 the WCC central committee called both parties to respect the cease-fire agreement and put an end to all hostilities, resuming peace negotiations without delay. Last April, WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia reiterated the Council's concern and appeal.

Churches in Sri Lanka have provided cautious and critical support to the peace process, among other things through interreligious cooperative endeavours to mobilize people for peace and national reconciliation. The "living letters" team will find out more about the churches' efforts and needs, and will report back to the wider ecumenical family at a time when, in Kobia's words, "despite the ensuing humanitarian crisis in the northern and eastern parts of the country, Sri Lanka appears to have been forgotten by the international community".

The "living letters" teams are part of what is expected to become a major worldwide mobilization of churches for peace that will culminate with an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to be held as conclusion of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence in early May 2011.

Members of the team are:
• Professor Eunice Karanja Kamaara, a Christian ethicist from Kenya who heads the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Moi University in Nairobi.
• Dr Bo-hyuk Suh, a university professor and researcher on peace issues in the Korean peninsula and former member of the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea.
• Ms Jennifer Leath, a graduate from the Union Theological Seminary (New York), is the co-moderator of the Joint Consultative Group between Pentecostals and the WCC and a member of the newly appointed WCC youth body.
• Ms Peggy Adeline Mekel, a junior lecturer of business and economics at Sam Ratulangi University in Manado, Indonesia, is a WCC central committee member.

Mr Santha Fernando, executive secretary of the Commission for Justice and Peace of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka will join the team on behalf of the local churches. Support staff being sent by the WCC to accompany the delegation will include Aruna Gnanadason and Semegnish Asfaw.

A summary of the visiting team:
• Some view neither religion nor ethnicity as a problem. They observed that, political instability and leadership failures are the core problems in the country.
• The extreme minority of Christians in the country limits the effectiveness of churches’ capacity to have substantial influence for justice and peace.
• The churches are divided along ethnic lines and often it is unable to speak as one despite cooperation among different church groups.

The war was declared officially over in May 2009 after three decades of civil war. This allows the ecumenical movement to pray and support Sri Lanka in the processes of rebuilding and reconciliation.

The first visit by the Living Letters was to the beautiful island of Sri Lanka. After more than two decades of civil war the Island’s beauty has faded replacing it with ugly scenes of war. The civil war started in 1983 has been complicated by both ethnic and religious animosity. Some did not have this view. They concluded that, political instability and leadership failures are the core problems in the country.
As The Living Letters Team journeyed from Colombo to the Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, they learnt from people the challenges that the country was facing. The war left thousands displaced, homeless and starved. There were cases of disappearances, abductions and kidnappings especially of civil activists. The team also experienced first-hand encounters with the high military regime, through varied road blocks and check points.

Sri Lanka has 6% of Christians. Living Letters team observed that the extreme minority of Christians in the country limits the effectiveness of the churches’ capacity to have substantial influence for justice and peace. As much as the churches have made efforts in peace initiatives, the perception by many people as the team observed is more military action to deter the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE).

Another challenge of the churches is division along ethnic lines which often makes it difficult to speak as one voice. This is despite some levels of cooperation among Protestant, Roman Catholic and Evangelical groups. Christianity is also seen as an external force by the Sinhala-Buddhist nexus which threatens religious freedom. The constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," though it is not recognized as the state religion. The constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to freely practice their religion. While the Government publicly endorses this right, in practice, this was not the case.

Close to two years after the Living Letters visit, the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa on May 19th 2009 officially declared the end of the war. Despite this, as Gethin Chamberlain of The Observer put it; “Colombo needs massive international aid. It also needs to bind up the wounds of a fatally divided conduct of the civil war.” The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation will provide the ecumenical movement with an opportunity not only to pray for Sri Lanka to re-build but also seek ways of supporting the country in its reconciliation and quest for just-peace.


Amman imperatives

Almost sixty years have passed since the Christian churches first spoke with one voice about Arab-Israeli peace. For the last forty years the Christian churches have called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the very place where Jesus Christ walked upon the earth, walls now separate families and the children of God – Christian, Muslim and Jew – are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair. The Palestinian Christians from Gaza to Jerusalem and to Nazareth have called out to their brothers and sisters in Christ with this urgent plea: “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.”

We welcome the timely and prophetic statement of the heads of churches in Jerusalem. We affirm that “the Churches are part of the conflict, because the churches cannot remain silent while there is still suffering. The role of the churches is to heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation.” Our belief in God reminds us “that all God’s children of all religions and political parties are to be respected.” We assure the churches of Palestine and Israel of our prayers, collaboration and resources.

Thus, in Amman, Jordan 18-20 June 2007, days that have witnessed a deepening of the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories, and also includes the United Nations World Refugee Day, we representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every
corner of the earth, affirm the decision of the central committee of the World Council of Churches and launch the “Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum” as an instrument to “catalyze and co-ordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation in accordance with UN resolutions, and demonstrate its commitment to interreligious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.”

This action has been taken in response to three fundamental imperatives that call us to action:

• The ethical and theological imperative for a Just Peace
• The ecumenical imperative for unity in action
• The Gospel imperative for costly solidarity
The premises of this action are the following:
• That UN resolutions are the basis for peace and the Geneva conventions are applicable to the rights and responsibilities of the affected people.
• That Palestinians have the right of self-determination and the right of return.
• That a two-state solution must be viable politically, geographically economically and socially.
• That Jerusalem must be an open, accessible, inclusive and shared city for the two peoples and three religions.
• That both Palestine and Israel have legitimate security needs.
• That the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal, and constitute an obstacle to peace.
• That the “Separation Barrier” constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories is a grave breach of international law and must be removed from the occupied territory.
• That there is no military solution for this conflict. Violence in all its forms cannot be justified whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians.
• That comprehensive regional peace is indivisible from a just peace in Israel and Palestine.
• That the life and witness of local churches is at the center of worldwide church advocacy for a just peace.

We understand the mandate of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) to be a space where we will develop comprehensive strategic approaches to the two processes of peace making and peace building. An inclusive core group convened urgently by the WCC should be mandated to facilitate this and also ensure improved coordination between all actors. The core group will be informed by the reports of the working groups of the Amman conference, and that its composition and mechanism be designed and announced by the WCC.

Peace building will include the following:
• Furthering theological and biblical perspectives and Christian education resources around those issues central to the conflict.
• Developing strategies that will support the processes of justice and reconciliation, including interreligious dialogue and cooperation.
• Strengthening the churches’ responses to the occupation.
• Recognizing, encouraging and cooperating with all efforts of Israeli and Palestinian civil society that are in accord with the vision and goals of the PIEF.

Peace making will include the following:
• Defining and promoting measures, including economic ones, that could help end the occupation and enhance sustainable growth and development.
• Strengthening existing efforts and identifying new models of church solidarity in action. Supporting local churches and church related organizations not only to survive and continue their powerful ministries, including educational, health, cultural and social services, but also to thrive and be witnesses of hope.
Developing a long-term advocacy strategy in order to mobilize all of our constituencies and influence change.

**Amman challenges**

We have heard the voices of the Christian churches of Palestine and Israel challenging and saying to us:

Act with us to liberate all peoples of this land from the logic of hatred, mutual rejection and death, so that they see in the other the face and dignity of God.

Pray with us in our efforts to resist evil in all of its guises.

Raise your voices along with ours as we speak “truth to power” and name with courage the injustices we see and experience. The illegal occupation has stolen two generations of lives in this tortured place, and threatens the next with hopelessness and rage.

Risk the curses and abuse that will be aimed at you and stand in solidarity with us and with our Palestinian brothers and sisters of all faiths as we defiantly reject the possibility that occupation will continue.

Help us to tear down walls and build and rebuild bridges among all peoples in the region.

Extremism on all sides produces chaos. It threatens to divide us and to destroy bridges among peoples that would lead to reconciliation and peace.

Add your hope to ours in the knowledge that evil and despair have been overcome through the death of our Lord on the Cross and through His Resurrection.

Insist with us that all dispossessed peoples, all refugees, have the right to return.

Partner with us as we seek peace and pursue it. Peace is possible. Christians and Muslims and Jews have, can and will understand one another and live together as neighbours.

And we representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every corner of the earth, we respond:

Yes, we will. Together we will act and pray and speak and work and risk reputations and lives to build with you bridges for an enduring peace among the peoples of this tortured and beautiful place – Palestine and Israel – to end these decades of injustice, humiliation and insecurity, to end the decades of living as refugees and under occupation. We will work with you to seek peace and pursue it. We have allowed too much time to pass. Time has not served the cause of peace but has served the cause of extremism. This is our urgent cause that cannot wait.

**“How can religions live together?” Keynote lecture by WCC general secretary at 31st German Kirchentag, 7 June 2007**

Dear friends,

What a joy to be with you and so many German Christians again at this 31st German Kirchentag in Cologne! The Cathedral on the other side of the Rhine reminds us of the many centuries of Christian presence in this country. The faces of the many young people here at the Kirchentag signify that there is life and future for the churches in Germany. May God bless you all and be among us this morning!

“Religions living together” is the theme for our deliberations this morning. Living together, however, is about people and is not just an abstract concept stemming from the different religions – as if books about Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or other religions could talk with each other from their library shelves. The question is rather:

- How do people of different faiths live together as neighbours and not as enemies?
• How do we share our common home, this planet, as people of different faiths?

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the global media has emphasized the tensions between the “Western” and the “Muslim” world. Samuel Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations” has become the framework for seeing and interpreting the current situation. These perceptions are further fuelled by almost daily news on violence in the Middle East and in other places around the world.

But there is also the other side of the story. There are communities in Indonesia rediscovering their ancient ways of peacemaking in situations of conflict. There are intense efforts to work for peace and reconciliation between communities in northern Nigeria, in Lebanon and in so many other countries. There are also the many, many families – even here in Germany – which include members of different faith communities who live in peace and harmony with each other. Multifaith households and extended families are becoming an increasing social phenomenon in many parts of the world.

This is in brief what I would like to talk about. I will do this in three steps:

1. I will share with you a story from the life-experience of such “interreligious families”.
2. I will then concentrate on reflections on the role of religion in violent conflicts and what we can learn from research done on this, and
3. I will conclude with some examples from the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its member churches how we complement interreligious dialogue with interreligious cooperation.

Living together as people from different faith communities

When I started talking to some of my colleagues in the WCC, I was surprised how many of them actually count people from other faith communities to their family members. My assistant, a Christian from the USA, is married to a Muslim from Egypt. They are now a wonderful family with two children who learn Arabic at the Geneva Mosque and also participate in the worship of the English-speaking Lutheran congregation in Geneva. While the rest of the family displayed some hesitation in the beginning, this has changed in the meantime.

There are colleagues from India with Hindu brothers-in-law, those from Sweden with Jewish family background, those from Germany with a cousin who is living here in Cologne as the wife of a young Turkish Muslim.

I could go on with these examples from the staff community in the WCC. I am sure that some of you also share similar experiences. But for those among us who do not have people from other faith communities in their families, let me briefly speak about my own family in Kenya. It has now been several years since my niece married a Muslim from Uganda. It was natural to all of us that he would be with us when we celebrate Christmas, as he would invite us to celebrate together the Eid al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan. These are the moments when we talk about our faith journeys and grow in understanding of each other.

I have come to believe that there is a distinctive African way of being Christian or being Muslim. It is rooted in our African understanding of the ubuntu, of life in community, and of God as the supreme power and origin of all life. It is very strange for us to think that God would want us to fight for him. God the almighty does not need us to come to his defense. We depend on God and not God on us. The very fact that we believe in God should unite and not separate us across religious boundaries.
A colleague from Tanzania told me the story of a German missionary from the Berlin Mission. When the Germans occupied the region of the Kilimanjaro Mountain, this missionary destroyed the trees of the ancient African shrine and built a church at the same place. When they started to cut the trees, an old man stood in their way, asking them: “what kind of God is this who wants you to destroy the holy places of others?”

It is one of the sad chapters of Christian mission history that in the name of Christ the presence of other religions was oppressed in often-violent ways. Just as the memory of the crusades is not forgotten in the Middle East so the oppressive side of Christian mission in other regions. If we do not own up to this history, turn around and repent, this part of our past will always haunt the relationships among us and with people of other faiths.

Living together as people from different faith communities requires that all of us overcome histories of domination and oppression and learn to live as neighbours and friends who share our lives in a common home – planet earth. Only then will we become one human family, which, I believe, God wants us to be.

Overcoming violent conflict

If this is our goal, we will be aware of the many traps and obstacles that can derail us and block our common journey. To affirm justice and to honour the dignity of the other will always be the basic and guiding principles on our way. It is only destructive to undermine others’ life and survival or to humiliate them. It can happen so easily – even through simple caricatures or jokes about the other – there are so many jokes about the Rabbi, the Priest and the Imam going to heaven or meeting someone; about the Pope or a Protestant pastor that might look innocent and rather innocent to us, but such a joke might hurt the other very, very deeply.

Since religion is at the centre of life for many people all over the earth, religion is a very sensitive issue when it comes to tensions and conflict. Historians have noted that more than three quarters of the world’s civil conflicts in the period from 1960 to 1990 can be traced to ethno-religious causes. This proportion further increased with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Whether we like it or not, religion plays a critical role in the present context.

Contrary to expectations that, step by step, western culture would replace local cultural environments and marginalize the role of religion, religion is reasserting itself in the public realm. Twenty years ago, social scientists and other researchers expected secularism to spread. Today, they are giving the role of religion more and more attention. But this re-discovery of religion is often accompanied by accusations that religion is the source of evils such as dogmatism, fanaticism, extremism, etc.

I am convinced that this tendency still reflects the underlying assumptions of the secularization theory. It derives from the massive conflict in European culture that culminated in the Thirty Years War in the seventeenth century. To neutralise the effect of devastating religious conflict at the political level was of vital importance for the stabilization of nation states and the future of Europe. Today, the re-appearance of religion in the public sphere, therefore, is often perceived as alarming, providing a rationale for all kinds of fears and new enemy images. This was apparent even during the first Gulf War.

Attributing outbursts of violence only to religion even where religious symbols accentuate tensions or where religion explains differences among groups in a conflict, is not correct. Causes for violent conflicts are usually more complex. They are the result of the interaction of many global, national and local factors. What is called the “resurgence of religion”
with reference to new forms of religious fundamentalism is probably most adequately interpreted as a form of collective resistance against cultural hegemony in the context of globalization. It corresponds to the need of different communities of people to find their place and be recognized in the brutally competitive environment shaped by global economic and political forces.

Studying the brutal conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India, the Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar, came to the following conclusion: “What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism where a community of believers not only has religious affiliation but also social, economic, and political interests in common which may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers who share the same geographical space”.

Sudhir Kakar's analysis of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India suggests that social, economic, political and cultural consequences of the accelerated process of globalization significantly contribute to the emergence of new ethno-religious conflicts. Globalization has social and ecological costs that have become much clearer in recent years, e.g. a growing gap between rich and poor and an increasing number of “disposable” and excluded people corresponds to accelerated extraction of resources, high levels of energy consumption and destruction of spaces and species essential for future survival. These costs as a result of globalization contribute to emerging conflicts by increasing pressure on local communities and creating new forms of insecurity.

Sharing the same space, different groups find themselves more and more in competition for control over systemic power. Under the pressure of the social and ecological costs of globalization, everybody operates with the assumption that you lose out completely if you do not belong to those who have access to systemic power and global flows of capital, goods and information.

Under these circumstances, the politics of identity become the battlefield for social inclusion and exclusion, and the distribution of power. Strong symbols of belonging are mobilized and often re-invented, creating communities that can claim power and access to land and resources for themselves at the expense of others. Family relationships and ethnic identities are the first to be exploited together with different religious affiliations and other markers of difference, such as race and gender. For political leaders who have nothing to offer to the poor, mobilizing those strong symbols of belonging is a tempting way to create loyalty and influence the distribution of power in society in their own favour.

The WCC – interreligious dialogue and interreligious co-operation

It is obvious that religion can be both a source of division and hatred and a liberating force contributing to life in dignity in just and sustainable communities. Which side will surface depends on a number of internal and external factors to religion itself. Saying this, I simply want to describe a social reality. As a Christian theologian, however, I do not surrender to the given circumstances. I am involved in the conflict of interpretation for a meaningful role of Christian faith in today’s world in response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Zephaniah reminded his people: *Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility.* (Zephaniah 2:3)

We hear Jesus saying according to the Gospel of Matthew:
Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
(Matthew 6:33)

This message of the Bible led me to say before:
To affirm justice and to honour the dignity of the other will always be the basic and guiding principles on our way.
Or in words more familiar to all of us:
Love your neighbour, as you love yourself.

In situations of conflict, this Gospel imperative compels us to work for healing and reconciliation among the different groups involved. This often requires healing of memories that are deeply hurt by the suffering and the enmity that have grown in the past and which the conflict has aggravated. Healing is only possible if atrocities and crimes committed in the past are acknowledged. But the process cannot just stay there. It must necessarily lead to restitution and in some cases to reparations in order to arrive at a situation where justice rules the relationships and all can live in dignity.

There are a number of good examples for such processes, not surprisingly with critical involvement by churches and church leaders. What we have learned together in intra-Christian processes of reconciliation – just think of the reconciliation process between Germans and people from Poland and the former Soviet Union; think of Northern Ireland or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa – what we have learned in intra-Christian processes of reconciliation can help us to develop similar approaches between people from different faith communities.

Against this background, the WCC has engaged in efforts to juxtapose interreligious dialogue with interreligious co-operation. Perhaps the best illustration for this new way of interreligious engagement is the life journey of our former colleague, Dr Tarek Mitri, who was responsible for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Dr Mitri currently holds a key position in the government of Lebanon. He went back to Beirut when the prime minister called him to intensify the process for reconciliation among the different groups in the Lebanese society. He moved from the ministry of the environment, to the ministry of culture and is now acting foreign minister of his country. He represented Lebanon at the UN General Assembly and the Security Council during last year’s Israeli invasion of Lebanon and last week when the Security Council decided on investigation of the killing former Prime Minister Hariri.

Dr Mitri has taken a high personal risk to serve his country and to live his conviction that dialogue and co-operation between religions is necessary for peace and justice in this world.

At present we are very actively engaging Christian and Muslim leaders in the Horn of Africa. There is the danger that peace in the region and the fragile peace process in Sudan will break apart in a series of regional wars. As a consequence of the situation in Somalia, which has become a battlefield of the “war on terror”, tensions between Christian and Muslim communities are growing. This is a very dangerous moment for the countries in the region – also my own, Kenya.

Let me conclude here. I think it is clear, we are
• Engaging in studies, for instance on the role of churches in situations of conflicts, or
• Holding conferences such as the “Critical Moment Conference” in 2005 that are landmark events for determining a new approach to interreligious co-operation, or
• Engaging in the Decade to Overcome Violence as a platform for the churches to learn from each other and support each other mutually.
All this we do. But even more important is our active work for peace and reconciliation, together with our member churches and ecumenical partners in the most critical and violent places of this world.

So much more can be said about this but I would also like us to have enough time for questions and some discussion. I am eager to hear from you on your concerns and questions. I hope that we can all learn from each other and be enriched by our encounter this morning.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Letter to the Prime Minister of Jordan, Dr Marouf Suleiman al-Bakhit regarding the withdrawal of recognition of His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, 18 May 2007

Your Excellency,
Greetings in the name of almighty God.

It is with deep concern that the World Council of Churches (WCC) received the news that your honourable government decided to withdraw its recognition from the legally elected His Beatitude Theophilos III, patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine. We want to express our fear that such a decision might lead to a division among the Orthodox Christian community in Jordan and Palestine with negative ecclesial and socio-political consequences.

We understand the reason behind this decision by the Jordanian government, and interpret it in terms of strengthening the Christian Arab presence and witness in Jordan and Palestine. In this sense we also welcome the recent decisions of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate under the leadership of His Beatitude Theophilos III, to accelerate the process of satisfying the request formulated by the Arab faithful of the Patriarchate.

In a period where the WCC is convening an international peace conference in Amman (17-21 June) calling the churches worldwide to coordinate their actions towards ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and working for a just peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, this decision might prove counter-productive for all peace initiatives and distract from the goals of this conference.

Although fully aware that your government’s decision does not interfere in the internal affairs of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem in terms of judging the legality of His Beatitude’s election by the Holy Synod of that church, we still believe that recognizing His Beatitude as the Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine is of utmost importance for the good governance of the institutions related to that Patriarchate.

We therefore, very respectfully and kindly ask your honourable government to reconsider its decision so that peace and harmony within the church prevail again. Thanking you in advance for the positive attention that you will give to this special request, we look forward to have a fruitful consultation in Amman next June.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Letter to His Excellency Mr Ahmet Üzümcü, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, permanent representative of Turkey to the United Nations Office in
Geneva, regarding concern about killings and other threats directed at members and leaders of religious minorities in Turkey, 1 May 2007

Excellency,

We would like to register with your Government our serious concern about killings and other threats directed at members and leaders of religious minorities in Turkey. Like many people in Turkey and beyond, the news of acts of violence causes us deep revulsion. News of threats brings added dismay. The fact that these crimes appear to be motivated by hatred for whole groups of people adds to the sense of alarm in churches and among people of goodwill around the world.

The savage murders of three Christians in Malatya on 18 April are the latest tragedy. Words do not suffice to describe such hateful deaths. The victims and their families have been remembered in prayer in parishes in many countries. Likewise, churches and citizens are watching the authorities in the case to see that justice is done and that further crimes are prevented.

The killing of the Armenian writer, Hrant Dink, is fresh in many minds, as is the vast public display of solidarity by Turkish citizens of all kinds in the streets of Istanbul – a moving tribute to a man of integrity, courage and honour.

We must add to this regrettable list by remembering Father Andrea Santano, the Catholic priest shot in the back at his church in Trabzon last year.

It is disturbing to note that such killings are usually preceded by threats and violence against the individual who is at risk as a member of a religious minority. Accordingly, we note here incidents of this kind reported last year: young men shouting abuses at Syrian Orthodox parishioners in Diyarbakir; protesters disrupting a Greek Orthodox mass at a historic church in Bergama; a Protestant leader in Adana beaten and threatened with death if he did not renounce his faith; a similar group attack on a Catholic friar in Izmir.

"We are deeply sorry for the increase, in recent times, of provocative actions of terror which threaten the peaceful integrity of Turkey," His All Holiness Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, said after the latest event, in Malatya.

The explicit condemnation of such killings by government officials including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an important positive factor when it occurs. We are also aware and grateful that your Government supports the freedom of religion stipulated by the constitution of Turkey. Tolerance among people of different faiths is evident in Turkish society and religion is appreciated as a matter of conscience in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. These and other developments of recent years are building blocks for strategies to reduce hate crimes and enhance human rights.

Yet in recent months there have also been news reports of plots against the lives of the heads of two World Council of Churches member churches in Turkey – His All Holiness Bartholomew, the ecumenical patriarch, and His Beatitude Mesrob II, the Armenian patriarch of Istanbul and All Turkey.

Religious communities that face recurring threats to life and limb also face other unresolved matters concerning the property and services of minorities. The World Council of
Churches has periodically taken public note of long-standing governmental claims and actions against church property. These cases prevent church lands and buildings from being used for purposes that include religious education, schooling for children, housing for orphans, and the care and healing of the sick.

In raising these specific issues for Christian churches, your Excellency, we note that the rights of one religious minority are inseparable from the general rights and the well-being of other religious minority groups.

Progress toward addressing these concerns will help to complete a new chapter in Turkey's unique history. Current trends in the Middle East, and between the region and the world, point to the contribution that the nation and society of Turkey can make toward peace in a pluralistic world. Turkey's rich cultural heritage and diversity are an asset in this regard.

The rule of law must be evident, however, through actions at all levels of government. The practice of tolerance must be a public goal.

We look to see respect for human dignity – socially, politically and religiously – reflected in the treatment of churches and other religious minorities.

Acts that lead to violence must be treated by the authorities as serious crimes. Authorities must bring the perpetrators of violence to justice under the law, while also preventing further crimes.

We look to the appropriate governmental authorities to ensure the respect for human rights and for the rule of law which safeguards all citizens, including these whose cases we raise here.

We thank you for your attention, look forward to a response to these important concerns and welcome opportunities for discussion of the same.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
cc: His All Holiness Bartholomew, ecumenical patriarch
His Beatitude Mesrob II, Armenian patriarch of Istanbul and All Turkey

Public lecture delivered by WCC general secretary on “Hope and the healing of memories” and response to a lecture on “Prisoner abuse: from Abu Ghraib to the passion of the Christ” at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin, Ireland, 30 April-1 May 2007

Healing wounded memories is an essential feature of the search for Christian unity, World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia told participants at a public seminar in Dublin, Ireland on Monday 30 April. A day earlier, in a sermon preached in Edinburgh, Scotland, he affirmed that churches are recognizing that "without each other, none of them is being fully church".

Having just been through the most violent century in human history, humanity is entering the third millennium with lots of wounded memories. That is why, Kobia explained, "Christian unity will become meaningful both to Christians and non-Christians alike if the church takes the lead in healing and reconciling memories".
Speaking at the Irish School of Ecumenics, the WCC general secretary proposed a model of reconciliation that is "not cheap" but entails "an attitude of repentance and a will for reparation". Kobia affirmed that churches "are also called to initiate and promote acts of forgiveness in each place and in all places," for it is forgiveness that creates "the possibility of starting afresh and beginning something new".

To avoid the "inherent danger" that reconciliation be "trivialized and stripped of its fundamental value," churches need to deal with it as both "a theological and a social category". This "integrated approach" must take into account both the biblical understanding of reconciliation and forgiveness and the "sometimes too complex" nature of today's conflicts.

There is no monopoly on Christ's presence

"One key to the search for unity is the discovery that Christ is present in each believer... and in each church," the WCC general secretary told worshippers at Edinburgh's Livingston Ecumenical Parish, the oldest ecumenical parish in Scotland, on Sunday, 29 April. "This awareness is the starting point for the whole ecumenical movement!" he proclaimed.

In spite of the unity that all Christians have in Christ – a unity "from which we cannot escape" – the church "has become divided into a myriad separate churches". According to Kobia, while many of the differences "enrich the body of Christ", others are "destructive divisions".

This is the case when churches "do not recognize baptisms performed by others"; when they "compete in launching mission programmes" or "duplicate programmes and work of all sorts"; and most notoriously, when their members "cannot share the eucharist with one another".

While divisions "contradict the nature of the church itself as the one body of Christ," churches are called to recognize that "no church has a monopoly on Christ's presence and power," Kobia declared. And shared some examples of churches who are recognizing that "without each other, none of them is being fully church".

We belong to each other

Kobia returned to the theme of reconciliation and collaboration between churches in a meditation during worship at Edgehill Theological College in Belfast, Ireland, on 1 May.

Recalling the response to the tsunami that hit Asia and parts of Africa in December 2004, he highlighted that "churches in the affected countries were among the first to move in to care for the people in partnership with people of other faiths". Churches abroad "ready to support efforts at rehabilitation and reconstruction" joined them, he reported.

"The message was loud and clear: 'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it'," Kobia said, quoting the Apostle Paul's words. "At all times, not just in times of such a tragedy, we need to recognize that we belong to each other," he added.

Global migration and new ecclesial realities, address by WCC general secretary, Cardiff, United Kingdom, 25 April 2007

Migration is one of the main features of the changing global context, with decisive consequences for the church and the ecumenical movement locally and globally. More people throughout the world are being forced to leave their homes because of wars, human rights
violations, dire poverty or environmental destruction. In the coming years, ecological migrants will increase in number because of the effects of climate change. But more than any other cause, wars lead to the massive displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, as happened to the Lebanese as a consequence of Israel’s military actions. While several hundred thousand Lebanese were able to leave their country for Syria, Cyprus and other countries, over half a million Lebanese were displaced from their homes but remained within the country. These internally displaced people are often more vulnerable to violence and face more difficulties in accessing humanitarian assistance than those who were able to make it across an international border. While television screens were filled with pictures of some foreigners being evacuated from Lebanon, there were many other foreigners in Lebanon whose governments were unable to support their evacuation. Tens of thousands of Asian domestic workers, for example, were forced to remain in the country.

The war in Iraq has forced some two million Iraqis to flee to neighboring countries while another two million are displaced within their own country. This is the largest displacement in the Middle East since the 1948 Palestinian refugee crisis. Presently one in eight Iraqis is displaced. Most of the refugees are in Syria and Jordan, but they face restrictions on employment and access to social services. Many Iraqi refugee children, for example, are not in schools. Other governments in the region have closed their borders to Iraqis fleeing the violence of their homeland. Within Iraq, the internally displaced people are particularly vulnerable and both Iraqi and international NGOs find it increasingly difficult to provide humanitarian assistance because of the security situation. The Iraqi Red Crescent is the only organization working throughout the country and around Christmas, a number of their staff were kidnapped by extremist organizations. Some of the Iraqi governorates have refused to allow Iraqis from other parts of the country to enter their communities. The displacement of Iraqis is changing the demographic “geography” of the country as people are leaving mixed neighborhoods for ones where there is a majority of a particular sect. The consequences of Iraqi displacement will be felt for many years, perhaps even decades.

From rural to urban areas, from poor to emerging economies in the South, from countries of the South to countries of the North – migration has become a trend impacting most societies worldwide. The number of international migrants has increased to more than 175 million in 2005, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Today, one in fifty people on earth are living outside their home countries, while an estimated 25 million have been forcibly displaced within their own countries. At the same time that globalization is leading to freer movement of capital, goods and services, walls are going up to limit the movement of people across borders. As the “human side” of globalization, the phenomenon of migration means that virtually all societies are multicultural and multi-religious.

In June 2006, the United Nations issued a report on international migration and development that explored how migration is helping countries expand their economies, meet shortages of workers and lift themselves from poverty. According to the report, migration is no longer a one-way ticket to geographic and cultural isolation. Today, immigrants are able to contribute not only to their new countries, as they have always done, but can more easily help their countries of origin as well. The vast flows of remittances – which last year exceeded $230 billion and now dwarf international aid – are only the most tangible expression of this. In addition, immigrants are using their skills and savings to help their home countries grow, even when they remain abroad. At the same time, the UN report acknowledges that migration has many negative consequences – political, economic and social – and calls on governments to strengthen instruments to protect the rights of migrants.
Migration is a global issue, affecting societies around the world and continues to grow as a consequence of the increased integration of world economies over the past decade. However, Migration from Pacific countries is changing the nature of island societies and local economies. South Africa deported more than 50,000 irregular Zimbabwean immigrants in the first six months of 2006 as floods of people fled economic collapse in their country. Much of the domestic policy debate in the United States this year focused on immigration reform. Migrants from North Africa set out in small boats for European shores in record numbers, provoking political crises for countries such as Malta and Spain. The increasing emigration of Christians from the Middle East has long been a concern to churches in the region. Periodic crackdowns in Thailand lead to the deportation of tens of thousands of Burmese migrants who have come to Thailand because they cannot survive at home.

In 2005, the WCC central committee meeting before the Porto Alegre assembly addressed these realities through a public issue statement on “Practicing hospitality in an era of new forms of migration”. This document summarizes well the impact of globalization and the post-11 September 2001 concerns for security in regard to the movement of people. The document points to both negative and positive consequences for sending and receiving countries. While remittances have far and away surpassed development aid, Africa already has lost one-third of its educated and skilled labour. “Brain drain” has severe consequences for countries like Ghana that lost to migration 60% of its graduating doctors in the 1980s. Today we can ask: how many of the skilled professionals who fled Lebanon in July and August 2006 will return to help re-build their country? And we can only speculate on the long-term consequences for Iraq of the departure of much of the country’s educated middle class. Receiving countries benefit from the skills and contributions of immigrants. Nevertheless, some politicians blame immigrants for unemployment, crime and other problems of their economies, thus fuelling racism and xenophobia in their societies, often with severe consequences for migrants who are subject to harassment and even murder.

Addressing the emerging trends of migration, our WCC statement draws attention to the trafficking of women and children. It says, “600,000 to 800,000 human beings are trafficked every year with annual profits of US$ 8-10 billion.” In many cases the marginalization and exploitation especially of trafficked women and children, but also of adult men, amount to new forms of slavery. Because of their “illegal” status, they are left without any protection and support.

The document highlights the devastating impact of military interventions and war, but also emphasizes that governmental concerns with security and migration have led to unacceptable forms of detention, imprisonment and forced deportation of refugees and asylum seekers in a number of countries. I myself have witnessed the inhuman situation in a detention camp in Australia which, at least at that time, provided a parallel with prison conditions in Guantanamo Bay. The statement concludes with very clear and practical recommendations to the churches on how to offer hospitality to those who arrive in their countries, to combat stigma and discrimination in their societies and to challenge government policies.

New ecclesial realities

The 2005 WCC central committee statement provides a solid basis to engage with the consequences of migration in our societies. It is a real public issue statement. Migration, however, also has a very deep impact on the churches themselves with important challenges to their ecumenical relationships both locally and globally. And it is for this reason that I have decided to make it the central theme of my report.
Intra-national or international migration flows have an impact on the churches from which migrants leave as well as on the churches in their host countries. This is most obviously manifest in the increasing number of new diaspora churches in all countries and regions of the world. The recent multiplication of Orthodox churches all over the world is worth mentioning particularly, as is the remarkable presence in Northern countries of many churches of African origin. Diaspora experience modifies both the “host” and the “guest” churches, and their customary theological or ecclesiological approaches. This is particularly visible in large cities, where migrant churches provide a haven and home for the most vulnerable, offering material support, cultural space, an affirmation of identity and the opportunity for religious expression. In many countries, the growth of such churches is significantly changing the religious and ecumenical scene.

Geneva is a good example. For centuries, Geneva has attracted substantial numbers of foreigners – refugees, business people, employees of international organizations. But in recent decades the figures have drastically increased. According to government statistics the number of people in Geneva of African origin and from Eastern Europe has doubled between 1989 and 2002. Those from Asia and Latin America have increased about 50%. More than 50% of residents in the city of Geneva now come from abroad.

The official figures, however, cover only those people who have been officially registered. They do not take into account the many persons without legal status – immigrants looking for a job, asylum seekers and others. This great diversity of people is also mirrored in church life. There are more than sixty Protestant communities of different origin in Geneva. While for many language, culture or ethnic background is the common denominator, others bring together people from different countries. A number of them are bilingual and provide simultaneous French-English interpretation. Some worship in the churches and community centres of the Protestant Church of Geneva, but the majority of them have found their own spaces – sometimes just a garage or a room in a basement. At the same time, other churches of Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition have come into existence as have new religious communities of Muslim, Jewish and other faiths. It is interesting to note that most members of conservative evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Geneva are foreigners.

While migrant churches are being established throughout the world, there are many cases where churches in host countries have opened their doors to migrants and have been transformed in the process. Almost all clergy ordained in the Methodist Church of Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, are Pacific Islanders. The more conservative social theologies of Pacific Christians are changing the policies and practices of churches in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Waldensian Church in Italy now has many more African members than Italian ones as a result of a deliberate decision by the church to welcome immigrants and to be transformed in the process. St. Andrew’s Church in Cairo has similarly been profoundly changed by the active participation of Sudanese Christians in its church life. For many US mainline churches, growth in church membership is happening primarily through increasing Hispanic and Asian participation.

There are varying degrees of integration of migrants into the life of host churches. In some cases, churches arrange parallel services for migrants so that they may worship in their own languages. Thus, some congregations in the US will have several worship services on Sunday: in English, Spanish, Korean and Kiswahili, for example. In some cases, migrants establish mission churches, reaching out to English-speaking communities.
Of course, migration is bound to change local ecumenism and its organizational expressions. The same is true for the national level. It has been quite some time since the Nigerian-founded Church of the Lord (Aladura) joined the British Council of Churches, today’s Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. But there are now developments where, in Switzerland for instance, churches of people of African origin have formed their own umbrella organization (Conference of the African Churches in Switzerland) that is now looking for membership in the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches. The Conference of European Churches has received similar requests from Korean churches and churches of African immigrants. They all say: “We are no longer foreigners. We live together with you in Europe, in this country, in this city. We see ourselves as integral to the one Church, and we wish to become a more visible expression of the Church of Christ in this place.” The changing ecclesial realities in Europe demands for churches to remain “united in diversity” or “being church together.”

There are encouraging examples from various cities and countries of how the process of integration and ecumenical relationships between different churches may be fostered. I am sure that many of you representing churches from around the globe are in a position to share positive examples showing where the Holy Spirit wants to lead us with these new developments. But we also know that in the process of mutual encounter and growing together, old wounds of history, racism and cultural differences must be addressed. Historically, colonialism accompanied European migration into all regions of the world. People were driven from their lands, their livelihoods were undermined, and many were killed. Colonial conquest and the slave trade deeply changed the ethnic composition of this world in a violent and radical way, and this has left its mark even on the churches. To this day, the consequences of slavery and racism impact on relationships between churches; for instance, in the USA this history necessarily has been addressed in the process of uniting churches. The impact of migration today confronts churches with racism and xenophobia in new but similarly violent forms.

Churches which seek to open themselves to people of different ethnic origins and cultural backgrounds often find the process to be more difficult than anticipated. Migrants bring with them different theological traditions, different liturgies and different music that can enrich churches – but also may divide them. Philip Jenkins argues, in “The Next Christendom”, that Christian migrants from the South tend to be more socially conservative and more evangelical than the mainstream churches in the North. They often gravitate towards evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the North, thus strengthening the more conservative evangelical churches and, at least indirectly, weakening certain ecumenical initiatives.

Churches, like the societies of which they are a part, are grappling with the questions of assimilation versus integration. It is easier for a church to welcome migrants as long as they adapt to the traditions and policies established by the host church. This is assimilation. Integration, on the other hand, implies a willingness to accept the contributions of migrants to change the church and to create something new. This is more difficult for many to accept. It has been argued that one of the reasons migrants establish their own churches is because they don’t feel that the established churches are ready to change to accommodate their needs.

The church of the stranger
Throughout the Bible and in the early church, people were called by God to love and offer hospitality to strangers and exiles (Lev. 19: 33-34; Rom. 15:7). The Bible contains many stories of
people on the move, from Abram/Abraham and Sarah/Sarai to the Holy Family. Christ’s call to welcome the stranger (Matt. 25:31-45) is central to the gospel message. Welcoming the stranger is not optional for Christians. Nor is it conditional. Christ didn’t call for Christians to welcome those strangers whose papers are in order or who speak our language. Given the realities of migration today, welcoming strangers is not just about “being nice” to those who arrive on one’s doorstep. In today’s world, welcoming strangers is a justice issue, and often a political statement.

The church therefore should strengthen its capacity to practice hospitality in an era of new forms of migration. The church must be a strong advocate and defender of the right of people to move freely within their own nation and leave their home and live elsewhere in search of their God given right to life with dignity. We welcome the stranger with solidarity from the stand point of Christ and a common desire to seek justice and accept God’s word. “I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Those who fear him and do what is right are acceptable to him, no matter what race they belong to.” (Acts 10:34-35) “I cannot therefore overemphasize the important fact that as a church we have a responsibility to ensure that public opinion is properly informed on the realities and true situations in the country of origin for the migrants. The threat to life, the poverty level, the environmental damages, the lack of social services and medicines, the tragedies that affect them and the risks involved in returning to their countries of origin. This step is crucial in order to guard against the rise of new forms of xenophobic action and racism that can happen in our communities, churches and countries. Secondly making migrants, who are our brothers and sisters, by faith becoming scapegoats for social, political and economic difficulties within the local situations.

It would be wrong to deny that welcoming strangers often goes hand in hand with a deep challenge to one’s own tradition and identity as a Christian and as a church. Unfortunately, it is not automatic that the experience of difference translates into the embrace of diversity and the sharing of different gifts. It requires a conscious choice to build relationships of trust and to be ready to change in the common encounter. Very often, difference is further deepened by lines drawn between differing communities that might even justify racist exclusion and oppression. The community that is called to share the bread and the wine with each other, and to follow Jesus in his ministry of healing and reconciliation, must not aggravate divisions; rather, it should become a bridge-builder. It ought to provide space for those who are different from one another to experience that they all belong to one humanity meant by God to share life on this planet.

We as Christians and as church must speak migration with an added perspective of gospel values. We recognize the need for governments to ensure the security of its people and nation. However, as Christians we should also look at every human being as an individual deserving to be treated with dignity and respect. As a church our response to migration should not only be determined by the prevailing laws but that it should challenge us to desire to overcome every form of injustice, discrimination and contempt shown to other people as every one of us is in the image of God. We should emphasize the fact that our response to migration is rooted in scripture and the social doctrine of the church. “When an alien resides with you in your land do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God.” (Lev 19:33-34) The World Council of Churches being an ecumenical body and seeking the unity of churches and human kind wishes to use the biblical foundation of welcoming the stranger to challenge churches to do their part. Offering hospitality and a way to receive those who come to our community with respect and dignity and strengthening the human relationships. The Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, of which CTBI, is a member, is a cooperating partner on migration, refugees and work against
racism, and this cooperation includes work with the Middle East Council of Churches through
the Amman Process.

Over the centuries, Christian communities were ready to help people on the move. This
was vital in times of persecution (1 Peter 4:9). Widows and deaconesses practiced hospitality
(1 Timothy 5:10) and served strangers even in other countries. St Verena, a nurse from Egypt, went
to Switzerland in the 3rd century. There were St Anysia in Thessaloniki (3rd century), Olympias
in Constantinople (4th century), St Melany from Rome (5th century), Juliette the Merciful in
Russia (16th century). At the edge of the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia, St Basil began to
construct a group of buildings destined to receive travelers and sick persons. In many other
places similar houses were established in a ministry known as xenodochia.

Many churches remember that their ancestors had to leave their villages, cities and
countries for the sake of their faith; they were expelled, or fled from war and genocide. In many
parts of the world, there are churches that have existed and continue to exist as churches of
refugees and migrants. There are also others who remember how their church received and
welcomed these refugees into their midst. The 19th-century abolitionist movement in the US and
Canada gave refuge to slaves on their way into freedom. Churches in Europe joined in helping
people to escape from Nazi dictatorship and the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Today, churches in
South America are working together to move to safety Colombians whose lives are in danger.

The challenge to our fellowship

Churches, from the very beginning of their existence, have built diaconal services for
refugees and migrants. But they have always understood that the real challenge goes deeper and
is indeed about sharing in solidarity the common life in Christ. Unavoidably, the situation of
migrants puts the question to each of us: Who is my neighbour? Diaconia in this existential
context reveals the deeper meaning of the koinonia, the fellowship in Christ.

The fifteenth-century Orthodox icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rubliev identifies the
divine communion between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with the communion of the
three strangers who were received and fed by Abraham in the spirit of genuine hospitality
(Genesis 18; Hebrews 13:2). As was expressed in the July 2004 Faith and Order Commission
meeting, “through the practice of true hospitality, which transcends somehow the distinction
between ‘host’ and ‘guest’, a mutual transformation takes place.”

Let me conclude my reflections by posing a number of questions: Does such true
hospitality in the shared household of God provide us with an interim goal at the present stage
of ecumenism? Can there be among us genuine hospitality, which helps to overcome the wounds
of the past, to discover each other in new ways and to build the relationships and the community
that will help us, finally, to discover and live out our oneness in Christ? Are we willing to take the
necessary risks? Practicing true hospitality involves recognizing our own vulnerability and being
open to transformation. “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to
strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those
who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as
though you yourselves were being tortured” (Heb 13:1-3). The process of welcoming strangers
also leads us to look at our own societies in new ways and to see the racism and xenophobia that
may not otherwise apparent to us. Standing with migrants is politically unpopular in most regions
of the world. The risks are very real, yet so is our calling.

Migration is a complex phenomenon which affects our societies, our churches and our
ecumenical movement. This issue merits further reflection and discussion by churches locally
and globally. In the WCC programme plans we are calling for public hearings in different regions this year and a major global consultation on “Migration and the changing ecclesial landscape” in 2008. Our initiative will be greatly enriched by input from different parts of the world, and I welcome the participation of the churches in Wales.

Message sent to Rt Rev. Dr Mvume Dandala, AACC general secretary, on Muslim Christian leaders peace initiative on Somalia, 3-4, February 2007, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 26 January 2007

Dear Mvume,

I greet you warmly in the name of the World Council of Churches on the occasion of the conference of Muslim and Christian leaders Peace Initiative on Somalia.

Caring for the wellbeing of all humankind is an important dimension of Christian discipleship in these times of violence and conflict. The vision of a world of justice and peace is the corner stone of our Gospel. While perfecting of a just peace is beyond the possibility of human achievement, it is within the power of the Sovereign God of Love who has created one whole, indivisible human family in a covenant of peace. We as human beings are committed to this vision of peace.

Unfortunately, ours is a broken and fractured world because of violence and conflict. This situation makes it imperative for people of faith to come together in initiatives that are geared to promote healing and reconciliation within and between communities. The All Africa Conference of Churches has taken a significant step forward in promoting interreligious dialogue for peace in Somalia, a country whose people have suffered tremendously as a result of intermittent wars since the early 1990s. Inter clan wars have taken the lives of an estimated 3000 people and 1.5 million have been rendered homeless and forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

The World Council of Churches remains strongly committed to engagement and dialogue between faith communities on issues and in struggles for justice and peace. Today more than ever before there is a call for an intensification of the dialogue of religions and cultures. In the case of Somalia it is a dialogue of life for the future generation of the country. We hope this initiative of interreligious cooperation between the people of the two communities will lead to building a much-needed culture of peace.

We pray for the success of the meeting and take this opportunity to assure you of our prayers and full support.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Expression of concern on religious tension in Palu, Central Sulawesi
Letter to Rev. Dr Richard Daulay, General Secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, 18 October, 2006

Dear Rev. Dr. Richard Daulay,

The World Council of Churches is deeply shocked and dismayed by the news of the killing of Rev. Irianto Kongholi MTh, General Secretary of the Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah
The cowardly murder of Rev. Kongholi in Palu, Central Sulawesi, is indicative of the communal tensions and sectarian strife that continue to plague this region.

The Christian-Muslim tension and violence that started in 1998, having reached its peak in early 2000, seemed to subside for a while. However, with the execution last month of three Christians for their role in inciting inter-communal violence, the tension between the two communities has been revived. Tempers have flared on both sides and the authorities have done little to defuse it.

The Executive Board of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) has rightly called on the Government seriously to address the causes of tension and conflict between the two communities. It is the responsibility of the Government of Indonesia to take necessary steps to apprehend the culprit and ensure that justice is done. This is the only way to restore the confidence of the Christian minority in the law-enforcement agencies and the judicial system of the country.

The World Council of Churches supports the call of the Executive Board of the CCI and appeals to the people of Palu, Poso and Tentena to keep calm and make every effort to ensure harmonious relations within their society.

We request the Executive Board of CCI to communicate our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Assuring you of our continuing prayers and support,
Yours in Christ,
William Temu
Acting General Secretary

Condolences on death of Fr Boulos Iskander
Letter to H.H. Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, 17 October, 2006

Your Holiness,

The World Council of Churches is thankful to the Archbishop of Jazirah and Euphrates, Eusthasius Matta Roham, for sharing the news of the tragic death of Father Boulos Iskander. The Council is appalled by the circumstances in which the killing of an innocent servant of God was carried out. The incident reflects the depravity to which the situation in Mosul has deteriorated. The killing of Fr Boulos is a senseless crime that cannot be justified in any circumstances. It neither benefits anyone nor does it promote the cause of any religion. The World Council of Churches has always been an advocate of tolerance and remains committed to inter-religious harmony.

Such a heinous crime makes it obligatory on all Iraqis of good will who, we are certain, are many that such an incident is not allowed to take place in the future. It brings a bad name to the country. The Iraqi police and the coalition forces who are there to maintain law and order must ensure that every possible step is taken to secure the safety and protection of all human lives in Iraq.

The World Council of Churches calls on its members in the Middle East as well as in the other regions to remember Fr Boulos Iskander and his family in their prayers.

We ask Your Holiness to please convey our condolences to the family of the bereaved.
Election of the new UN Secretary General
Letter to H.E. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General-Elect United Nations, 16 October, 2006

Dear Mr Secretary General-Elect,

We are delighted by the news of your election as Secretary General of the United Nations and extend to you our warm congratulations.

The World Council of Churches has followed with deep interest the developments at the United Nations since its inception, having itself come into being as a fellowship of the Churches around the world in the year 1948, with similar objectives of promoting international peace and security, fundamental human rights, practice of tolerance and promotion of economic and social advancement of all peoples.

You come into your new high office with a rich experience spread over a broad spectrum of international concerns ranging from Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to the reunification of the Korean Peninsula and its people. You bring to your office the benefit of being an international diplomat as well as a renowned civil servant who will pay equal attention to the needs of all member states of the United Nations, be they big or small.

Sir, you take the mantle of your office at a most difficult moment in the life of the United Nations Organization, and indeed, at a time of unprecedented complexity in world affairs. The expectations of the role you will play are not only high, but also contradictory. In these circumstances, we assure you of our prayers and support.

One of the important tasks that face you is the reform of the United Nations. This, no doubt will receive your urgent attention and action. The international community has in recent times expressed its concern about the urgency of carrying out these reforms.

Commenting on the need for reform of the United Nations, the statement of the IX WCC Assembly at Porto Alegre in February 2006, called on all states to ensure the ongoing participation of civil society organizations and faith communities in the work of the UN, at local and international levels as a means of encouraging transparency and accountability as well as means of availing itself of essential expertise and information. The role of religions and religious organizations in addressing issues of security, human rights, development and the growing interplay between religion and politics should be particularly taken note of.

It would be an honour for me to extend to you in person our congratulations and to exchange views about how the World Council of Churches and its more than 340 member churches can assist and support you in your new responsibilities.

My colleagues in our Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) in New York will be in contact with your office early in the new-year to consult with respect to such an opportunity, at the United Nations Headquarters, or on the occasion of an early visit by you to Geneva.

May our Lord’s blessings be with you as you prepare to assume your new responsibilities.
Message of condolences on the death of Bishop Alberto Ramento

Letter to the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and the WCC member churches in the Philippines, 10 October, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The World Council of Churches has received with deep shock and grief the news of the brutal stabbing of Bishop Alberto Ramento, of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. Bishop Ramento was a soft-spoken, kind person and a church leader who led a simple life. He was committed to the poor and marginalized of his diocese in the rural area. Being close to his people he was aware of and understood their sufferings, trials and tribulations. Many a time he came to their rescue when they were victimized and harassed by the security forces. The position he took in defence of his congregation was not appreciated by those in power and he was frequently warned to change his ways. He was often subjected to death threats. In one of his statements the Bishop said, “I know they are going to kill me next. But never will I abandon my duty to God and my ministry to the people.” Little did he realise that soon he would succumb to his prophetic words. He died in harness while serving God and his people.

The attention of the government was drawn several times to the increase in the spiral of violence and extra-judicial killings in the rural areas, but it did little to redress the situation. Despite protests and demonstrations, the security forces of the Government of the Philippines continued to indulge in victimization, torture and extra-judicial killings on the pretext of fighting the terrorist threat in the region. These wanton acts of killing and destruction are carried out with complete impunity by the officials of the army and para-military forces, sometimes with the implicit support of the government. Little has been done to arrest this trend despite protests by churches, both within and outside the country.

It is against this background that the WCC Central Committee, meeting in Switzerland 30 August to 6 September 2006, unequivocally condemned the extrajudicial killings and expressed its condolences to the families of the victims. It also called on the Government of the Philippines to disband death squads, private militias and para-military forces operating outside the official chain of government command and to hold accountable any members of the military found to be indulging in these illegal acts. Finally the statement issued by the Central Committee called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into these extra-judicial killings.

The World Council of Churches assures you that it will continue to monitor these developments and will be ready to act with partners in bringing these atrocities to the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The World Council of Churches requests you to please convey our heartfelt condolences to the family of the late Bishop Alberto Ramento.

Yours in Christ,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary
Recognition by Israel of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilus III
Letter H.E. Mr Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, 29 September, 2006

Your Excellency,

I write to convey the deep concern of the World Council of Churches and request remedial action at the long delay by the Government of Israel in recognizing His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilus III as the head of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. More than one year has passed since his election to that post. The other governments involved in this matter have fully recognized his patriarchy.

In addition to this unjustified delay, Your Excellency’s administration continues to recognize the duly deposed former patriarch, now monk, Irineos, in contravention of the actions of the legitimate religious representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem who hold the authority to elect and install the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem. It is only their Holy Synod – not the Government of Israel – which determines who is the legitimate leader of that church.

The recently concluded meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches took up the Israeli Government’s action which is tantamount to interference by the state in the affairs of the church. The Central Committee has asked me, as General Secretary, to communicate their concern to you. The World Council of Churches calls for the prompt and unqualified recognition of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilus III as the primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem by the Government of Israel.

I would end this letter with the observation that meaningful and appropriate demonstrations of respect for religion do honour to those in positions of power in every place. Nowhere is this more the case than in the divided city of Jerusalem and among communities around the world that look to it in faith and hope.

Yours sincerely,
Rev Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Minute on Kosovo
WCC Central Committee, Geneva, 30 August-6 September, 2006

Deliberation by the international community on the future status of Kosovo is presently underway and expected to near completion by the year’s end 2006. Kosovo cannot continue to survive in a state of indetermination. The realization of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kosovo must begin, realistically, with peaceful co-existence.

All those who call Kosovo their home must be permitted to return, regain rightful residence, and all must learn, again, to live side-by-side in peace and in harmony as good neighbours. Then, once familiar and comfortable with each other’s presence, they must begin integrating into all phases of life, especially in cities, which at present are almost entirely mono-ethnic and mono-religious. This will serve to define the beginnings of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

On this basis the international community can implement a sustained effort toward an enduring and just peace, while securing freedom and tolerance in a truly multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kosovo.
To that end, we support the leaders and senior representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community of Kosovo, the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Evangelical Church and the Jewish Community gathered on 2–3 May, 2006 at the historical Pec Patriarchate Monastery for an Interfaith Conference on Peaceful Coexistence and Dialogue. The Conference was held at the initiative of religious representatives in Kosovo, hosted by the Serbian Orthodox Church, organized and sponsored by Norwegian Church Aid and accompanied and co-moderated by the World Conference on Religions and Peace.

Therefore, given this background, the World Council of Churches Central Committee, meeting in Geneva between 30 August and 6 September, 2006:

- **Encourages** the religious leaders of Kosovo to continue to work for reconciliation in order to foster healing and harmonious relations in a society that has been torn asunder by violence, hatred and conflict; and to ask all relevant authorities to support efforts for reconciliation and;

- **Commits** the WCC, in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), to continue to monitor the situation on the maintaining of human rights and religious freedom, particularly of religious minorities, and the preservation of cultural and religious patrimonial heritage in Kosovo, and in this connection to keep member churches informed of developments and express support for reconciliation.

**Message of condolences on the death of Bishop Alberto Ramento**

*Letter to the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and the WCC member churches in the Philippines, 10 October, 2006*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The World Council of Churches has received with deep shock and grief the news of the brutal stabbing of Bishop Alberto Ramento, of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. Bishop Ramento was a soft-spoken, kind person and a church leader who led a simple life. He was committed to the poor and marginalized of his diocese in the rural area. Being close to his people he was aware of and understood their sufferings, trials and tribulations. Many a time he came to their rescue when they were victimized and harassed by the security forces. The position he took in defence of his congregation was not appreciated by those in power and he was frequently warned to change his ways. He was often subjected to death threats. In one of his statements the Bishop said, “I know they are going to kill me next. But never will I abandon my duty to God and my ministry to the people.”

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The attention of the government was drawn several times to the increase in the spiral of violence and extra-judicial killings in the rural areas, but it did little to redress the situation. Despite protests and demonstrations, the security forces of the Government of the Philippines continued to indulge in victimization, torture and extra-judicial killings on the pretext of fighting the terrorist threat in the region. These wanton acts of killing and destruction are carried out with complete impunity by the officials of the army and para-military forces, sometimes with the
implicit support of the government. Little has been done to arrest this trend despite protests by churches, both within and outside the country.

It is against this background that the WCC Central Committee, meeting in Switzerland 30 August to 6 September 2006, unequivocally condemned the extrajudicial killings and expressed its condolences to the families of the victims. It also called on the Government of the Philippines to disband death squads, private militias and para-military forces operating outside the official chain of government command and to hold accountable any members of the military found to be indulging in these illegal acts. Finally the statement issued by the Central Committee called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into these extra-judicial killings.

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The World Council of Churches requests you to please convey our heartfelt condolences to the family of the late Bishop Alberto Ramento.

Yours in Christ,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

**Appeal for respect of right to religious freedom**
*Letter to H.E. Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, 2 August, 2006*

Your Excellency,

It was around two years ago that the World Council of Churches (WCC) Faith and Order Plenary Commission met in Kuala Lumpur. This was a historic event in the life of the member churches of the WCC. It was the first time ever that the Faith and Order Plenary Commission met in a predominantly Islamic country.

Members of the Commission who came from all over the world were well received with the traditional warmth and affection of the Malaysian society. They were impressed and touched by Your Excellency’s words made in the presentation “Dialogue is the Key to Unity of Multi-religions, Multi-culture and Multi-cultural Societies”. Your reflections on the present state of the world where inter-religious dialogue seems to have become increasingly difficult were well thought through, meaningful and reflective of the impediments in the relationship between Islam and the West. The path of interfaith dialogue can never lead to confrontation.

We urge your Government to create and offer open spaces where frank and creative dialogue can take place, without extremists derailing such positive measures.

We in the World Council of Churches not only treasure your participation in this important ecumenical event, but also your reflections on the need for interreligious dialogue, since inter-religious dialogue has always had high priority on the WCC agenda. It is in pursuance of the WCC’s objectives to break down barriers between people and to promote one human family in justice and peace and uphold the integrity of creation so that all may enjoy the fullness of life. Malaysia is one of the most progressive countries in the region that subscribes to enlightened moderation inherent in a democratic plural society. Malaysia’s progressive and secular-based constitution caters to the needs and aspirations of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.
Your Excellency, the right to freedom of religious liberty has been a major concern of the member churches of the World Council of Churches since its inception. We believe the exercise of religious freedom must always reflect the great diversity of convictions that exist in the world. This right is inseparable from other fundamental human rights. The right to religious freedom is enshrined in most constitutions, as is the case in the Malaysian Constitution, Article 11. We hope and pray that the sanctity of the constitution and the values it promotes will be ensured so that all Malaysian people continue to enjoy the right to religious freedom and liberty, which includes the right to choose one’s religion without let or hindrance. We are heartened by the recent measures of Your Excellency’s Government to ensure religious peace and harmony in the Malaysian society.

We pray that under Your Excellency’s enlightened and able leadership, Malaysia will continue to grow economically and will remain politically strong to face the challenges from forces of retrogression and reaction.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Appeal against the Second Report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba
Letter to H.E. George W. Bush, President of the United States, 10 July, 2006

Dear Mr President,

The Second Report of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba contains a recommendation that US churches and ecumenical agencies should cease to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Cuban children, women and men through the Cuban Council of Churches. This is a matter of serious concern for us. According to an advance copy, the report recommends that the US Government “[l]ighten regulations for the export of humanitarian items, other than agricultural or medical commodities, to ensure that exports are consigned to entities that support independent civil society and are not regime administered or controlled organizations, such as the Cuban Council of Churches.”

In my letter of June 2004 to the Cuban churches, issued after the meeting of the Cuban Pastoral Forum, I regretted the implementation of the recommendations of the First Report of the Commission, as these have tightened the economic embargo and adversely affected the Cuban families in vulnerable situations. As I have expressed several times, the economic embargo goes beyond an economic and political measure, therefore from a humanitarian and ethical perspective, it should be lifted.

We are deeply concerned that the application of these affirmations by the US Government will be a serious affront to the mission of the church. National councils of churches and regional ecumenical organizations, whether in the United States, Canada, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia or the Middle East, have the responsibility to relate to their counterparts throughout the world in pursuance of their common mission tasks.

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of 348 churches from over one hundred countries around the world and has a constituency of more than 560 million Christians. It has had a long history of relationship with the Cuban Council of Churches.

Last year, I had the opportunity to pay a pastoral visit to Cuba to meet WCC member churches in the country. I also visited the headquarters of the Cuban Council of Churches and was able to witness its important work for promoting Christian witness and service and working for human
dignity in the country. During my visit I clearly stated that all Cuban churches should receive equal treatment from the state in order to meet the challenges of their pastoral ministry. Churches, in particular the Protestant churches, are growing in Cuba. This growth entails building of new churches and seminaries and access to the media in order to tackle the pastoral challenges that arise in their service to the Cuban people.

Religious freedom would be threatened if the recommendation is followed through by the US Government. It would also seriously burden the Christian mission of our sister ecumenical bodies in the United States, the Church World Service and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. And, in fact, this US action jeopardizes all ecumenical Christian councils everywhere by setting the precedent that governments can determine who the churches can relate to as true Christian partners and who they cannot.

Ecumenical Christian bodies have a right to determine their ecumenical partners and to engage with them internationally. We strongly feel that it is completely inappropriate for the US Government, or any government, to determine who is and who is not a legitimate national council of churches, and to restrict or deny Christian fellowship and humanitarian assistance to any particular national church council, including the Cuban Council of Churches.

In our judgment such an action would be a gross violation of religious freedom and a remarkably aggressive interference in religious matters for which no government has the right or the spiritual competence.

For these reasons we ask you to place no burden on the ability of US churches and ecumenical organizations to engage in Christian fellowship and to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Cuban brothers and sisters through the Cuban Council of Churches.

We pray God may guide your decisions and bless abundantly the American people,

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

The Mandate and Work of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Joint written statement submitted by non-governmental organizations on the Roster at the First Session of the Human Rights Council, June 2006

As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 November 1981, and the 20th anniversary of the creation of the

mandate on religious intolerance/freedom of religion or belief, it is urgent to pay close attention
to the conclusions and recommendations in the latest report of the Special Rapporteur on
freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir (E/CN.4/2006/5); this could not be considered
sufficiently at the truncated 62nd session of the Commission on Human Rights.

It is to be hoped that the new Human Rights Council will quickly resolve structural and
procedural matters and give its early attention to substantive issues such as are raised in the
reports of special procedures.

Issues of protection remain of grave concern in many countries. There is need for protection
from denial or obstruction of the freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief as well as from the
prohibition or punishment of the exercise of the freedom to change one’s own religion or belief.

In a number of countries there have been insensitive and provocative attempts to legislate
against certain religious symbols, including religious dress; in other countries there have been
attempts to legislate against or punish “conversions” without sufficiently differentiating between
“forced” and “free-will” conversion. There have been worldwide confusions and even acts of
violence over the failure to respect both the freedom of religion and belief and the freedom of
expression. It is necessary to protect convictions based on religion or belief from defamation and
offensive disrespect. It is equally necessary to protect responsible use of freedom of expression
from virulent over-reactions.

Issues of prevention remain an important part of the mandate and vision of the Special
Rapporteur. NGOs which seek to mobilize and sensitize civil society often feel frustrated that
there has been little implementation of preventive measures despite formal encouragements
received from United Nations bodies. For example recommendations from the “International
Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief,
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”, held in Madrid in 2001, have not been sufficiently
followed up and resourced through fully staffed United Nations programmes or through support
for related NGO programmes. It is to be hoped that the United Nations World Programme for
Human Rights Education and the programmes for dialogue among civilizations will bring new
momentum to the task of education for tolerance in the context of ignorance, prejudice and
discrimination based on religion or belief. One must also hope for more follow-up of the “Study
on the Status of Women in the light of Religions and Cultures” by Professor Abdelfattah Amor,
the former Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

During the transition from Commission to Council, the recommendations that followed in situ
visits by several Special Rapporteurs, even when they drew urgent attention to gross or life-
threatening violations, have not been considered, much less implemented. Furthermore, the
reluctance of some governments to issue or renew invitations for in situ visits is a continuing
dilemma, as is the lack of mechanisms to review and require implementation of
recommendations. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has urged increasing
“involvement of the relevant policy makers” and has stressed the need for “a mechanism to
address appropriately the situation of countries that consistently fail to cooperate with the special
procedures mechanisms”. She has also encouraged governments and NGOs to “support the
initiatives that will be taken to organize events that will take stock of achievements since 1981”
and to “identify the provisions of the Declaration that today raise particular concern and
challenge rising trends of religious intolerance”.

The vision and determination shown by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
deserve the full support of governments and NGOs, and call for adequate mechanisms of
investigation, follow-up and, if necessary, enforcement. The Special Rapporteur has shown by
her methods of cooperation with other Special Rapporteurs how inextricably connected with the
freedom of religion or belief are many other fundamental human rights. Similarly in the NGO
community, the NGOs which have signed this statement, many of which work together regularly
in the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief (Geneva), represent a spread of concerns extending beyond freedom of religion or belief to the status of women, the right to education, the rights of the child, and many other issues. However, freedom of religion or belief is a cross-cutting concern that unites us all, as much as it divides many societies. Now, more than ever, the important mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief deserves the support of governments and civil society alike.

Release of hostages
Letter to Mr Douglas Pritchard, Co-Director of the Christian Peacemaker Teams, 23 March, 2006

Dear Mr Pritchard,

It is with great joy that we received the news today of the freedom of the three Christian Peacemaker Team members held in Iraq. We send them, their families and the staff of CPT our best wishes for safe homecomings and reunions with colleagues and loved ones.

At the same time we share in the sorrow surrounding the death of Mr Tom Fox, who paid for his high convictions with his life. Our condolences go out to his family and to the team now freed.

We also pray that amid all the pain and anxiety of this case, those engaged in the violence in Iraq may remember and heed the many voices, both Christian and Muslim, including World Council of Churches member churches in the region and around the world, who made publicly clear that among the many people of faith concerned for peace there are also people called to be peacemakers – and that your team was answering one such calling in Iraq.

May God continue to guide and bless you and your staff, especially in discernment for these times about the witness in your important work.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Statement on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights
WCC 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006

“The violence of terrorism – in all its many forms – is abhorrent to all who believe human life is a gift of God and therefore infinitely precious. Every attempt to intimidate others by inflicting indiscriminate death and injury upon them is to be universally condemned. The answer to terrorism, however, cannot be to respond in kind, for this can lead to more violence and more terror. Instead, a concerted effort of all nations is needed to remove any possible justification for such acts.”

This message, included in the letter of the General Secretary of the WCC to the Secretary General of the United Nations on October 1, 2001, is reaffirmed by the 9th Assembly of the WCC.

In recent times, acts of terror and some aspects of the so-called “war on terror” have introduced new dimensions of violence. In addition, fundamental international laws and norms, including long-established standards of human rights, have come under threat. Terrorists base their actions in absolutist claims. Religion is sometimes used as a pretext for the use of violence as being divinely sanctioned. Assembled as representatives from churches in all corners of the world, we state unequivocally that terror, as indiscriminate acts of violence against
unarmed civilians for political or religious aims, can never be justified legally, theologically or ethically. The WCC’s 9th Assembly supports the stated goal of the Decade to Overcome Violence to “relinquish any theological justification for violence and to affirm a new spirituality of reconciliation and active non-violence”.

Acts of terror are criminal acts, and should be addressed by the use of the instruments of the rule of law, both nationally and internationally. These instruments should be strengthened. The internationally accepted norms and standards of human rights and humanitarian law are the result of common efforts and are specifically meant to deal with situations of crisis and threats to individuals and societies. There is a danger that these instruments will be eroded in the response to terror. It is of critical importance to resist this erosion of rights and liberties.

The “war on terror” has redefined war and relativized international law and human rights norms and standards. A military response to terror may become indiscriminately destructive and cause fear in affected populations. It may provide legitimacy to a violent approach rather than the criminal justice approach which is appropriate in dealing with cases of terror. The international community should cooperate in addressing terrorism, especially by strengthening the International Criminal Court to respond to acts of terror. Terror can only be overcome by the international community that upholds respect for the dignity of human beings and the rule of law.

Churches and all other faith communities are called to respond to the reality of living in a world terrorized by fear. At such a time it is appropriate to point to the rich resources in religion which can guide us to peace and reconciliation. These resources should be utilized when religious communities and religious leaders come together to speak out against all acts of terror and any attempt to legitimize it. They should also take action against any attempt at meeting terror with military means and disrespect for human rights and the rule of law. Religious communities and leaders should be in the forefront of the struggle for a society which is ruled by law and respect for human dignity. Churches have a pivotal role in framing the issues within a culture of dialogue.

Resolution:
The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006:

a) **Adopts** the Statement on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights.

b) **Affirms** the role of the churches to seek peace and pursue it. Violence against unarmed and innocent civilians for political or religious aims by states and non-state actors can never be justified legally, theologically or ethically.

c) **Requests** UN member states with urgency to agree on a clear definition of Terrorism.

d) **Urges** that terrorist acts and threats as well as organizational support for terror be considered as matters of criminal justice. Measures to counter terrorism must be demilitarized and the concept of “war on terror” must be firmly and resolutely challenged by the churches.

e) **Appreciates** the theological work done by the churches on the concept of security and calls for its further development.

f) **Expresses** the need to accompany and support the churches as they respond prophetically and creatively in a pastoral and prophetic mission to assist those that are caught up in fear.

g) **Encourages** interfaith initiatives to mobilize alternate responses to terrorism that do not rely on violence. They should reject all attempts to justify acts of terror as a response to political and social problems and play an active role in the prevention of conflicts by serving as an early warning system and by building a culture of peace for life.

b) **Affirms** that all acts to counter terrorism by the state must remain within the framework of the international rule of law ensuring respect for human rights and humanitarian law. Legislation to counter terrorism should not result in humiliation and violation of human rights and dignities.
It is necessary for the states and the international community to go beyond policing and military cooperation and embrace cooperation in order to address root causes of terrorism.

**Minute on Mutual Respect, Responsibility and Dialogue with People of Other Faiths**

*WCC 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006*

The international community must work together to nurture global respect for diversity, culture and religion. Religious communities and leaders have a special responsibility to promote tolerance and address ignorance about others. Representatives of 348 churches from 120 countries gathered in Porto Alegre, Brazil, at the 9th Assembly of the WCC, reaffirm their commitment to respectful dialogue and cooperation between people of different faiths and other convictions. Through dialogue we learn about the faith of the other and better understand their underlying pain and frustration. We see ourselves through the eyes of the other. We can also better perceive the role of religion in national and international politics.

In a world where we recognize a growing interaction between religion and politics, many conflicts and tensions carry the imprint of religion. The WCC has always encouraged interfaith dialogue both on the global and the local level. We urge member churches and national councils of churches to create platforms for such dialogues. Dialogue should be accompanied by cooperation where faith communities together can address the rest of civil society and governments on issues of common concern, and particularly when religion, holy places, minority rights and human rights are threatened.

Faced with the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed of Islam, starting in Denmark in September last year, we recognize it is crucial to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. The publications have caused worldwide controversies. Further publication and the violent reactions to them increase the tension. As people of faith we understand the pain caused by the disregard of something considered precious to faith. We deplore the publication of the cartoons. We also join with the voices of many Muslim leaders in deploiring the violent reactions to the publications.

Freedom of speech is indeed a fundamental human right, which needs to be guaranteed and protected. It is both a right and a responsibility. It works best when it holds structures of power accountable and confronts misuse of power. By the publication of the cartoons, freedom of speech has been used to cause pain by ridiculing people’s religion, values and dignity. Doing so, the foundation of this right is being devalued. We remind ourselves of what St Peter wrote: “As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil – honour everyone” (1.Pet.2; 16-17). Misuse of the right to freedom of speech should be met with non-violent means like critique and expressions of firm disagreement.

We recognize that there are more than just religious aspects to the present tensions. Failure to find a just and peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, reluctance to accept outcomes of free elections, together with the war on Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, add frustration to historical experiences marked by crusades and colonialism. In many parts of the world people identify as being politically and economically excluded, and they often experience that dominant
powers and cultures apply double standards in dealing with issues which are important to them. In many countries in the rich and dominant parts of the world, integration policies have failed to welcome new minorities. Instead, they meet racism, stereotyping, xenophobia, and a lack of respect for their religion.

The real tension in our world is not between religions and beliefs, but between aggressive, intolerant and manipulative secular and religious ideologies. Such ideologies are used to legitimize the use of violence, the exclusion of minorities and political domination. The main victims of these types of controversies are religious minorities, living in a context of a different majority culture. Nevertheless, we recognize a growing respect and tolerance in all cultures. Many are learning that it is possible to be different, even to disagree and yet remain in calm dialogue and work together for the common good.

The recent crisis points to the need for secular states and societies to better understand and respect the role and significance of religion in a multicultural and globalized world, in particular as an essential dimension in human identity. This can help religion and people of faith to be instruments for bridging divisions between cultures and nations and to contribute to solving underlying problems.

**Resolution:**
The Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006:

- **Adopts** the minute on Mutual Respect, Responsibility and Dialogue with People of other Faiths.
- **Asks** member churches and ecumenical partners all over the world to express and demonstrate solidarity to those who are experiencing attacks on their religion and join them in defending the integrity of their faith by non-violent means.
- **Recommends** all member churches, National and Regional Councils of Churches to contribute to the creation of platforms for dialogue with people of other faiths or none, and to address immediate as well as underlying social, economic and political reasons for division, including interaction with governments and secular authorities.
- **Urges** member churches and ecumenical partners in contexts where religion interacts with politics in a way which causes division to deepen dialogue with leaders of other faiths, seek common approaches and develop common codes of conduct.
- **Calls** on member churches and ecumenical partners all over the world to continue to address racism, caste, stereotyping and xenophobia in their respective societies and together with people of other faiths nurture a culture of respect and tolerance.
- **Reaffirms** our commitment to the right to freedom of speech, at the same time as member churches are called to contribute to a needed reflection on how to uphold the need for ethical behaviour and good judgment in using this right.

**Congratulations on presidential election**
*Letter to Dr Michelle Bachelet, President-Elect of Chile, 20 January, 2006*

Dear Dr Bachelet,

It is with great pleasure that we at the World Council of Churches received the results of the presidential election which gave you a clear majority of the votes with a wide margin. On behalf of our general secretary, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, who had the opportunity of visiting your country in November 2004 and met with the “Ministro Secretario General de Gobierno”, as well as on behalf of our colleagues, we send our sincere congratulations for this important victory.
which, without a doubt, is a victory not only for Chileans but for all those in the ecumenical movement who share the values of justice and solidarity that you stand for.

We share with you, the churches and the Chilean people, a vision of a country that practises solidarity, fellowship, inclusivity and respect for God’s creation. In this spirit we trust that your presidency will contribute to overcoming the alarming inequalities which exist in Chilean society.

We also share the aspirations of a country that fully guarantees freedom of religion, and that values and provides spaces for all churches to contribute to building a country of sisters and brothers.

As you rightly said in your speech, Chile has already made great progress towards building this vision and we believe that it will be possible to go even further at this stage under your leadership.

The WCC will hold its 9th Assembly next month in Porto Alegre. This is the first time a WCC assembly is being held in Latin America. We believe that, at this moment in the history of Latin America and the world, Chile is being called to play an even greater role in furthering international dialogue and cooperation so that during this millennium we may make progress towards greater understanding and more justice in the distribution of resources, as opposed to their excessive concentration which we are witnessing today. This dialogue and cooperation should enable us to value the cultural and spiritual richness that each community, country or region contributes to life on this planet.

We, as the WCC, will continue to help you, through the churches in Chile, to fulfill your dreams for your country that works towards greater solidarity and fellowship towards its people and the other nations of the world.

Marta Palma, Latin America Desk
Guillermo Kerber, CCIA

Expression of concern at recent statements by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Letter to H.E. Mr Mohammad Reza Alborzi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in Geneva, 3 November, 2005

Your Excellency,

We send you this letter with greetings from the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

We write as an expression of our deep and long-standing concern for the resolution of conflicts that divide the nations in the Middle East and oppress the peoples of the region. This message comes to you also because of concerns we share with the people of Iran, namely, that there be increased dialogue between civilizations and between religions, and particularly to establish stronger relationships between Islam and Christianity. In this regard, through a series of seminars held alternately in Teheran and Geneva since 1995, the World Council of Churches has been privileged to foster contact and engagement between Iranian Islamic leaders and scholars and representatives of WCC member churches and staff. These encounters revealed a genuine desire for dialogue and aroused great interest on both sides, culminating in a visit of the Iranian President, His Excellency Mohammed Khatami, to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva in December 2003.

On that occasion, President Khatami noted that “the future of religion will depend (…) on mutual comprehension and openness” and that “dialogue is the foundation which allows for unity in diversity”. In response, the Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, my predecessor here as General
Secretary, affirmed a central tenet of WCC policy: that WCC member churches “reject the tendency, not uncommon in many Western countries, to perceive Muslims as a threat and to portray Islam and some Islamic nations in negative terms”. Also receiving President Khatami here on that occasion was the Prime Minister of Norway, Kjell Magne Bondevik. Mr Bondevik, who is an ordained Christian minister, said, “Those who have a strong belief can better understand others with strong belief (….) In many conflicts religion is considered to be part of the problem. I uphold the idea that religion should be seen as part of the solution.”

Given this positive link to the people of Iran and reflecting also the decadeslong commitment of the World Council of Churches to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the application of international law, the United Nations Charter and UN Security Council resolutions, we would like to register with you, Mr Ambassador, our grave concern at the recent statements by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, which called for one of the states of the region, Israel, to be “wiped off the map”. We are convinced that the way to peace in the region’s most intractable conflict – that involving the state of Israel and its occupation of Palestinian territory – is to be found in determined and equitable negotiations between the two parties in conflict on the basis of UN resolutions and in including the stringent international guarantees missing from previous peace initiatives. As part of that process Israel must withdraw from the territories occupied in the 1967 war and has the right to exist within internationally recognized and secure borders.

The state of Israel was created as a result of a UN resolution. It is therefore the responsibility of all UN members to ensure a peaceful solution to the conflict between Israel and Arab states. We offer this communication to you and ask that you convey it to your government. It reflects our on-going efforts to advance the international rule of law in the region, to achieve the peaceful removal of long-standing threats to the security and well-being of the peoples of the region, and to continue the spirit of dialogue between two religions that hold true peace to be among God’s greatest blessings.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Message on the Episcopal Silver Jubilee year of Dr Alexander John Malik
27 October, 2005

It gives me great pleasure to send you this message of greetings and best wishes as you prepare to celebrate the Episcopal Silver Jubilee year of Dr Alexander John Malik, Moderator of the Church of Pakistan. Bishop Malik is no stranger to the World Council of Churches and the international ecumenical movement. As a member of the WCC’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, he has contributed much to the discussions on new forms of mission in religiously-plural societies. For him the best way to witness the gospel is through practice. Evangelism does not necessarily mean bringing in new people but in making our own people true Christians. In his Easter message to Pakistan’s Daily Times in April 2004, Bishop Malik said “the primary message of Easter was the life-giving power which transformed Jesus’ disciples. It does not happen through structures and systems, but by the person of Christ. The church should be a living witness of his resurrection power.”

Bishop Malik is a worthy son of Pakistan, having made immense contributions in the fields of education and health for which he was awarded a “Star of Distinction” from the Government of Pakistan in 2000.
Living in a predominantly Islamic society, Bishop Malik has endeavoured to foster inter-religious dialogue as a vehicle to promote peace and harmony amongst Christians and Muslims. However, in times of crisis when confronted with the situation of harassment and persecution of Christians, he has not failed to speak out. Describing the blasphemy law as the hated “black laws” he is on record as saying such laws are a “licence to harass, enslave and eliminate minorities and legalize religious persecution.”

On this auspicious occasion, we wish Bishop Alexander John Malik a long and fruitful mission as he continues with his ministry of building bridges of peace and solidarity between the Muslim and Christian communities of Pakistan; and as a revered religious leader who continues to speak out against injustice, social marginalization, discrimination and exploitation.

May Our Lord’s eternal blessing be with him as he continues to serve all God’s people.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Message of sympathy on the tragedy of the 8th October earthquake in Pakistan
Letter to member churches and National Council of Churches in Pakistan, 10 October, 2005

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

The World Council of Churches is deeply distressed by the news of the unprecedented earthquake shocks in Pakistan on the morning of 8th October, as the people were beginning to start their day’s work. This national calamity took place just as the Muslim community had begun preparations to celebrate Ramadan, a month of fasting, of cleansing of the body and soul that is followed by the major festival of Id-ul-Fitr. In the wake of this great tragedy, there is not going to be much celebration. Civic and religious organizations including Christians have called on the people instead to donate generously to Government relief efforts for the earthquake victims.

Muslims and Christians have been struck by the magnitude of the disaster and have joined hands in providing relief and assistance to those in need. The National Council of Churches in Pakistan in its appeal has called for prayers and material assistance for the victims. There is an immediate need for medical aid and assistance for affected people in remote areas. The Council has drawn attention to the extent of devastation. The northern parts of the country have been heavily damaged, some villages have been completely wiped out and major cities like Abbatabad, Murree, Man Shera, Khanspur, Peshawar and others have been badly hit, communications and water systems are in ruins and are in need of urgent repairs. Over 20,000 people have been killed, many others are unaccounted for, also many, including children, are buried under the rubble.

Military, security forces and expatriate teams are engaged in non-stop rescue operations that have been hampered by non-availability of military helicopters and heavy earth-moving equipment, once again a pointer to the wrong priorities of the Government that has placed greater emphasis on acquiring military armament than on the essential needs of its people.

Countries all over the world are cooperating in the relief efforts and we are grateful for the humanitarian aid and assistance that is coming into the country. ACT (Action by Churches
Together members too are in the process of mobilizing aid and assistance to meet the needs of the people in the region.

The World Council of Churches assures its member churches, the National Council of Churches in Pakistan and the people of Pakistan of its continuous prayer and support as they pass through this difficult period.

Yours in Christ,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

**Right to religious freedom**

*Letter to H.E. Branko Crvenkovski, President of the Republic of Macedonia, 31 August, 2005*

Your Excellency,

I write on behalf of the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of 347 churches around the world including churches of the Orthodox communion.

The right to religious freedom is foremost amongst the most historic and fundamental rights of human beings. Since its inception, the issues of church and state and religious liberty have been of primary concern for the Council and its member churches. The Council has also endeavoured to promote as one of its objectives the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation in a spirit of mutual accountability, the development of deeper relationships through theological dialogue, and the sharing of human, spiritual and material resources amongst its member churches.

The World Council of Churches is therefore deeply concerned by the decision of the Appellate Court of Bitola in the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia that has sentenced to a term of imprisonment Archbishop Jovan of the Archdioceses of Ochrid, the Canonical Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate in the country. The Council considers the sentence to be unduly harsh and severe for a church dignitary of his age. It is likely to further embitter church and state relations.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the Council is committed, guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to manifest one’s religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. While passing the judgement the Appellate Court should have given due thought and consideration to the universally accepted norms and standards as laid down under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is pertinent to note that the countries of Europe have enshrined these universal principles of religious liberty in their constitutions, setting a high standard for promotion and protection of religious freedom and liberty. In the circumstances, the decision of the Appellate Court is likely to cast a shadow of doubt on the independence of the judiciary of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia in the region.

The World Council of Churches is of the considered view that inter-church disagreements and disputes should only be resolved through a judicial approach as a last resort. Such disputes and disagreements should be resolved through discussion and dialogue.
The Council appeals to Your Excellency to intervene in this rather sensitive matter and exercise Presidential discretionary powers to set aside the term of imprisonment of Archbishop Jovan in the larger interest of church-state relationships and to maintain religious harmony.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Weiderud
Director

Message of solidarity with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Letter to His Eminence Metropolitan Cornelios of Petra, Locum Tenens of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 22 July, 2005

Your Eminence,
Warm ecumenical greetings from the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

Thank you for your letter of July 15 to Rev. Christopher Ferguson. He has passed on the letter to us and he has kept us informed of the crisis that has confronted the Patriarchate in these past months.

We have kept the Patriarchate and all faithful of your Church in Jerusalem and the Holy Land in our thoughts and prayers during this period of travail. We appreciate that the Holy Synod and the Brotherhood have attempted to address the crisis within the framework of ecclesiastical law and thus worked to avoid schism and promote the unity of the church even in the face of division and conflict. To this end the Patriarchate submitted their actions to the Pan-Orthodox Synod which ratified your actions.

When the State of Israel refused to recognize Irineos I as Patriarch in the years following his election, the World Council of Churches called on Israel to respect the integrity, authority and freedom of the church to choose its own leadership and to govern church affairs without the interference of the state. Once again we find that the State of Israel is violating this basic principle by continuing to recognize Mr Irineos as Patriarch in spite of your Church’s decision to dismiss him.

We note that the Governments of Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority have withdrawn their recognition of Mr Irineos Skopelitis. Your Eminence, please be assured that the World Council of Churches stands firmly with the Patriarchate in rejecting this unwarranted interference with the freedom of the Church to choose her own leadership. We will raise this matter directly with representatives of the State of Israel and all the governments concerned in keeping with the principles we expressed previously.

We are equally concerned that the Israel police and security forces have violated the sanctuary of the Monastery of the Patriarchate. In keeping with the principle stated above it is up to the Church to decide who has authority within her institutions, churches and monasteries. The State has no right even under the pretext of an invitation by a leader who has been dismissed by the ecclesiastical authorities to violate the sanctity and sanctuary of the Monastery. We will raise this matter with the Israeli authorities calling on them to respect the leadership of the church and the sanctity and sanctuary of churches, Holy Places and monasteries.

Your Eminence, in responding to these two difficult matters we are aware that the current crisis confronting the Patriarchate is even more complex and touches on other areas of historic
significance. We take this opportunity to express our concern over the transfer of property in Jaffa Gate knowing that this land deal has deep consequences on various levels – for the status quo of Jerusalem, for relationship between Christians and Muslims, for the whole Christian community, and for the relationship between the Patriarchate and the Arab Palestinian faithful. It also raises fresh concern for a just peace in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

We have been informed of the appointment of advocates charged with annulling the land deal and securing the property. We are of course aware of the many pressing issues facing the Patriarchate including the up-coming patriarchal elections. Given the gravity and urgency of the situation, we would be remiss if we did not pledge our help for immediate action to annul the land deal and secure the status quo and the future of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

We would also like to extend our hope and encouragement to you, the Holy Synod, the Brotherhood and all the faithful so that God might use this crisis as an occasion for transformation and renewal for the “Living Stones” of the Holy Land and so that the Palestinian Christian community may flourish and prosper with all God’s beloved servants. May the Patriarchate, by God’s grace, emerge from this crisis with new strength and vision.

Your Eminence, in closing allow me to reiterate the concern and prayers of the World Council of Churches for the well-being of the Church and the unity to which it is called. The Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem can count on our solidarity and support.

Peace and Grace to you.
Truly yours in our Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Recognition of new Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem
Letter to H.E. Mr Itzhak Levanon, Ambassador of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva, 22 July, 2005

Your Excellency,

We write to express our serious concern over two issues involving the State of Israel and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a member church of the World Council of Churches, and to call for your cooperation in taking urgent remedial action.

The first issue concerns the right of churches to run their own affairs. The State of Israel is currently continuing to recognize Mr Irineos Skopelitis as Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem despite his renunciation and dismissal from office by the church’s highest decision-making body, the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. As your government is aware, when ex-Patriarch Irineos refused to accept this formal renunciation of his patriarchal status by the body that granted it, an extraordinary Pan-Orthodox Synod was held on May 24, 2005 in Istanbul. There, the Synod of the Heads of Churches of the Orthodox Autocephalus Churches and their representatives upheld both the decision to dismiss ex-Patriarch Irineos and the authority of the Holy Synod in Jerusalem to take that decision. Jerusalem’s Holy Synod subsequently reduced the ecclesiastical rank of Mr Irineos Skopelitis to that of a monk.

The other governments involved in the case – Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and the Greek Government which is indirectly involved – have withdrawn their recognition of the ex-
patriarch thereby respecting the church’s right to decide upon it’s own leadership without external interference in the exercise of that right. The Government of Israel’s continuing refusal to recognize this decision of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate violates the basic principle of non-interference by the state in the affairs of the church.

We recall that this principle was also exercised early in the tenure of ex-Patriarch Irineos. When he was first elected, the State of Israel refused to recognize him as patriarch for more than one year. Based on the same principle which is at stake now, the World Council of Churches’ Central Committee called on the State of Israel to “recognize the election of His Beatitude Patriarch Irineos I as head of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem” (WCC Statement, September 2, 2002; and letter to the Prime Minister of Israel, September 4, 2002) because he had been duly elected by the competent church authorities.

The second matter is related to the first. It concerns the inviolability of church precincts. As a result of the state’s continuing recognition of the ex-patriarch, Israeli police have been stationed in the monastery of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem at the request of the ex-patriarch and supposedly for his protection. The duly-appointed church authorities have opposed this unwarranted presence of the police in the monastery, but without success. In an incident on July 13, 2004, the police stationed there allowed a group of approximately 40 men forcibly to enter the precincts of the monastery and to destroy property in the monastery. The police watched the destruction of property and allowed the intruders to stay on the premises for several hours despite the protests of the clergy in charge of the monastery.

We do not accept the claim that the police presence in the church compound is legitimized by an invitation from ex-patriarch Irineos. It has been brought to the attention of the Israeli authorities repeatedly that he is no longer recognized as the patriarch by the church that exercises authority over those premises. On this point our concerns for recognition of church leadership and inviolability of church property come together. Police and official actions have violated church rights in this case in three ways: by the continued non-recognition of a church decision on leadership, by maintaining an armed presence on church precincts, and by allowing unlawful conduct by intruders on church property.

We note with respect that the State of Israel has pledged itself to honour the special legislation, covenants, orders and treaties on Jerusalem known as the status quo, which protects the sanctity of Holy Places and the rights of churches to manage their own affairs. Alarmed at the violation of principles to which Israel has agreed, we call on your government to take the following steps to resolve this crisis:

First, in respect of the rights of churches to manage their own affairs, to withdraw recognition of Mr Irineos as patriarch.

Second, in like manner, to recognize Metropolitan Cornelios of Petra as Locum Tenens of the Patriarchate and, in due course, to recognize as patriarch whosoever will be duly elected by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Third, in respect of the inviolability of church premises, we call on the Government of Israel to remove the police from the monastery of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

Similarly, we reiterate the long-held rule that if police are invited to enter any church, mosque or Holy Place by the legitimate religious authorities of the site, they do so without arms.
We make these requests mindful that justice must also be done in the case at the heart of this crisis, namely, the irregular transfer of church lands in Jerusalem. It is urgent that the competent authorities oversee the return of the land to its proper owners – in the name of the law and in the interests of peace. The member churches of the WCC and the churches of Jerusalem are resolved to see Jerusalem become a shared city under the rule of laws that protect peace for the two peoples who live there and for the three religions for whom it is holy.

We look to the State of Israel to share in that resolve and to fulfill its responsibilities in these matters accordingly. After your receipt of this letter we will seek an early opportunity to meet with you about these concerns.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

The World Council of Churches pays tribute to Pope John Paul II
3 April, 2005

Pope John Paul II has been among the most outstanding personalities during these last decades, with an impact far beyond the Roman Catholic Church and the Christian community worldwide. During his pontificate, the Roman Catholic Church affirmed its universal vocation and strengthened its internal coherence.

His commitment to social justice and reconciliation, to human rights and the dignity of the human person, as well as to Christian unity and inter-religious understanding, will be gratefully remembered.

We recall with warm feelings the visit John Paul II paid to the WCC headquarters, early in his pontificate in 1984, where we shared a worship service at the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre and prayed together for full communion among Christians. He was not only following the steps of his predecessor Paul VI, who had visited the WCC in 1969, but also expressing his own commitment to the one ecumenical movement.

Karol Wojtyła, born in Wadowice, Poland, on 18 May, 1920, was elected pope in 1978. During his pontificate, through his extensive travels, the *ad limina* visits, his impressive body of writings and by purposefully using church structures (e.g., the synods of bishops), he sought to bring cohesion and coherence to the Roman Catholic Church.

In the first half of his pontificate, John Paul II focused on the situation of people living under communist rule. With a combination of quiet diplomacy and strong denunciation, he developed an ecclesial and political “Ostpolitik” and strengthened those taking a stand against Marxist ideology, particularly in his native Poland. During this period, an intentional focus on human rights (particularly in *Redemptor hominis*) and religious liberty provided a strong basis for challenging Marxist ideology and communist practice.

During the second half of his reign, Pope John Paul II sought to challenge the predominant values in Western culture, to question what he saw as permissive trends in human sexuality, and to affirm “the culture of life” over and against “the culture of death”. This was most evident in the various social encyclicals published during his time – *Laborem Exercens*, *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*. In this restatement and development of Roman Catholic social thought, he was able to initiate a dialogue on appropriate structures and foundations for human life in society.
The systematic examination of major features of the Christian faith, and of the issues facing the church throughout the world, also demonstrated John Paul II's concern for affirming the central truths of the faith and the Roman Catholic Church. This was evident in the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the issuing of a number of doctrinal instructions. (e.g., *Ad Tuendam Fidem*).

Having consciously adopted the name John Paul on his election to office, Karol Wojtyla was not simply seeking to honour his immediate predecessor, but to continue and complete the reforming work of Pope John XXIII and Paul VI. In his work, therefore, he also sought to promote relations with other Christian churches and engage in the search for Christian unity with them.

An immediate concern was rapprochement with the Orthodox churches, and he constantly sought to strengthen and develop the bonds between the “successors” of the brothers Andrew and Peter. In his visits throughout the world, Pope John Paul II took every opportunity to meet with leaders of other churches and to encourage his Roman Catholic colleagues to engage fully in local ecumenical initiatives and councils.

Of particular interest is his attempt to offer a vision of unity; his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* draws on the insights and experiences of Roman Catholic involvement in the ecumenical movement, and offers substantial reflections on the nature of dialogue and unity. Indeed, this encyclical is unusual in citing reports from the wider ecumenical movement – notably that of the WCC Faith and Order Commission.

To further the moves towards unity, John Paul II in the Encyclical invited other churches to reflect with him on the role and structure of the Petrine ministry as a servant of Christian unity; he also invited his church to apologize for the sins committed during its history which contributed towards division. This was most evident during the Millennium Celebrations in Rome on 13 March, 2000, when he sought forgiveness from other churches for sins committed against them by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church.

As Bishop of Rome, the Pope initiated a series of events and reflections on the work and being of the Holy Trinity to celebrate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. This drew Christians of different churches in all parts of the world into an intentional ecumenical process at local and international level and provided encouragement for local ecumenism.

Efforts were also made to seek dialogue with people of other faiths. On two occasions at Assisi, the Pope invited leaders of the major world religions to join him to pray for world peace – in 1986, and in January 2002 (the latter in the light of the terrorist attack of 11 September, 2001 on the United States and the subsequent actions) – and to promote a culture of peace to counter the prevailing culture of war.

His strong proclamations and actions for peace, particularly in the two Gulf wars and in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have been particularly important. By lifting up this common concern of churches worldwide and the ecumenical movement as a whole, he strengthened the voices of Christians everywhere working to overcoming injustice and promoting lasting peace.

The pontificate of John Paul II has bridged in a courageous way a period of profound changes and transformations in the church and in the world. A new era and a new millennium have begun, which will require fresh responses in the Roman Catholic Church and in the ecumenical movement.
Pope John Paul II: outstanding figure in modern Christendom, one of the most courageous spiritual leaders of our time

Condolences from WCC Central Committee Moderator Catholicos Aram I and WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, 2 April, 2005

Expressing the profound sadness of the World Council of Churches following the announcement by the Holy See of the death of His Holiness Pope John Paul II today, the WCC Central Committee Moderator Catholicos Aram I said: “His Holiness Pope John Paul II will remain an outstanding figure in the modern history of world Christendom. In fact, his relentless effort to make the Gospel of Christ a living reality in the life of people, his unyielding prophetic witness to make the moral values the guiding principles of human societies, his firm commitment to the cause of Christian unity, his openness to other religions with a clear vision of living together as a reconciled community in the midst of diversities, and his continuous advocacy for justice, human rights and freedom made him an exceptional figure of great achievements. As moderator of the World Council of Churches central committee and as the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia, I had the privilege to meet His Holiness on different occasions and witnessed the strength of his faith, the depth of his wisdom and the clarity of his vision.”

The condolences were shared by WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia who emphasized:

“His Holiness Pope John Paul II will be remembered as one of the most courageous spiritual leaders of our time. He demonstrated this courage as much in his illness as he did through his leadership, his writings and his pronouncements. In the one ecumenical movement he constantly affirmed as irreversible the deep involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in ecumenism. In responding to the challenging issues for the church in the world, he opened a dialogue with other religious traditions, and addressed constantly issues of social justice and moral and ethical values. As an African, I recognize the importance he gave to the African synod, and the pastoral care in which he identified with the people of Africa.”

Expression of concern following the attack on the Christian community of Maghar

Letter to the Rt. Rev. Riah Abu El-Assal, The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, 24 February, 2005

Dear Bishop Riah,
Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We received your letter of 16 February and want to share our concern at the news you relayed about the recent incident in the village of Maghar, Galilee. As reflected in the resulting declaration by the Heads of Churches in the Holy Land and also in press reports of the incident, the attack on the Christian community of Maghar was very dangerous to them, destructive of their property and gives cause for serious questions about law and order.

Especially troubling was the failure of the police, first, in not protecting the citizens from attack and second, in not assuring their safety after the attack and a secure return to their homes. The fact that the attacks were sparked by unsubstantiated rumours and then directed at a whole group solely on the basis of religion further adds to the gravity of the event.
As your declaration states, at issue are the rights of the various communities that make up Israeli society. We will raise this matter in our next meeting with the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva.

We note that Greek Catholic Archbishop Georges Haddad, whose parishioners were attacked, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, and yourself are seeking a meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Please keep us informed about further developments. We look forward to an appropriate and effective response from the authorities in setting this matter right and in maintaining order with justice in the future.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Statement on the Iraq Crisis: Enhancing Peace, Accountability and the Rule of Law
WCC Central Committee, Geneva, 15-22 February, 2005

The crisis in Iraq persists at the expense of the Iraqi people and with long-term complications for the international community. The World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, February 15 to 22, 2005, issues this statement mindful of the consequences of this crisis and remembering especially women, children and men who have lost their lives to war and conflict in Iraq, the uncounted dead, the many who are injured, sick and traumatized by violence, and the millions bereaved or in fear. We note that this war is only the latest of eight wars in Iraq since World War I, a violent century, when foreign entities and local elites monopolized the region’s petroleum while generally neglecting the good of its people.

The fate of Iraq’s poorest and most vulnerable citizens especially concerns us – one fifth of the nation, some five million people, whose deprivation endures from the previous regime to the present. Their infant mortality rates, income levels and access to clean water, sanitation and health-care suffice to keep a nation with the second largest petroleum reserves in the world, and more pledges of aid than all Africa, on the list of countries that suffer the most extreme forms of poverty.

We recognize Iraq’s Christian communities for their unique role in Iraqi society today, for their time-honoured witness to the gospel and for their commitment to live in harmony with their neighbours. We declare that the current conflict is not a religious conflict and that leaders of the parties involved have a responsibility not to misuse religion to further fuel the conflict.

In the birthplace of Abraham, we look to his children – Jews, Christians, Muslims – to become agents of the healing and reconciliation that Iraq so sorely needs and that faith so clearly requires.

We see a ray of hope for the future in the millions of citizens who went to the polls last month, even though others did not participate including some Christian communities that were prevented from voting. The embrace of a democratic process is a vote for a new Iraq, one freed both from dictatorship and from occupation.

Most news has not been positive, however. At this point in the crisis we are obliged to note that positions we took three years ago are, regrettably, still relevant, including:
Our calls for sustained diplomacy on peaceful solutions, our rejection of preemptive military action and our affirmation of the international rule of law (WCC Central Committee Statement, 9/02);

Our appeal to uphold the UN Charter’s limits on the use of force, our denunciation of human rights violations in Iraq and, on the eve of war, our strong affirmations of church actions world-wide for peace (WCC Executive Committee Statement, 2/03); and, five months after the pre-emptive strike on Iraq,

Our dismay at the UN Security Council for yielding to pressure to legitimize the occupation and undermining its mandate as the arbiter of international security, our condemnation of atrocities under Saddam Hussein, our defence of Iraq’s territorial integrity, our support for unimpeded and impartial humanitarian work there, our concern at polarization over the war within the US, our warning against the establishment of foreign military bases in Iraq, our call for war reparations to the Iraqi people, and our affirmation of the role of Iraq’s churches in rebuilding civil society together with other religious communities in Iraq (WCC Central Committee Statement, 9/03).

We firmly reject assertions of the so-called “global war on terror” as justification for the war on Iraq. To employ again now the same indiscriminate language against other countries in the region is both irresponsible and dangerous. Leaders who used the false pretexts of terrorist connections and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to bolster their case for war will be judged by history. Time will also bring acknowledgements of the actual loss of life in Iraq and record how democracies respond appropriately to acts of terrorism.

The WCC Central Committee appreciates the principled and important opposition to the war on Iraq among church leaders and members around the world, yet is alarmed that churches, communities and individuals who have much to offer in constructive dissent should be silenced because patriotism runs high in their government, media, election campaigns, and even local parishes.

We are deeply concerned at violence that targets innocent civilians in order to kill people by category – in suicide bombings at community gatherings, in summary executions of new job applicants, by the bombing of churches and mosques, and in the taking and murdering of hostages.

We condemn unequivocally the torture and humiliation of prisoners in Iraq and deplore the relegation of punishment for these crimes to low-ranking soldiers, despite ample evidence of decisions at high levels of the US administration to bypass obligations under international law.

The overarching violence in Iraq arises from the disproportionate use of force by coalition armies, causing up to 100,000 civilian deaths and destroying whole towns and neighbourhoods purportedly to save them. We note that such strategies of occupation and subjugation engender further violence, work to excuse adversaries from their own barbarities, inflame public opinion across the region, and lower the political threshold for state-sponsored violence in conflicts around the world.

The human costs of war and conflict weigh heavily on women in Iraq. The breakdown in public safety, the collapse of health care and sanitation, and the denial of basic rights, trap women and girls now and will hold them back from shaping their nation’s future.
Financing this war and occupation in Iraq has been and continues to be an unconscionable misallocation of the world’s wealth. The 200 billion dollars already allocated by the US administration for use in Iraq would, for example, provide safe drinking water to every child in need in the world for a decade and a half, thereby saving 25 million lives. As for existing obligations, the amount spent to date would pay US dues to the United Nations for the next 400 years.

This one episode reflects the global imbalance between national security concerns and human security needs, and demonstrates a failure of accountability in the international community.

The WCC Central Committee therefore calls governments and intergovernmental bodies to greater accountability under the rule of international law both for the cause of peace in Iraq and for more effective management of such crises in future. We request member churches and WCC-related organizations to engage their governments in this call as well, encouraging action in the following areas:

*Take steps* in the appropriate international forums to open debate of a timetable for the reduction and termination of the US-led Coalition’s military presence in Iraq and for the removal of its military bases there;

*Monitor* each Iraqi election of 2005 so that these exercises of popular will under *de facto* occupation are used to further the prospects of genuine self-rule and are not used to prolong the authority of non-elected or foreign entities;

*Prepare* for the progressive transfer, under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council, of governance and resource management in Iraq to broad-based, national institutions where contending groups can learn to negotiate over power and policy;

*Prepare* similarly for the transfer of Iraq’s security affairs to a joint Iraqi-UN peacemaking force;

*Constitute* a United Nations mechanism to oversee the post-war reconstruction of Iraq on terms that refocus international aid and Iraqi resources around the basic rights and well-being of the Iraqi people, give guidance in matters of war damage compensation, ensure the maximum feasible participation of Iraqis in reconstruction and development projects while greatly reducing the role of foreign contractors, and guarantee public accountability for such projects;

*Reconfirm* that the war on Iraq was illegal under the United Nations Charter and international law and address the need to consolidate international political consensus on the legal grounds for military action and on legitimate responses to threats;

*Assist and enable* independent, credible and accurate third-party verification of casualty levels on all sides during this conflict – assigning responsibility for the deaths, illnesses, traumas and injuries caused directly and indirectly by the disproportionate use of force, by unexploded ordnance, and by the use of depleted uranium;

*Prevail upon* the US administration to revert from its current violations of international law on the arrest, detention, treatment and legal representation of prisoners and by closing all extra-territorial, extra-legal prisons involved;

*Advocate* for human rights in Iraq and for adherence to international humanitarian law – especially the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols – by the occupation authorities, the interim government, and subsequent governments in Iraq.

The WCC Central Committee also calls member churches and WCC-related organizations to engage in local and international actions to heal wounds inflicted during the crisis:

*Assist* Christian citizens to stay in Iraq by speaking out on their behalf and on behalf of all who suffer violence, killings, attacks and kidnappings there; providing help to churches and agencies...
in neighbouring countries that have welcomed tens of thousands of Iraqi Christians forced to flee; and praying and working for their safe return;

**Strive**, as churches, to heal divisions between Christians and Muslims around the world that have developed before, during and after this war, and call governments to join with churches, schools, foundations and media in the lengthy process of reconciling such divisions;

**Support** the continuing efforts of Christians to work with Muslims and people of other faiths in discerning common goals for Iraq and the Middle East, and in choosing courses of action that will lead towards those goals;

**Call** churches around the world to pray for peace in Iraq, stand in solidarity with churches that question this war and, confessing the need for broader dialogue, listen to and engage with the many Christians who do not share our stance against the war.

We commend these actions to member churches and governments for the good of the people of Iraq and for the cause of peace in the Middle East.

**Message to the Churches in Iraq**

2 August, 2004

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are deeply shocked and distressed by the attack on churches in Baghdad and Mosul. We unequivocally condemn this act. We mourn with those of you who lost their loved ones and pray for a speedy recovery for the injured.

The churches in Iraq have faithfully served the Iraqi people. You have worked for many years to foster co-citizenship in your country and promote dialogue among all the religious communities in Iraq. We shall continue supporting you as you strive with fellow Iraqis to strengthen national unity and rebuild an independent country.

The World Council of Churches has always spoken out in the interest of all people of Iraq. We had condemned the imposition of sanctions that resulted in suffering of the people, particularly women and children. Subsequently, the WCC also condemned the war on Iraq as being immoral and illegal. It has affirmed its commitment to a united, sovereign and democratic Iraq.

As Christians, and the whole people of Iraq, pass through these critical and turbulent times, our prayers are with you.

We hope that the forgiving spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ will help you to stand firm in faith and love in spite of the loss of lives and destruction of church properties.

Please convey our sympathy and solidarity to the Christians of Iraq.

*God remembers those who suffer*
*He does not forget their cry*
*And he punishes those who wrong them.*

*(Psalm 9:12)*

Assuring you of our prayers,
Yours in God’s Name,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary
New wave of violence
Letter to the Lutheran Church in Liberia, Presbytery of Liberia, United Methodist Church, Liberian Council of Churches, Church of the Province of West Africa / Episcopal Church in Liberia, 29 October, 2004

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with deep sadness that we write to you regarding the recent violence that erupted in the city of Monrovia and its environs on the night of October 28. We share with you how troubled we are that the fragile peace, brought by the seating of a transitional government and the presence of the United Nations peacekeepers, seems to be threatened.

Though we are aware of the gravity of this new development, we are indeed very pleased by the immediate constructive cooperation between the Muslim Council and the Council of Churches. This, the World Council of Churches believes, is critical in finding a sustainable solution in the midst of perceived difficulties in the relations between Christians and Muslims. We wholeheartedly welcome this partnership and offer to you our strongest support and affirmation in seeking an avenue of lasting peace in Liberia.

This recent development in Monrovia deeply troubles the World Council of Churches, especially at a time when the hopes of many are attached to the presence of the United Nations peacekeepers, the seating of the Interim Government, disarmament, demobilization, resettlement and reintegration, and the beginning of the political process which should lead to elections in October of 2005.

The World Council of Churches calls upon all citizens of Liberia, its member churches, the Interim Government of Liberia, the various rebel groups and all peace loving Liberians to denounce this new wave of violence, support the efforts of the Liberian Council of Churches and the National Muslim Council and work towards sustainable peace in Liberia.

We express our solidarity with you and ask God’s manifold blessings upon you in these trying times.

Expression of concern for the hostages in Beslan
Joint letter from the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia, Russian Orthodox Church DECR, 2 September, 2004

Your Holiness,

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, with his words
“‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matt. 25:40)

It is with shock and profound concern that we are following the situation in North Ossetia, appalled by the situation where hundreds of children and civilians have been taken as hostages, following recent attacks in Moscow and on Russian airlines leading to many more innocent victims.

The World Council of Churches and Conference of European Churches have followed the situation in the Northern Caucasus region with concern for years, appealing for peace and rule of
law and condemning the attacks by all warring parties on civilians. We have joined you in the rejection of the use of religion for political ends in the conflict.

Today, our primary concerns are the children, their parents and teachers, living moments of terror in a school building that was to shape their dreams for their future. There are no goals that justify the use of this kind of action, as Bishop Feofan of Stavropol and Vladikavkaz has said. We welcome the fact that he is now in Beslan as well as the chief mufti in the area, sharing the anguish of the people and giving a powerful witness that this kind of use of children is heinous and alien to all religions, and that in this religious leaders are unanimous.

At this moment the people in School No 1 in Beslan are in the centre of our prayers as are the peoples in the war-torn region and in Russia, living in the shadow of senseless terror.

It is our hope and prayer that the situation will be solved without more bloodshed. You have asked people not to give in to fear and not to give place to hatred in their hearts. We join you in this and pray that your leadership will help to guide the leaders and the nation in solving the terrible violence that has spread over all boundaries and in helping to find a lasting solution of peace for the region.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Georges Lemopoulos, WCC
Acting General Secretary
Rev. Dr Keith Clements, CEC General Secretary

Message to the Churches in Iraq
2 August, 2004

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are deeply shocked and distressed by the attack on churches in Baghdad and Mosul. We unequivocally condemn this act. We mourn with those of you who lost their loved ones and pray for a speedy recovery for the injured.

The churches in Iraq have faithfully served the Iraqi people. You have worked for many years to foster co-citizenship in your country and promote dialogue among all the religious communities in Iraq. We shall continue supporting you as you strive with fellow Iraqis to strengthen national unity and rebuild an independent country.

The World Council of Churches has always spoken out in the interest of all people of Iraq. We had condemned the imposition of sanctions that resulted in suffering of the people, particularly women and children. Subsequently, the WCC also condemned the war on Iraq as being immoral and illegal. It has affirmed its commitment to a united, sovereign and democratic Iraq.

As Christians, and the whole people of Iraq, pass through these critical and turbulent times, our prayers are with you.

We hope that the forgiving spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ will help you to stand firm in faith and love in spite of the loss of lives and destruction of church properties.

Please convey our sympathy and solidarity to the Christians of Iraq.
**Expression of concern on arrest of church leaders**  
*Letter to H.E. Mr Quang Xuan Ngo, Ambassador, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 15 June, 2004*  

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has received with deep concern the reports of the recent arrest of church leaders in Vietnam. These arrests have been made to prevent the clergy from exercising their fundamental right of religious freedom and liberty. The right to religious freedom and liberty has been a major concern of the World Council of Churches since its inception. This right is inseparable from other rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Council is concerned about the recent incidents that have taken place in Vietnam, particularly the circumstances surrounding the arrest of Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang, a Mennonite minister. He has been under detention since last week. Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang is a respected member of the clergy of the Mennonite Church in Ho Chi Minh City. He is a committed Christian and a law-abiding citizen. It is therefore unfortunate that his detention has been ordered for performing legitimate activities allowed under the laws of Vietnam.

In the circumstances we call on Your Excellency to convey our concern to the authorities in Vietnam. The Council appeals to the Government of Vietnam to look into the case of Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang and to order his immediate release.

Yours faithfully,

Guillermo Kerber Mas  
Acting Coordinator, CCIA

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**Expression of concern on religious violence in the Malukus region**  
*Letter to H.E. Megawati Soekarnoputri, President of the Republic of Indonesia, 5 May, 2004*  

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has received with dismay and concern reports of the outbreak of violence and conflict between Muslims and Christians in the Malukus region since 25 April. As a result of the ongoing violence over 33 people have lost their lives and 238 people have been injured.

These events have come after a period of relative calm and inter-communal harmony between Muslims and Christians in the region. The member churches of the World Council of Churches have all along striven for peace and reconciliation between the two communities and in this connection have consistently promoted inter-religious dialogue, through the Communion
of Churches in Indonesia, particularly in the Malukus region. It is important that these efforts do
not suffer a setback because of actions of a few extremists on both sides of the religious divide.

We are particularly concerned by the attacks and acts of arson at the Indonesian Christian
University in the Malukus that have resulted in the complete destruction of 16 lecture rooms that
catered to the faculties of Theology, Civil Engineering, Economics as well as Social and Political
Sciences. Priceless collections of books accumulated over many years, including the Maluccana
and Idonesiana collections, have been completely gutted as a result of the attack on the
university library.

According to the reports received by us, much of the damage and spread of violence could
have been avoided if the Indonesian Security Forces were vigilant and had taken timely action
against the miscreants. Your Excellency will appreciate that it is the responsibility of the
Government of Indonesia to maintain law and order and to provide security to the people in the
country, particularly in a region like the Malukus where inter-religious tensions run high.

The World Council of Churches supports the call of the Moderator of the Protestant
Church in the Malukus, Rev. Dr I.W.J. Hendriks and Msgr P.C. Mandagi MSC, the Roman
Catholic Bishop of Ambonia, that the Indonesian Government take immediate steps to put an
end to the violence in the Malukus. The Government should also encourage and support peace-
building efforts of churches and civil society groups that are endeavouring to promote inter-
religious harmony in the region.

As we make this plea to you, we uphold Muslims and Christians in our intercessions and
pray for peace and reconciliation in the Malukus.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

30th anniversary of the NCC in Korea’s Human Rights Mission
Letter to Rev. Paik Do-Woong, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, 23 April,
2004

Dear Rev. Paik,
Greetings.

It is an honour and privilege for me to send you this message as you celebrate the 30th
anniversary of the Human Rights Mission of the National Council of Churches in Korea. The
churches in Korea, through the National Council, have made an exemplary contribution to the
human rights movement not only in the country, but also in the region. This work is a shining
example of the Korean churches’ witness to the gospel – their healing ministry to the broken
body of Christ.

Through the years of military dictatorships, first under General Park Chung Hee and then
under General Chun Doo Wan, churches and Christians were in the forefront of the struggle
against repression and human rights violations. During this period thousands of Christians,
including members of the clergy, teachers, trade unionists, students and others, were incarcerated
and tortured. They were tried before summary military courts and sentenced to long terms of
imprisonment under the draconian National Security laws. At that time the churches provided
not only the much-needed and timely legal aid to victims but also pastoral care and accompaniment to the suffering families. The weekly prayer meetings at the offices of the National Council of Churches became a hallmark of Christian love and concern for victims of human rights violations and their families, and a symbol of resistance to the repressive policies of the military regime.

The World Council of Churches is proud to have been a part of the history of struggle of the Korean churches. While the churches and Christians carried on a vibrant and robust struggle against the forces of evil and darkness at the local and national levels, the WCC and its member churches around the world mobilized the much-needed international solidarity and support. The fact that Korean society today is well set on the way to democratization and the rule of law is a tribute to the efforts of the Korean churches for which we give thanks to God. May our Lord’s blessings and guidance be with the leadership of the churches and the people of Korea as they continue their struggle for the dignity of all Korean people and seek the peaceful reunification of the peninsula and its people.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

Religion and Ethnicity: Gift from God or Source of Conflict?
Address presented at the Workshop on Lasting Peace in Africa, in Kigali, Rwanda, 16 April, 2004

I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this important workshop, to learn from you and discuss with you the role of religion in conflicts and gross human rights violations.

Thank you in particular for the experience yesterday afternoon and the visit to the Ntarama Memorial. To visit the site and begin to better understand the pain of the Rwandan genocide I consider a great privilege.

I come from a very different background, compared to most of you. While Africa is a continent with a strong and active religious life, my home country Sweden is probably one of the most secularized countries in the world. At the time Christianity came to Rwanda – 100 years ago – Sweden began its transfer into a modern and secular society, where the role of the churches and the role of religion were marginalized for a period of time.

However, in both our contexts we can see an increased role of religion in politics. In the case of Sweden it can be described as a transfer from a post-Christian to a post-secular society. Unlike many European countries, Africa has the advantage and the disadvantage to meet the challenges of the trans-modern society, without the experience of deep-going processes of secularization.

Religion is normally not the source of conflict. However, depending on how religion is used or misused, religion can either de-escalate and help the conflict to be solved in a constructive way, or fuel the conflict, make it deeper, more violent and more difficult to solve.

For the individual believer, religion is a single totality, but when reflecting on its political impact it can be helpful to explain the phenomenon of religion by classifying it according to its different forms of expression:
1. **Religion as spiritual experience.** In this aspect there are only very slight differences between the world religions – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Traditional religion.

2. **Religion as theology.** In the past there were great differences between the major religions in this area, but in recent years they have moved towards a deeper common understanding.

3. **Religion as ethics and values.** In this area there are much smaller differences between the religions than the individual believer and general public might think. For example, the three monotheistic religions have a similar basis for the ethics of economic management and how to put one’s gifts to good use – ideas about social justice, about the individual’s responsibility for his or her neighbour and the global neighbourhood. In broad terms they all share the view that the earth can provide “enough for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed”.

4. **Religion as a bearer of culture.** This is the area where the greatest differences are to be found, not only between the world religions, but also within them. This aspect of religion is also increasingly important as the underlying cause of conflict – or as a tool easily manipulated in order to stir them up.

   The two last-mentioned roles of religion – as an upholder of ethics and a bearer of culture, are the aspects of religion that are not only the concern of the individuals, the churches and religious organizations. I believe these aspects to be the concern of the whole society and that it is absolutely necessary to bring them into the decision-making and political processes of our societies.

   The fundamental transformations taking place in our societies mean that it is more urgent than ever to understand the role of religion in political processes.

   National change and global exchange have led to economic development of considerable magnitude. As millions of people leave extreme poverty behind, this potential offers hope to many of the world’s poor. Old structures of power are forced to change.

   Simultaneously, however, new patterns of exclusion and inequality have appeared, with marginalization, insecurity and powerlessness as real consequences for many people. Such a situation may generate feelings of social and cultural insecurity. Africa is the continent that is worst off in this respect.

   These transformations in society also change the role of the nation-state. It would seem that the very rhythm and scale of the transformation exceed the capacity of national governments and policies to shape and influence the process.

   We have a global economy. But the legal, moral or democratic framework vital to an economy if it is to be able to serve the common good continues to be a basically national responsibility.

   In the trans-modern, economic and political context, the main ideologies of the so called modern 20th century – Marxism as well as liberal capitalism – have lost power as well as credibility. The nation-state, as the main framework for identity, according to these ideologies, has become significantly weaker. Failed states are one of the most urgent security concerns in today’s international affairs.

   The nation-state is not going to disappear. It will remain the most important political instrument in the foreseeable future. But global interdependence makes it increasingly difficult for the nation-state alone to deliver what people expect for a good life. This is a fact in both the northern and the southern hemisphere.
Consequently, people will look for supplementary communities with which they can identify, both larger and smaller than the nation-state. But people will also turn inwards. Cultural factors – such as ethnicity and religion – will be more important in people’s search for fundamentals on which to build their hopes for the future. Socially and politically marginalized young people, who 30 years ago turned to Marxism in their search for a better future, might today turn to religion.

Africa, with 2,600 ethnic groups and where colonial powers have injected mistrust and unrest for centuries, is particularly complex and challenging in this respect.

We know – both from history and contemporary experience – that religious influence on politics can be both beneficial and detrimental. Religious-political conflict is not a new phenomenon. Let me focus on three examples:

1. Historically, the role of religion in political conflicts has been to increase tension – even cause clashes – between civilizations. This can only happen if religion is used by political leaders to emphasize the exclusiveness and primacy of one particular group at the expense of others – be it Christian, Jewish, Muslim or some other religious faith. It is necessary for all actors – in particular churches and ecumenical organizations – to counteract all such monocultural political tendencies and prove that the Samuel Huntington theory of an inevitable clash between civilizations is part of an outmoded way of thinking.

2. In modern societies, in particular in confrontation with the modern ideologies of the 20th century, religious/political friction has mainly occurred between clerical and secular authorities. Basically this is a healthy conflict which has helped – and continues to support – the development of universal social values in modern society, for example, pluralism, democracy and human rights. It has also clarified the different role and relations between church and state.

3. As a consequence of the transformation taking place in our societies, a third kind of religious/political clash has become more evident in recent years both in domestic and international politics. This is the split within religions and cultures. A split between “fundamentalists”, who see their traditional scriptures and teachings as so absolute as to divide humankind into irreconcilable believers and infidels, and others, who see their ancient traditions or spiritual insights as raw material for wider human reconciliation, as the basis for an intensified search for community among people of differing races, creeds and national origins.

The clash between cultural provincialism and openness is evident in all cultures and must be addressed with a forward-looking attitude.

If religion is used as an instrument to gain political power and emphasize the exclusiveness and primacy of one’s own group at the expense of others, it will be a most destructive contribution. The political idea of “the otherness” fuels conflicts.

On the other hand, by emphasizing fundamental ethics and humanity, by giving voice to the voiceless, by emphasizing the responsibility of the individual, by focusing on inclusiveness and a deeper sense of hope, by highlighting the importance of the meeting of cultures, by being ecumenical, religion will make a much-needed and constructive contribution to our societies.
In light of this, it is of growing importance for the ecumenical movement to work with member churches and to handle this split; to stimulate an inclusive understanding of the role of faith and to vaccinate against an exclusive understanding of themselves.

At the time of the Rwandan genocide I was serving as P.A. to a bishop in the Church of Sweden and with very little connection to the WCC. I have talked to colleagues involved at that time and they all say that we did not do enough in time. After the tragedy, a lot of efforts have been made. However, when there still was time...

This is an in-built dilemma for a membership organization like the WCC. When member churches invite, encourage or give support, there is a potential for a strong action. Like with the US churches during the war on Iraq. Like with South Africa in the struggle to end apartheid. Like in Sudan and the struggle for a peace agreement.

However, when the churches are divided, when they oppose action from outside or when they are part of the problem, the space for action is very limited.

This was the case in relation to communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. This is the case with Zimbabwe today.

This dilemma needs to be further addressed. The more difficult the situation, the more important is the action and involvement from the ecumenical movement.

The WCC and the ecumenical movement is not only accountable to its member churches, but also to the people in these churches and to the principles of justice, peace and human rights that have been developed through its history.

This is why criticism of the role of the WCC and the ecumenical movement before and during the genocide is important. Not to blame, but to help to develop principles and criteria on how to act in situations when action is needed but when the local churches are not ready or not in consent with the action needed. I would therefore like to hear your comments on the role of the ecumenical movement in situations of great risk of major violations of human rights.

My experience tells me that it is particularly in the beginning of a conflict or at the end where the churches are mainly able to make constructive contributions.

The closer we are to the peak of the conflict, the more difficult it is to find a relevant response.

The UN Charter gives governments and intergovernmental organizations clear measures of conflict prevention (Eliasson ladder):

– Early warning, verbal actions
– Fact-finding by UN or regional organization
– Stimulate parties to use different measures
– Peace keeping
– Sanctions
– Threat of force, on the basis of Chapter VII
– Use of force, on the basis of Chapter VII

The ecumenical movement could look for a similar structured approach to make the best possible use of our instruments – statements, pastoral visits, stimulate churches to act, fact finding, dialogue with governments, advocacy campaigns, interaction with the UN, etc.
Although it is clear that the WCC could have done more before and during the Rwandan genocide, it does not mean that such actions could have prevented the genocide. A similar reflection is valid for the churches in Rwanda.

To answer that question, it is necessary to understand why genocides take place. In literature and public debate, referring to the genocides of the 20th century – Armenian, Holocaust, Khmer Rouge and Rwanda – there are in particular three themes of explanations given. They relate to war, governance and ideology.

Genocides take place during war or in immediate connection with war. Preventing wars also means preventing genocides.

Genocides are carried out by non-democratic or semi-democratic regimes. Preventing genocides means long-term investment in democratic culture, including minority rights, legitimacy, independent judiciary, independent media, etc.

Genocides are based on exclusive ideologies, dividing “us” from “them”. Preventing genocides is about promoting tolerance.

All these themes are at the core of the ecumenical movement and the member churches. If we were to take them even more seriously, it would of course make a difference.

If it would have been enough to prevent the Rwandan genocide we cannot know. But it would have been enough to save many individuals and to avoid the painful question: Where were the churches during the genocide?

Thank you.
Peter Weiderud
Director, CCIA

Concern on outbreaks of violence in Kosovo
Joint letter from the World Council of Churches and the Conference on European Churches to Mr Harri Holkeri, Special Representative of the Secretary General, United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo, 29 March, 2004

Dear Mr Holkeri,

We write on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) concerning the recent tragic events in Kosovo, and their implications for stability and peace-building throughout the Balkan region.

The background to our concern is the close and long-standing involvement of our organizations, in partnership with the religious communities in the region and church-related humanitarian agencies from Europe and the wider world, in promoting peace and reconciliation throughout the Balkans.

We have also, throughout this period, regarded the role of UNMIK and the internationally-provided instruments at its disposal as being of crucial importance in securing the immediate security needs of all communities in Kosovo, and in providing a framework for its continuation as a multi-ethnic community. It was this recognition which prompted the
secretariats of WCC and CEC to write on 16 August, 2002 to the-then Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Mr Michael Steiner, expressing our concern at what was even then happening in Kosovo. That letter included the following two paragraphs:

The deliberate attacks on the churches and holy places of the Serbian Orthodox Church occurring in Kosovo and Metohija at this time are a painful and scandalous manifestation of the extremism and instability affecting parts of this region. We condemn these and all acts of violence and destruction, and remember with sadness all those, from all communities, who have fallen victim of extremism and intolerance in recent years. These attacks are a major obstacle to the hope of a normalization of inter-communal relations in the province.

This situation also reflects the inadequacy of the international protection provided by the interim authorities, including the UNMIK, in Kosovo to the minority communities, and particularly to the Serbian community. We appeal to you and to the responsible authorities in Kosovo to ensure effective security and justice for all the peoples and the protection of their spiritual and cultural inheritance in Kosovo.

It is with great pain that we find it now necessary to repeat these sentiments and appeals, the more so as the recent events have been even more serious in nature and scale: the damage to or destruction of eighteen churches and monasteries, as reported to us by the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church; the loss of life and injuries suffered by many citizens especially in the Serbian community; and the evictions of many families, following the destruction of their homes, who will now join more than 200,000 displaced persons still awaiting their return to Kosovo after the conflict of 1999.

We are relieved to hear reports that, with the strengthening of the presence of security forces in Kosovo, the situation is now calmer, and we especially wish to reaffirm the vital role of UNMIK, in both its administrative and security aspects, in an exceedingly difficult context. At the same time, we wish to emphasize certain points as follows, and urge their importance not only for the United Nations but also for NATO and the European Union.

First, whatever the exact sequence of events which prompted the recent outbreak of violence, the extreme continuing fragility of society in Kosovo has been made clear five years after the international community took action in 1999. The failure to see and prevent the latest tragedy must not be downplayed in the desire to see a speedy return to “normality” which, in all likelihood, is bound to be superficial.

This must be a matter of serious reflection for all concerned at the international level. The military action undertaken by NATO in 1999 was justified to the international community as necessary to counter ethnic oppression and violence in Kosovo being instigated by the-then Yugoslav Government. In keeping with the fundamentals of that commitment, it is incumbent on the authorities to ensure the multi-ethnic character of Kosovo and provide protection to its minority communities.

Second, in addition to the suffering of the people, the deliberate attacks on religious buildings that have tremendous sentimental value for the people of the region are of special significance. Throughout Europe, churches and other sacred buildings are cherished both as places of worship for believers and as beautiful historic sites appreciated by people at large. In the Balkan region, however, they have even more special significance: they symbolize the very identity of a community and its right to live freely and to flourish in a particular place. Any attack on such buildings is bound to be construed as an expulsion order.

Third, we appreciate the responsible and firm manner in which UNMIK and KFOR personnel have acted to defuse tension and conflict and restore normalcy in the recent crisis. Our concern is that international organizations and the governments in whose name they act
should ensure that adequate resources are made available for them to fulfill their mandate. At a time when much of the international attention is focusing on serious situations elsewhere in the world, not least the Middle East, it is perhaps understandable that Kosovo and the Balkans as a whole now seem to present less of a threat to peace, and a less urgent call on resources. This would be seriously to misunderstand the situation. Kosovo not only remains a delicate and explosive scene in itself, but carries with it much wider implications. A failure to prevent further conflict and to build peace here would be interpreted in other situations as giving licence to resort to violence,

without let or hindrance by the international community.

Fourth, as WCC and CEC we are keenly aware of the immense investment – human and material – which has been made in Kosovo and the region in recent years by non-governmental organizations, relief and development agencies (church related and others), peace-building organizations and the churches themselves.

They have a vital role in the building of a civil society incorporating the values of respect for human dignity, tolerance, participation and democracy, without which there can be no stable and peaceful future. This can only be a long, difficult and complex process. Many in this constituency of service have been dismayed by recent events which they fear will have damaging consequences for much of what they have achieved thus far, and will make their future efforts even more challenging. It is vital that they be given the confidence that in Kosovo they have a continuing and strengthened framework of stability and security such as can only be provided by an adequate and effective UNMIK.

Finally, the recent events have shown how little progress has been made towards an acceptable political solution for Kosovo. We are aware that this is an exceedingly difficult and complex issue, and that there are at the moment a number of alternatives being proposed, none of which appear to be acceptable to all parties involved. The recent events, it is to be feared, will have deepened mistrust and antagonism still further. As representative organizations comprising churches which are communities of faith, however, we appeal to all actors in the political process, both in the region and in the international community, not to yield to despair. In particular we ask that religion, which too often in this context is seen as a factor making for antagonism, be viewed for the potential it can offer for reconciliation, and that the religious communities in the region be taken seriously as partners in long-term peace-building. Our organizations will, therefore, be doing whatever they can to encourage and enable the Serbian Orthodox Church and other churches to play their role in promoting a spirit of dialogue within which a constructive political process can develop.

We thank you for your attention to this letter, and assure you that your demanding and vital work is accompanied by our prayers and good wishes.

Rev. Dr Keith Clements, CEC General Secretary
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC General Secretary

The World Council of Churches Condemns the Assassination of Sheikh Yassin
25 March, 2004
Peter Weiderud, Director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (WCC/CCIA) made the following comments after the killing of Hamas spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin by the Israeli Army in Gaza on 22 March, 2004:

“Through the targeted assassination of Sheikh Yassin, Israel has chosen to violate international law once again. This action fosters hatred and will likely lead to more bloodshed. It can neither ensure peace nor human security.

We are appalled that the State of Israel continues to resort to extra-judicial executions. Every attack has resulted in the unlawful killing of innocent bystanders, including children. These actions as well as Israel’s public official threats to continue to assassinate Palestinians with impunity are totally unacceptable by the WCC and will always be condemned as unlawful.

We therefore call on Israel to put an immediate end to its policies of targeted assassinations. The Council also calls on Palestinian armed groups immediately to stop targeting Israeli civilians in indiscriminate suicide bombings and other attacks. We reaffirm our strong conviction that non-violent means of resistance and peaceful negotiations are the only way to achieve peace and security for both the Palestinians and Israelis and a lasting, viable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.”

Concern on outbreaks of violence in Kosovo
Joint letter from the World Council of Churches and the Conference on European Churches to His Holiness Pavle, Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 19 March, 2004

Your Holiness,

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our peace, we greet you on behalf of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches.

The reports of outbreaks of violence in Kosovo, with loss of life and many injuries and the destruction of homes and sacred buildings, brings dismay to all who have worked, hoped and prayed for the building of peace and stability in Kosovo since the conflict of 1999. To see, once again, people being driven from their homes to join the thousands who have still not been able to return home, is shameful. As you are aware, in these past years we have followed closely the situation in Kosovo and, for example in the letter to Your Holiness from WCC and CEC of 16 August, 2002, expressed our deep concern over the continuing vulnerability of the Serbian minority in Kosovo-Metohija. We are therefore grieved at this outbreak of conflict which not only is inflicting immense suffering here and now, but threatens to create even more difficulties for the long-term peace of Kosovo and the region.

With this new wave of violent intolerance and extremism, affecting the life of thousands and bringing destruction to the cultural and spiritual heritage belonging to all people, it is of paramount importance that we as churches and religious communities raise our voice. We need to appeal to all parties to refrain from further violence in order not to threaten years of efforts for reconciliation. Especially, we must reject any attempt, from any quarter, to use religion as a motivating factor for conflict and a justification for violence.

We have been deeply moved to hear of the appeals for peace and prayer made by Your Holiness and the Holy Synod and, especially, by the efforts to protect the Mosque in Belgrade which came under attack in response to the events in Kosovo.
With you, we appeal for respect to be paid to all religious and sacred buildings, whether churches, monasteries or mosques, and for protection to be ensured for them by the authorities responsible for law and order.

We pray with those who are mourning for the victims of the violence and those who have been forced to leave their homes or see them destroyed by hatred.

We join in your prayers and your appeal for people to realize that, grief and anger notwithstanding, they will not give in to the desire for revenge which will only strengthen the cycle of violence and deny hope for the future. May the concluding prayer of the Appeal of Holy Synod be heard throughout Kosovo, throughout the region and wherever violence threatens in our world today: “O Lord, help all, and also us and our enemies, as peace, freedom and justice are necessary for all, both for us and for all people and nations.”

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Keith Clements, CEC General Secretary
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC General Secretary

Question of Religious Intolerance: Pakistan, Indonesia
Written statement at the UN Commission on Human Rights’ 60th Session, Item 11e: Civil and Political Rights, 15 March-23 April, 2004

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches has from the very beginning had religious liberty as its central concern.

Defence and promotion of religious liberty continues to be an integral part of the mandate of the Council. Over the years, the progressive evolution in the ecumenical understanding of religious liberty has been augmented and refined by the variety of concrete experiences of its member churches around the globe.

While religious liberty is considered as the main component of human rights for which the World Council of Churches has special responsibility, it is nevertheless clearly recognized that it cannot be divorced from other aspects of human rights. Aware of this position, the 5th WCC Assembly in Nairobi 1975 in its Report on Human Rights made the following observations under the Section “The Right to Religious Freedom”:

“The right to religious freedom has been and continues to be a major concern of member churches and the WCC. However, this right should never be seen as belonging exclusively to the church. The exercise of religious freedom has not always reflected the great diversity of convictions that exist in the world.

No religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect and reverence for the faith and basic human rights of others.

Religious liberty should never be used to claim privileges. For the church, this right is essential so that it can fulfill its responsibilities which arise out of the Christian faith. Central to these responsibilities is the obligation to serve the whole community.”

It is clear from the above that the Council believes being a Christian also means to belong to a world-wide “multi-national” confessing community. The unity of the church is meant to
serve all human beings and to become a sign for a full unity for justice and love of all men and women.

The World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by regular reports it receives from its member churches about increases in incidences of religious intolerance that result in innumerable deaths and destruction of property. Individuals as well as groups are subjected to persecution, discrimination and indiscriminate killings on grounds of religion, ethnicity and nationalism. In the post-Cold War period, in intra-state conflicts, religion has come to play an increasingly negative role in the regions. The WCC has identified the following ways in which religion plays a role in conflicts.

Religion as a component of nationalism.
Religious factors exacerbating tensions or conflicts whose root causes are socio-political and economic.
Religious factors and sentiments being deliberately used to heighten tension.
Religious notions of state transforming political institutions and leading to conflicts.
Religious fanaticism or fundamentalism influencing state policies.

Also, the global projection of religious fundamentalism and political power from major Western countries in consonance with economic imperialism has exacerbated inter-communal and inter-religious tensions internationally and within societies as they attempt to resist cultural incursions and economic exploitation.

Religious fundamentalism is now a common response to foreign domination, social marginalization and sudden disappearance of an imposed state ideology which leaves social groups exposed to overwhelming foreign influence. Ethnic and civil conflicts are also a constant challenge to inter-religious tolerance.

On the basis of the reports received, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches submits to this Commission its concern at the growing environment of religious intolerance and violence, amongst others, in Pakistan and Indonesia. This development is undermining the multicultural, multi-religious and pluralistic base of societies in these countries. The violence often unleashed against religious minorities in these countries has left them virtually defenceless. The challenge that governments and civil societies face in these countries is how to ensure the fair and effective application of legal standards to protect and promote the rights of religious minorities.

a. Pakistan

In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks in New York and the consequence of the US-led war in Afghanistan that did not go down well with Islamic parties and militant groups in the country, there was a series of attacks on Christian churches, hospitals, schools and other Christian institutions that left scores of people dead and many others wounded. On 25th September, 2002, terrorists attacked the office of Idara-e-Aman-o Insaf (Committee for Justice and Peace) that was set up in 1974 by the Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan in Karachi. The organization served the people irrespective of caste, colour or creed. Seven young Christian staff members of the Idara were brutally gunned down at point-blank range, allegedly by Islamic militants. To date neither the perpetrators of this gruesome attack, nor of the other attacks, have been arrested and brought before a court of law for their heinous crimes.
Despite the call by the National Council of Churches of Pakistan to the Government of Pakistan to hold a judicial inquiry into these incidents and to bring to justice the culprits responsible no headway has been made in the investigations. The lack of adequate oversight of law enforcement agencies and the judicial institutions have rendered them unaccountable and beyond the reach of government action. As a result, the culture of impunity has now become all-pervasive in the Pakistan society.

With the rise of religious intolerance the life of Christians in Pakistan has become increasingly difficult. Christians, with other religious minorities like Ahmdeis, suffer violence and persecution because of their faith. According to the Report released by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in 2001: “Christians continued to face social discrimination and violence in various forms. Like many other minority groups, their situation in fact appeared to have worsened in recent years.”

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, Christians in Pakistan continue to face social discrimination. As a result they have difficulty in finding jobs and are often subjected to indignity and inhuman treatment on the basis of their faith.

The government, while paying lip service about its concern for the religious minority, has done little to promote an environment of tolerance, understanding and pluralism in Pakistan society. It has failed to take any steps to control the projection of hate speech in the media, school curriculum and from the religious platform.

This has resulted in attacks and killing of Christians, particularly in the rural areas. Forcible conversion of Christians, particularly of young girls, is also on the rise. According to the Human Rights Monitor 2002-2003, published by the National Commission for Justice and Peace, there were cases of 125 and 73 forcible conversions in 2001 and 2002 respectively.

The dreaded blasphemy laws continue to hang over the heads of Christians as the sword of Damocles. Members of the Christian community, particularly in the rural areas, live in fear of cases being registered against them by the police on the complaint of an unfriendly neighbour or the Imam of the neighbourhood mosque.

A number of Christians continue to languish in jail in the provinces of Punjab and Sind, having been charged with blasphemy, since in most cases courts refuse to allow bail. The government of Pakistan, despite appeals by Christians and human rights organizations, has failed, neglected and/or avoided to repeal and/or amend the procedural part of the law to prevent its abuse.

b. Indonesia

Indonesia is a country where Muslims and Christians have lived side by side in peace for centuries. However, since the downfall of the Suharto government in May 1998, and the general breakdown of law and order, the country has witnessed a rise in religious extremism. Differences and disputes between Muslims and Christians in the Malukus and Central Sulawesi have resulted in violence and killings. The situation has escalated as result of the involvement of Lashkar Jihad. Christian communities throughout the region have been devastated and in some places entire communities and villages have been wiped out.

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs is particularly concerned by the recent developments in Poso. On 16th November 2003, the Treasurer of Central Sulawesi Christian Church, Mr Oranje Tadjodja and his nephew, were attacked and killed. The same day,
Dennis and Bowo of GKST Church from Wawopada and Ranoncu villages were stopped by a Muslim mob in front of Poso Central Market and killed. According to the reports received by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, during the last few months the region has witnessed an escalation in violence and systematic attacks, shooting and killings of Christians. The Indonesian Central government officials have blamed outsiders for these disturbances and have acknowledged failure on the part of local authorities to maintain law and order. The failure of the security forces to safeguard the lives and property of the people has created an air of fear and despondency in the Christian community.

In the Malukus region which witnessed unprecedented violence during the last three years, there is presently an uneasy calm, fear, insecurity and uncertainty. Muslims and Christians remain largely segregated in their respective areas with little or no possibilities of interaction. The pain, suffering and hurt caused as a result of intermittent communal violence have left deep scars on both sides that will take a long time to heal. The government has failed and/or neglected to help create an environment of security where the two communities could live together in peace and harmony. The longer this religious divide is allowed to continue the more problematic and permanent it is likely to become.

The unchecked influx of Lashkar Jihad in Sorong, Fak Fak, Biak and Jayapura has further compounded an already complex situation in the province of Papua. Young men from Java have been recruited for the militia ‘Satgar Merah Putih’ that operates hand in glove with the military and Lashkar Jihad to intimidate the Papuan people engaged in the struggle for social, economic, cultural and political rights.

The military, by encouraging and supporting the induction of Lashkar Jihad in the region, is using religion to create a ‘horizontal conflict’ to deflect attention from the demands of the Papuan people for justice and human rights.

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches therefore calls on the Commission to:

A. Pakistan
• urge the government of Pakistan to set up a permanent independent Minorities Commission that should inter-alia study the situation of religious minorities and make necessary recommendations to the government. It should be mandated to hear complaints of discrimination against religious minorities and recommend actions to the government.
• Encourage the government of Pakistan to promote understanding and interreligious tolerance in order to build a culture of peace, communal harmony and non-violence in the country through its educational institutions and the national media.

B. Indonesia
• Urge the government of Indonesia to defuse tension and conflicts in Poso, Malukus and Papua and create an environment of security that can enable a process of reconciliation and healing between the two communities. Encourage the government of Indonesia to revive the National Dialogue in Papua.

Religious Freedom and Liberty in the Emerging Context
Presentation by Peter Weiderud, Director, CCLA, at the EKD Working Group on Religious Freedom, Hanover, 18 December, 2003
Ecumenical concern for religious freedom and liberty is older than the World Council of Churches. The Oxford Conference on “Church State and Community” in 1937 first elaborated the understanding of the notion of religious freedom and liberty and named several freedoms that were necessary for the church to fulfill its obligations to society. These *inter alia* were:

– the right of public and private worship, preaching and teaching;
– freedom from imposition by the State of religious ceremonies and forms of worship;
– freedom to determine the nature of its government and the qualifications of its ministers and members;
– freedom of the individual to join the church;
– the right to control over the education of ministers and the right to provide religious instruction to youth;
– freedom of Christian service and missionary activity, both at home and abroad;
– freedom to cooperate with other churches; and
– freedom to use public facilities available to all citizens or associations as will make it possible to accomplish these ends.

This early understanding of religious freedom is all encompassing. It comes out of the colonial context of which the missionary enterprise was an integral part.

Subsequently, however, nearer to the period of the drafting of the Universal Declaration, the understanding of the right to religious liberty was set in the wider context of universal human rights which were the essential basis of a new just and peaceful world order.

**Amsterdam Declaration**

The first Assembly of the WCC (Amsterdam, 1948), meeting soon after the second World War, took cognizance of the work done by the Life and Work Movement and issued a Declaration of Religious Liberty that articulated a broad consensus among WCC member churches and was closer to the provisions of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration, with a focus on the rights of the individual rather than the rights of the Church:

– Every person has the right to determine his own faith and creed.
– Every person has the right to express his religious beliefs in worship, teaching and practice, and to proclaim the implications of his beliefs for relationships in a social or political community.
– Every person has the right to associate with others and to organize with them for religious purposes
– Every religious organization, formed or maintained by action in accordance with the rights of individual persons, has the right to determine its policies and practices for the accomplishment of its chosen purposes.

The Amsterdam Declaration of 1948 was prophetic. It not only emphasized the importance of religious liberty but also called for elaboration of an international bill of human rights to protect the rights of minorities, eliminate racial segregation or discrimination; guarantee freedom from arbitrary arrests and promote the realization of human freedom through social legislation. These rights together were seen as foundational pillars for building just and peaceful international relations.

The early discourse on the subject emphasized the responsibility for the protection of the right to religious freedom is a shared obligation: between State and Church, between the
churches themselves, between individual Christians and the churches themselves, between Christians and people of other faiths.

**Religious freedom and the return of religion in the political sphere**

The above definition of religious freedom and liberty served the WCC well during the Cold War period; over the years it was argued and refined by the variety of concrete experiences of its member churches around the globe. In the post Cold War reordering of societies and their international relations, the time has come to review and revisit the definition in light of the experience of the churches in their local, national situations and in the realm of international relations where religion has emerged as a key factor in the civil and political life of nations.

For the individual believer, religion is a single totality, but when reflecting on its political impact it can be helpful to explain the phenomenon of religion by classifying it according to its different forms of expression:

1. **Religion as spiritual experience.** In this aspect there are only very slight differences between the world religions – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.
2. **Religion as theology.** In the past there were great differences between the major religions in this area, but in recent years they have moved towards a deeper common understanding.
3. **Religion as ethics and values.** In this area there are much fewer differences between the religions than the individual believer and general public might think. For example, the three monotheistic religions have a similar basis for the ethics of economic management and how to put one’s gifts to good use – ideas about social justice, about the individual’s responsibility for his or her neighbour and the global neighbourhood. In broad terms they all share the view that the earth can provide “enough for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed”.
4. **Religion as a bearer of culture.** This is the area where the greatest differences are to be found, not only between the world religions, but also within them.

This aspect of religion is also increasingly important as the underlying cause of conflict – or as a tool easily manipulated in order to stir them up.

The two last-mentioned roles of religion – as an upholder of ethics and a bearer of culture – are the aspects of religion that are not only the concern of individuals, the churches and religious organizations. I believe these aspects to be of concern for the whole society and that it is absolutely necessary to bring them into the decision-making and political processes of our societies.

The fundamental transformations taking place in our societies mean that it is more urgent than ever to understand the role of religion in political processes.

National change and global exchange have led to economic development of considerable magnitude. As hundreds of millions of people leave extreme poverty behind, this potential offers hope to the world’s poor.

Simultaneously, however, new patterns of exclusion and inequality have appeared, with marginalization, insecurity and powerlessness as real consequences for many people. Such a situation may generate feelings of social and cultural insecurity.

These transformations in society also change the role of the nation-state. It would seem that the very rhythm and scale of the transformation exceed the capacity of national governments and policies to shape and influence the process.
We have a global economy. But the legal, moral or democratic framework vital to an economy if it is to be able to serve the common good continues to be a basically national responsibility.

The nation-state is not going to disappear. It will remain the most important political instrument in the foreseeable future. But global interdependence makes it increasingly difficult for the nation-state alone to deliver what people expect for a good life. This is a fact in both the northern and the southern hemisphere.

Consequently, people will look for supplementary communities with which they can identify, both larger and smaller than the nation-state. But people will also turn inwards. Cultural factors – such as ethnicity and religion – will be more important in people’s search for funds to build their hopes for the future. Socially and politically marginalized young people, who 30 years ago turned to Marxism in their search for a better future, might today turn to religion.

We know – both from history and contemporary experience – that religious influence on politics can be both beneficial and detrimental. Religious-political conflict is not a new phenomenon. Let me focus on three examples:

1. Historically, the role of religion in political conflicts has been to increase tension – even cause clashes – between civilizations. This can only happen if religion is used by political leaders to emphasize the exclusiveness and primacy of one particular group at the expense of others – be it Christian, Jewish, Muslim or some other religious faith. It is necessary for all actors – in particular churches and ecumenical organizations – to counteract all such mono-cultural political tendencies and prove that the Samuel Huntington theory of an inevitable clash between civilizations is part of an outmoded way of thinking.

2. In modern societies, in particular in Europe, religious-political friction has mainly occurred between clerical and secular authorities. Basically this is a healthy conflict which has helped – and continues to support – the development of universal social values in modern society, for example, pluralism, democracy and human rights.

3. As a consequence of the transformation taking place in our societies, a third kind of religious-political clash has become more evident in recent years both in domestic and international politics. This is the split within religions and cultures.

A split between “fundamentalists”, who see their traditional scriptures and teachings as so absolute as to divide humankind into irreconcilable believers and infidels, and others, who see their ancient traditions or spiritual insights as raw material for wider human reconciliation, as the basis for an intensified search for community among people of differing races, creeds and national origins: a split between those protecting the “truth” and those searching for the “truth”.

The World Council of Churches has a long-standing history of advocating the need for universally applicable standards. This goal, in the present context, can only be obtained through interaction and dialogue.

For many years ecumenical social thought regarded the secular state as the ideal for social harmony in a religiously plural society. Today, however, the resurgence of religious belief and resulting inter-religious tension has led some to subscribe to other models such as a multi-confessional state. Others call for deeper understanding of the rule of law and of new processes.
of democratic participation. There are renewed claims on the state by the churches. Presently, few states can claim guarantees of religious liberty within their jurisdictions to be free from problems.

Still, the secular state provides a good basis for a multi-confessional society. However, the state needs to be sensitive to and understand religious needs.

**Post-Harare framework for work on religious liberty**

The current framework for the CCIA's work on religious freedom and intolerance was spelled out at the consultation organized by the CCIA on “Human Rights and the Churches – New Challenges” at Morges, Switzerland, in June 1998. The Consultation had two main objectives – to sum up the findings of the Global Review of Ecumenical practices and policies on human rights and to prepare the Draft Statement on Human Rights for adoption by the 8th WCC Assembly in Harare.

It may be worthwhile to recall here the extracts on religious liberty from the Consultation Report.

“We reaffirm the statement of the Nairobi Assembly that religious liberty should never be used to claim privileges. For the church this right is essential so that it can fulfill its responsibility which arises out of the Christian faith. The list of countries that have declared an official state religion grows, giving to religion constitutional and legislative powers and privileges. In a number of these cases the freedom of citizens to choose and practice the belief of their choice is more and more severely restricted. The secular and plural basis of the state is under widespread assault and religious extremism and intolerance is on the rise.

Former communist countries struggle to revise or adopt new basic laws on religion and religious practice under pressure to pattern such legislation after Western models, creating a “free market” of religions. Churches and other faith bodies argue for protection against an invasion of exogenous religious movements and proselytism as they seek to recover from decades of repression and atheist rule. Difficult new questions arise for the ecumenical movement which has declared opposition to proselytism and at the same time advocates for religious freedom based on the provisions it has been instrumental in having included in international human rights standards.”

**Significant issues of concern**

It is in the above context of the Global Review process and the Harare Assembly Statement that the CCIA identified the following areas where the WCC needed to focus its attention in the coming period.

– Issues facing religious minorities in Eastern and Central Europe, where societies are in transition, and in the process of drafting new constitutions and legislations.
– Issues of religious minorities in Islamic countries where Shariah is being made applicable in the civil and political life of nations.
– Role of religion in conflict – looking at intolerance as a major contributor of human rights violations and inter-religious dialogue as a vehicle for promotion and protection of human rights.

**Religious minorities in Eastern and Central Europe**

Most societies in Eastern and Central Europe are in transition. The previous political equation of religion and state has been overturned and unresolved historical tensions have
resurfaced, while powerful foreign religious political and economic interests have intervened at all levels of society.

Unchecked activities of foreign missionaries and new religious movements have had a negative effect on inter-confessional and interfaith relations. In the emerging context national governments and civil administrations are being reconstituted to guarantee the integrity of the state. Steps are also being taken to provide constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion. The paradox is that while many constitutions guarantee freedom of religion, conscience or belief, the growing concern is that freedom to preach and to choose one’s religion is misused, both by established or majority religions or by new religious movements. There is also the question of how to encourage the practice of tolerance, both in the governments as well as in the religious communities.

In a consultation organized by the WCC in 2001 the participants from Central and Eastern Europe identified the following as crucial areas where churches need to pay attention:

- legal provisions, including registration, the consequence of a multi-tier system and restitution of church property;
- relationship between majority and minority churches;
- new religious movements;
- religion and conflict;
- education for tolerance;
- anti-discrimination;
- the effects of September 11.

Some key areas on which work has already started but where much more needs to be done include teaching of tolerance. The issue of tolerance for other religious beliefs and organizations is a matter of priority in Central and Eastern Europe. It has to begin to take place at local and national levels in the context of the understanding of tolerance within a Christian value system.

The WCC in cooperation with CEC could organize meetings between minority and majority churches to address problematic issues in their relationship. This is a major issue of discord, where despite new-found freedom and respite from communist rule, religious minorities in the region feel intimidated, harassed and oppressed by the majority. While the initiative to build bridges between the majority and the minority has to come from local churches, WCC and CEC can provide expertise and experience to build and strengthen healthy relations based on justice and fairness.

A considerable amount of advocacy work needs to be done in respect of the requirement of registration, religious education and restitution of church property. The WCC and CEC could undertake a comprehensive and systematic analysis of these issues throughout the region. A compilation of such data on the issue listed above could serve as a resource for churches struggling in their particular situations.

Ecumenical support should be mobilized for the OSCE expert panel on Freedom of Religion and monitoring implementation of the OSCE human dimension by making these mechanisms known to the churches. These two regional initiatives are carrying out important work on religious freedom that need to be known more widely amongst the churches.

The issue of proselytism continues to be a central theme in discussion of religious freedom and ecumenical relations. This is an issue that has resonance in all the regions, particularly the relationship between mission and religious freedom.
Church-state relations should not be seen in the national context alone but also in relation to the European Union which is a trans-national body, and need to study pluralism in Europe – how it is incorporated into constitutions and other legal frameworks.

**Religious minorities in Islamic countries**

The international human rights law prohibits discrimination against any religion or belief not only at the level of the state, but also at every level of society. This means that religious communities are themselves under duty to treat those of different beliefs fairly and with tolerance. The interpretation of Islamic Shariah laws in countries like Iran, Pakistan, Sudan, Indonesia and Nigeria is in contradiction with the principles of the primacy of international law. Also, practices based on national law in some Islamic countries ignore requirements of the right of freedom of conscience, religion and belief.

The rise of militant Islam in parts of Asia and Africa has galvanized popular Islamic movements against Western Christian values. This rejectionist trend is accompanied by the desire to implement the Islamic code of Shariah. One of the challenges for the WCC is how to respond to the cries of Christian minorities in Islamic countries, who suffer persecution, discriminatory practices and policies that are in violation of the principles enshrined in the international human rights regime.

The WCC is called to respond to this challenge in a sensitive manner to ensure it does not in anyway impinge and/or discourage inter-religious dialogue to resolve differences and disputes at the local and national levels. At the same time the WCC has to be seen to support and accompany churches pastorally so that Christian minorities in such situations do not feel isolated or abandoned. In a low-key consultation with church leaders from Islamic countries in Asia and Africa in 2000 the following areas were identified for future work:

- In view of the reassertion of Islam, how can the ecumenical fellowship support, accompany and respond to the needs of Christian minorities, particularly victims of human rights violations?
- Equip and empower churches in local and national situations to adopt preventive measures through inter-religious dialogue.
- At the international level, identify appropriate partners to form inter-religious alliances to prevent human rights violations while ensuring issues of inter-religious communal violence at the local and national levels are not internationalized.
- Shariah laws, it is said, are often introduced and adopted through undemocratic methods with the assistance of funds made available from abroad.

The push for application of Shariah laws that discriminate against religious minorities is inspired by outside forces and is a source of tension and conflict.

How can this trend be checked?

- Harmonious Christian-Muslim relations exist in some places. What are the lessons that can be learned from such experiences and situations?
- Muslims tend to see Christianity and Christians as a legacy of the colonial past. How can Christians be helped to overcome this barrier of guilt by religious affiliation?
The church leaders from Islamic countries call on the WCC to promote solidarity and networking amongst churches in Islamic countries and keep intergovernmental institutions like the UN, Commonwealth, ECOWAS and others informed about conflicts that have religious dimensions. Muslim organizations in Europe and North America that advocate for human rights of Muslim minorities should be made more aware of the situation facing Christians in Islamic countries and their help sought to address such situations.

Efforts should also be made to strengthen dialogue as a preventive measure. Those that have worked on successful models should be brought together. Case studies of successful dialogue situations should be developed and inter-faith groups strengthened. Churches need to seek allies amongst those concerned about the rise of religious extremism.

**Role of religion in conflict and inter-religious dialogue**

As said earlier, the return of religion in the political sphere has fuelled and escalated violence and conflicts. In 1986, at the 42nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, a Special Rapporteur was appointed to examine incidences and governmental action in all parts of the world that were inconsistent with the provisions of the Declaration on Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination of Religion or Belief and to recommend counteractive measures for such situations.

Over the years the Special Rapporteur has not only documented cases of discrimination against those who differ in religion or belief but also cases of summary and arbitrary executions, torture, unlawful detention, censorship and suppression.

Religious intolerance and restrictions on religious freedom, as stated earlier, have grown almost universally, giving rise to questions related to the degree to which religious freedom is an absolute right. Other related questions are the relationship between religion and culture, the role of religion in politics, the relationship between religion and national and ethnic identity.

The elimination of religious discrimination and intolerance is the basic responsibility of the State within the framework of legal and political commitments made and as a consequence of acceptance of international instruments. Nevertheless, it must be understood that behaviour patterns and attitudes cannot be controlled or regulated through executive or legislative actions. To overcome the present climate of intolerance, churches have to undertake awareness-building and education programmes to change the hearts and minds of the people in terms of understanding the other.

Religious freedom will continue to be a major area of concern for the involvement of the WCC. The Council and its vast network of churches around the world need to be mobilized in a major effort to foster understanding of the “other”.

Today more than ever before there is a need to bring out the liberating and humanitarian aspects of all religions to promote a culture of peace and tolerance.

As mentioned earlier, the main problem is not so much between, as within, religions.

The clash between cultural provincialism and openness – between those protecting the truth and those searching for the truth – is evident in all cultures and must be addressed with a forward-looking attitude.

As the ideologies of modern, industrial society are losing ground, there is growing openness to the contribution of religion.
If religion is used as an instrument to gain political power and emphasize the exclusiveness and primacy of one’s own group at the expense of others, it will be a most destructive contribution. The political idea of “the otherness” fuels conflicts.

On the other hand, by emphasizing fundamental ethics and humanity, by giving voice to the voiceless, by emphasizing the responsibility of the individual, by focusing on inclusiveness and a deeper sense of hope, by highlighting the importance of the meeting of cultures, by being ecumenical, religion will make a much needed and constructive contribution to our societies.

**Joint ecumenical approach to the conflict in Zimbabwe**

*Letter to H.E. Kjell Magne Bondevik, Prime Minister of Norway, 16 December, 2003*

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I want to express my very sincere appreciation to you for honouring us by your presence at the Inter-Religious Dialogue and for the far-reaching and challenging insights you shared with us.

Your statement that “religion should be seen as part of the solution and not as part of the problem” still resonates in our mind. Indeed this is also the position of the World Council of Churches. We are already receiving positive feedback from our member churches, particularly from the churches that live in situations where inter-faith dialogue is critical and urgent.

The encounter my colleagues and I had with you in my office, even though short, did help us to address two of the major conflicts in which the WCC is heavily engaged and where the involvement of Norwegian Church Aid continues to be very supportive. I am referring in particular to Sudan and Zimbabwe. The World Council of Churches will continue to monitor the developments in these two countries in close consultation with its partners.

Your proposal to encourage specifically the neighboring countries to play a proactive role in the Zimbabwe situation is timely. As you know, the Zimbabwean churches, through the recently created Task Force, have intensified their advocacy with the respective presidents of southern African countries. We will continue to support them in this important effort.

In response to the request of the Zimbabwean Council of Churches, in early 2004, we are planning to organize a meeting of the Zimbabwean churches and their partners in Southern Africa and beyond. This encounter will be strategically important for developing a joint common ecumenical approach to the resolution of the Zimbabwean conflict. The main challenge now is the imperative need to create the necessary positive political atmosphere for dialogue between the ZANU-PF and the opposition.

In conclusion the important and unique event we held last week has opened new possibilities and opportunities for a mutually supportive mission and task for the future. We therefore welcome and feel encouraged by this opportunity for dialogue and look forward to continued contacts for deeper engagement in the search for peace and harmonious living among the people of diverse cultures and beliefs. This is also because we see you not only as a political leader but as a person of faith as well.
I wish you Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary Elect

Statement on Iraq
WCC Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August-2 September, 2003

Recalling all of the WCC’s previous relevant policy statements on Iraq, in particular its statements made since the meeting of the Central Committee in 2002;
Condemning the human rights violations of the previous regime evidenced for example by the discovery of mass graves;
Reaffirming its conviction that the war on Iraq was immoral, ill-advised and in breach of the principles of the UN Charter;
Reaffirming also the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq;
Noting the inalienable and fundamental rights and freedoms of the Iraqi people;
Reaffirming also the right of the Iraqi people to freely choose their political destiny, non intervention in their own internal affairs, full sovereignty over the natural resources of their country and economic and social reconstruction;
Stressing the importance for the occupying powers immediately to allow the United Nations to work with the people of Iraq to form a representative, full and equitable participatory government based on the rule of law, free of influence of the occupying powers;
Reaffirming the importance of non-military means for the nuclear disarmament of Iraq and for its eventual confirmation by United Nations weapons inspectors and recognizing once again the need for the whole Middle East region to be free of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons by non-military means;
Reiterating the need for member states to support the United Nations in playing a leading role in humanitarian relief, the reconstruction of Iraq, disarmament, protection of human rights and the restoration and establishment of local and national governance structures;
Welcoming all humanitarian assistance provided to the people of Iraq by the international community and the churches world-wide, in particular under the umbrella of Action by Churches Together International (ACT) in cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC);
The WCC Central Committee,
Concerned about the prevailing lawlessness and insecurity in Iraq and the potential impact of the daily violence on the Iraqi people, humanitarian and UN personnel and the transitional process;
Noted with regret that over 80 percent of the population of Iraq is now estimated to be living in poverty while it is estimated that the total debt of the country is within the range of USD 100-150 billion (excluding its outstanding reparation claims from the 1991 Gulf War), which has a crippling effect on the life and future of the Iraqi people;
Continues to be concerned about the long-term political, social, cultural and religious consequences of this war and the continued occupation, especially the negative impact on Christian-Muslim relations, the exacerbation of intense hatred towards the “western world” strengthening extremist ideologies, breeding further global insecurity and increased emigration of Christians from the Middle East;
Encouraged by the increased role and involvement of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the creation of a new UN assistance mission to support the Secretary General in the fulfillment of his mandate under UN SC Resolution 1483;
Dismayed by the actions taken by the United Nations Security Council subsequent to the war on Iraq, giving the occupation an open-ended mandate, an ambiguous role to the United Nations, and granting the occupying powers the right to legally and financially administer Iraq, that have the propensity to undermine its role as primary upholder of international peace and security; Remains concerned that there is no clear timetable for an end to the military occupation and the earliest possible restoration of Iraqi sovereignty; Convinced that it is essential to place human rights and the rule of law at the forefront of efforts to encourage the building of representative, democratic institutions; Remains convinced that diplomatic efforts involving the states of the region will still be needed to address outstanding conflict issues in the Middle East, most notably the need to end the illegal occupation of Palestine; Noted with appreciation the statement “Church Leaders United Against War” and all efforts of the WCC General Secretary and staff prior to and during the war on Iraq and recognized particularly the appreciation expressed by the Arab world, including the churches in the Middle East and the MECC.

Therefore, the WCC Central Committee, Deplores the invasion and occupation of Iraq by foreign forces as an act of aggression in violation of the United Nations Charter and international law; Declares that preventive and pre-emptive war violates international law and the principles of the UN Charter; Welcomes the courageous stance of all WCC member churches in particular the churches in the USA, UK and Australia in opposing this war and working tirelessly for peace; Welcomes the lifting of economic sanctions against Iraq after thirteen years; Opposes the occupying powers taking advantage of their military force to establish military bases in Iraq for their own use, and from benefiting from rebuilding Iraq or from sale of its resources; Calls on the UN Security Council to insist on the establishment of a legitimate, sovereign, elected and inclusive government as early as possible and for the immediate and orderly withdrawal of the occupying forces, handing over transitional administration to the United Nations; Encourages member states of the UN to raise the concern of the legality of this war in the general debate of the United Nations General Assembly; Asks states to participate in setting up a transparent mechanism for arbitration and to cancel the Iraqi debt as it has emerged out of loans that merely financed the previous Iraqi regime; Requests the relevant UN mechanisms promptly to investigate, gather any evidence of violations of human rights of the previous regime, war crimes and crimes against humanity, violations of international humanitarian law including the illegal resort to war, and to prosecute all such crimes; Calls on the occupying powers to provide for full reparations to the Iraqi people for damages caused and precipitated by the unlawful use of military force, and to ensure the removal of cluster bombs, depleted uranium and un-detonated munitions; Condemns all forms of violence, the killing of religious leaders, all acts of destruction and looting in Iraq, including the deadly terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, and mourns the loss of lives of the UN personnel who were in Baghdad to serve the humanitarian needs and work for the restoration of the sovereignty of the people of Iraq, particularly the death of Mr Sergio Vieira de Mello; Urges all those concerned to allow full unimpeded access by humanitarian personnel to all people in need of assistance, and to promote the safety, security and freedom of movement of humanitarian, United Nations and associated personnel;
Calls on the churches world-wide and the international community to demonstrate a collective and cohesive commitment to support the people of Iraq, whose plight has not been given proper recognition in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of their country;

Urges the Iraqi religious communities to uphold fundamental human rights, including religious freedom, the urgency of establishing the rule of law, ensuring the rights of all religious communities and equal rights of all citizens;

Affirms the role of the churches of Iraq, in collaboration with other Iraqi religious communities, in the social, economic and political reconstruction of Iraq, including the creation of platforms of inter-religious dialogue;

Reiterates its commitment, together with the churches of Iraq, to dialogue and cooperation among religious communities. Such cooperation, grounded in the respect of cultural diversity and religious plurality, is essential for the safeguarding of national unity, preventing or diffusing communal tensions;

Prays for the people and the churches of Iraq and their faithful as they continue to be witnesses of hope.

Statement on Europe
WCC Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August-2 September, 2003

Background
There have been significant developments and changes within Europe in recent years, throughout the continent. In particular since the meeting of the last Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, a year ago, decisions have been made to enlarge the European Union with ten new members and, linked to that, to draft a new European Constitution.

Europe is a diverse and evolving region, with multiple geographic, economic and religious parameters. In the final years of the 20th century, Europe has experienced some of the most profound changes in its history. The revolutions which swept through Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 liberated millions of people from repressive and often violent regimes. The momentous events of the last decade mark an end to the partitioned Europe of Yalta, and they offer the real hope of a new and inclusive community from the North Sea to the Caspian – and beyond. The enlargement of the European Union to the east and south in 2004, and the expansion of NATO, along with the proposals for a new European Constitution by the Convention on the Future of Europe, will be decisive factors in shaping the destiny of the continent.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva 26 August-2 September, 2003, recognizes the profound and dynamic changes taking place across the European continent. The last resolution on Europe was adopted by the Central Committee, 21-28 August, 1992; in it, the Central Committee:

Alerted member churches to the promise and challenge of greater European integration.
Recognized the progress made by the EC in redressing regional imbalances, combating poverty and advancing the social rights of all its peoples.
Affirmed the need to speak out and maintain dialogue on poverty, economic inequities, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, environment and relationships with other European states and with the two-thirds world.
Drew attention to the presence of ecumenical institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg and to the resources and expertise they offer to the churches.

Noted with appreciation the role played by CEC (Conference of European Churches) and recommended enhanced cooperation between EECCS (European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society), CEC and the WCC on matters of concern related to European unity and its global implications.

The concerns of the ecumenical movement and the member churches in relation to the European institutions remain as identified in the WCC Central Committee resolution of 1992. Most of these concerns are handled primarily by European actors in the ecumenical movement, such as the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in the areas of European integration, economic issues, democracy, human rights, bioethics and religious liberty, or Eurodiaconia in addressing economic and social issues, or the churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) for refugees, migrants and ethnic minorities, or Aprodev in regard to development policies. The role of the WCC is to work with European ecumenical organizations by bringing in the global dimension, provide support when requested, and collaborate on issues of common concern.

Since the resolution 11 years ago, there have been major changes within as well as outside the European Union. Some boundaries have broken down, and new ones have been created.

Within the European Union three new, economically advanced and net contributing members have entered the community, making the total 15 member states.

Twelve of the 15 members have come together into the common currency, the euro. There has been a gradual development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the establishment of a Rapid Reaction Force, in particular as a result of the experience with the war in the former Yugoslavia. After the European Council in Copenhagen in December 2002, accession agreements have been signed with 10 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, who will become members of the EU in 2004.

Related to the enlargement, the Convention on the Future of Europe presented its draft Constitution in June 2003; in article 51, the role of the churches is affirmed in what is a new way for the EU: “The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.”…. “The Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organizations.”…. “Recognizing their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organizations.”

The European Union also has developed its cooperation with its neighbours and the rest of the world. In the “Barcelona process”, we have seen increased cooperation with the countries south and east of the Mediterranean. There is a treaty establishing the European Community on the one hand and The Georgetown Agreement establishing the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) on the other. Together they formulated in Benin, June 2000, a partnership agreement called the Cotonou Partnership Agreement that replaces the former Lomé Convention, affirming among other things their commitment to work together towards the achievements of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

There have been significant social and economic changes in the continent, both within and outside the EU. Many countries in the former Soviet Union have a significantly lower GDP,
compared to 15 years ago. The social security systems in Western Europe are challenged with an ageing population and changing economic conditions. The Common Agricultural Policy, which still is using the lion’s share of the EU budget, is challenged for being socially, financially, environmentally as well as globally untenable.

Since 1992, several sub-regional structures for cooperation have developed, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), contributing further to European integration. Important contributions, in particular relating to human rights, minority rights, democracy, the rule of law and development of civil society have also been made by the more inclusive European institutions, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE.

NATO, the military alliance remaining from the Cold War, has also changed. It has developed its crisis management capacity, contributed its first out-of-area operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, reached an agreement of cooperation with Russia and invited Central and Eastern European countries to become new members.

However, in particular during the last two years, there has been a growing division between the US and European member states on fundamental issues of security – pre-emptive strike, international law, the role of the UN and how to meet the threat from weapons of mass destruction.

The European ecumenical structures relating to the European institutions have changed and developed over the past decade. One important example is the merger of the Brussels-based European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS) with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the development of closer working relations with the Roman Catholic COMECE (Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community). One specific expression of this ecumenical climate is the Charta Oecumenica, which provides a tool for furthering cooperation between churches on local, national and European level.

The religious and ecumenical context of Europe is complex and varied, and religious pluralism must be recognized by churches and societies alike. The great majority of religious adherents is Christian, from the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions. Significant indigenous Muslim communities exist, particularly in the Balkans, the Caucasus regions and other parts of Russia, alongside multiple immigrant religious communities. Religious affiliation is to some extent related to geography, and has been a decisive factor in cultural and social development.

The level of religious practice varies highly across the region. In Western Europe, historical churches have experienced a decline in membership, while many Diaspora churches from the South have taken root, parallel with new forms of religious faith. Many churches in Central and Eastern Europe have undergone a powerful spiritual and material revival over the last decade, following the period of communist persecution. Religious and ecumenical relations are similarly complex.

In some places the ecumenical idea has become part of the self-identity of churches, but there are also churches and religious communities in conflict. In many countries, the period has been marked by the return of the churches and religion to the “public sphere” as important political and social actors. The churches are called to contribute to and influence the developments which are shaping Europe. Christianity has influenced European history, and the
contribution and responsibility of the churches and religious communities, including Judaism and Islam, must be recognized.

The significance of this period calls WCC member churches to reflect on, and engage in, developments in Europe.

The focus of the WCC
The WCC policy focuses primarily on four areas where Europe interacts with other regions – the values in shaping European unity, the European process of integration, a Europe in balance with its global neighbourhood and the role of Europe for peace and security. The implementation of the WCC’s policy should be in close cooperation with the European ecumenical organizations.

A. Churches and values in shaping European unity
During the course of the last century, Europe experienced revolution and upheaval on an unprecedented scale. Millions perished in wars and in the concentration camps and gulags of communist and Nazi regimes. The vision of modern European unity was born out of this context of violence and conflict, hoping for peace and democracy throughout the continent. Modern Europe has been at the heart of much of the extraordinary social, political and creative development of the postwar world. Churches and other religious institutions continue to have a central responsibility in the historical development of the continent.

The recent experience of European history teaches us that the vision and success of European unity and peace cannot be built simply on the market economy. People and societies are transformed by beliefs and ideas, as well as by transactions and trade. A “heart and soul”, a rediscovery and renewal of values and spirituality for Europe, are needed more than ever. But historically the churches have too often been vehicles of nationalist tendencies and crucibles of conflict. The churches can and must unlock their healing and peacemaking power in society, and find the inner resources to witness to a new hope that can be offered to Europe.

The WCC member churches must uphold the principle that churches and religious communities are vehicles of culture and identity, an essential foundation for a moral and ethical Europe, and must be recognized as partners in dialogue by the European institutions.

B. European integration: towards a deeper and wider Europe
Because they are the most inclusive European institutions and are mandated to handle issues of utmost importance to the churches, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe remain priorities for the WCC and the ecumenical movement when relating to European integration.

Also among the founders of the European Union, there was a common understanding of the need to solve problems and disagreements together, rather than on one’s own. This multilateral experience of solving common problems and meeting common challenges together, rather than on their own – the culture of political compromise – offers a political model for multilateral cooperation.

Europe has experienced profound divisions for most of its history, but recent political developments have shifted the focus to integration and unity. These developments offer the chance for a peaceful, democratic and just Europe stretching from Iceland to the Caucasus. The political search for an inter-dependent Europe, built on social and economic justice, is advocated by churches.

However, many historic divisions and challenges remain. Others are entering into the scene or becoming more significant as a result of the changing societies, like racism, ethnic
tensions and trafficking of human beings. Inclusion of new countries into the European Union means new borders between neighbors. Failure to accept migrants means new boundaries between people. A number of factors will affect the success and the depth of European integration, including geography, economies, history, culture – and religion.

WCC member churches should support the vision of an inclusive, wider Europe, where unity is based on respect for diversity in history, culture and faith. European unity should be built on a new and deeper encounter of cultures and civilizations, in which the churches will have an essential role. Therefore, the decision by the European Union to include in the next stage of European Union enlargement the nations of Romania and Bulgaria, countries with a majority Orthodox population, is an essential and welcome step. Similar attention must be given to the countries of the Western Balkans, to overcome the recent period of severe conflict and instability.

A wider European integration must give careful consideration to the contribution of Russia and the other CIS countries, as well as Turkey; these nations have been and continue to be major political and cultural forces in the European context. Churches should also contribute to the deepening of European understanding and integration. The continued importance of the cultural and religious divides of the continent should not be underestimated in the integration process. The schism between the Byzantine East and the Latin West, between the Orthodox and Catholic and, later, the Protestant worlds, marks one fundamental rupture in European history, and a distortion of European identity. The progressive enlargement of the European Union has, until recently, closely paralleled the historical territory of Western Christendom. New ways of bridging this divided space and memory, and of building new perceptions, through means such as open dialogue on different value systems, need to be sought by the churches.

C. **Europe in balance with its global neighbourhood**

Globalization means that Europe’s security and future must be sought in harmony with the rest of the world. Therefore, free and fair trade, development assistance, multilateral work for social justice, sustainable development and a healthy environment, human rights, public health and disarmament should be seen as forward-looking policies in Europe’s own interest.

Europe’s relation to the South has been marked by imperialism and colonial relations which continue to influence EU policies on development and trade. However, colonial experiences are limited to certain member states, and within an enlarged EU they will be in a minority. This offers a possibility for a new self-understanding of Europe’s role in the world, to which the churches should contribute.

Although there is no lack of fine policy statements of EU institutions regarding development cooperation, the translation of the lofty goals into actual practice leaves much to be desired. A major issue is the lack of coherence between the objective to eradicate poverty on the one hand, and the goals pursued by trade, agricultural, fisheries and foreign policy on the other hand. Conflicting interests within and between Member States as well as the complexity of EU policy-making exacerbate this incoherence.

The subsequent Lomé Conventions between the ACP and EU, combined a development cooperation agenda with non-reciprocal trade arrangements. Under the influence of trade liberalization policies pursued in the context of the World Trade Organization, this combination has been abandoned in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which basically aims at establishing free-trade arrangements. Although trade preferences are still given to the so-called Least Developed Countries (under the Everything But Arms initiative), the contractual nature of non-
reciprocal trade relationships has been lost. As free trade between unequal partners tends to benefit the strongest, the WCC and member churches are called to critically monitor EU-ACP trade negotiations for the coming years.

The lack of vision for and consensus on a future sustainable social model for Europe make it difficult for the EU to develop a coherent policy towards the rest of the world and to provide a clear alternative voice to the US in the international financial institutions. This lack of coherent policy may also be seen in the immediate neighbourhood, where on average, the people living to the north of the Mediterranean basin are economically 12 times better off than their southern counterparts. If the present policy of the EU continues to be carried out, promoting free trade in areas where Europe is strong but not in areas where the partner countries have comparative advantages, the gap might widen still more. This is a situation which will increase the risk of conflict, fan social tension and increase the number of refugees. The European churches need to address the values and principles of these issues in a clear way.

During the last three decades it has become increasingly clear that environmental resources are not available in unlimited amounts. As market prices do not incorporate sufficiently the limited availability and the environmental scarcity related to consumption of goods, their overuse, in particular of fossil fuels, has become systemic in Europe as well as in the rest of the OECD world. Europe contributes significantly to the emission of greenhouse gases and thus to global warming.

This represents a burden on future generations and a reduced capacity for longterm economic prosperity. It also represents a source of global tension. Extrapolating current European industrial consumption and production patterns to the entire world would require about ten times the number of existing resources. Europe is accumulating an ecological debt in its relationships to other regions.

The perception of increasing migration to Europe and widespread xenophobic sentiments have led governments to increase border surveillance, tighten asylum processes, and adopt policies intended to deter potential asylum-seekers. Yet the factors which compel asylum-seekers and migrants to seek entry into European countries continue – wars, human rights abuses, poverty and lack of hope. The tightening of borders and the lack of legal opportunities for migration have led to an increasing role for traffickers and smugglers. Over the past years, thousands of would-be migrants and asylum-seekers have lost their lives in their attempts to cross European borders or arrive on European shores. Many immigrants find themselves in irregular situations, often in deplorable conditions. In such conditions, new forms of slavery are on the rise in Europe.

While the demographic reality suggests that migration may be beneficial to European countries and while some European countries are encouraging highly skilled migrants, the overall trend is towards increasingly restrictive migration and asylum policies. As European governments attempt to harmonize their policies toward migrants and asylum-seekers, European churches are increasingly challenged to develop common approaches across national and denominational boundaries. The increasing presence of migrants in Europe also continues to raise broader issues of inter-religious relations, the linkage between racism and xenophobia, and questions about European identity itself. Churches are often called, not only to minister to the needs of migrants, but also to confront their governments concerning policies towards potential migrants and asylum-seekers.
Racism and xenophobia and other related forms of intolerance are not new elements in the European contexts. Churches in Europe have a special role to play in working to end racism and xenophobia in church and society.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”, much progress has been made in the setting up of new international norms and standards on human rights and humanitarian laws. Europe had much to contribute to this development. In recent times Europe has witnessed an emerging diversity in its societies that spreads across culture, politics, social and economic sectors. This enrichment has contributed to the shaping of attitudes as well as a new understanding of the concept and meaning of human rights and the rights of minorities.

With the changing nature of state and society, as a result of globalization, some of the above laws and standards need to be reviewed in light of the emerging developments. The European Union by virtue of its history and experience has a particular responsibility to contribute to this debate and ensure the respect of human rights in all member states.

Europe has much to offer to its global neighbourhood. However, it is imperative that Europe also learn from other societies. Historically, Europe has dominated the rest of the world both militarily, politically, economically, technologically and in terms of the dissemination of knowledge. This has created a euro-centric perception of other regions and difficulties to value knowledge from other societies.

A balanced relation with other regions can only develop with interdependency also in the field of knowledge, and the churches have an important role to play in Europe in this transformation.

D. Europe and security

For too many years, the focus in European Security Policy has been on military balance, nuclear weapons and power politics. Although we still cannot disregard these factors, the great difference today is that security can be discussed and sought within a much broader spectrum of measures, a shift from the traditional perspective of mere national security towards including human security. There has been a clear attempt by the EU to look upon security from a broader perspective, to strengthen the political will for conflict prevention and to reinforce the capacity for crisis intervention and peace-keeping.

However, when confronted with realities, the common foreign and security policy of the EU has not been strong enough to sustain the different members’ views.

The inability of the EU to maintain a common policy during the Iraq crisis of 2003 left the field open for the US alone to set the agenda.

There is also a risk that the capacity build-up within the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU will leave the continent too strong on the military side yet still too weak in civil instruments. Furthermore, there is no consensus among the EU members about the need for a UN mandate for action involving military force. In light of the illegal war against Iraq and the precedent that might set, the European member churches of the WCC are asked to request their respective governments to clarify their position on this basic principle in international law.

The early vision of a common European defence was never implemented. Today, most EU members are also members of NATO. However, a minority maintain a policy of military
non-alignment. The new members from Central and Eastern Europe have chosen membership of NATO as a means to safeguard their sovereignty.

This places heavy financial burdens on comparatively weak economies and direct resources from civilian to military needs. The enlargement of NATO, depending on how it is made, may also complicate the integration of Russia into the rest of Europe. The experience of the out-of-area activities by NATO in Kosovo and Afghanistan has shown the limits of the military alliance in meeting today’s complex threats to security and in building peace.

NATO is furthermore the most important tool of US involvement in Europe and of European countries’ influence on the US. However, the division between the US and European countries on critical security issues – pre-emptive strike, international law, role of UN and weapons of mass destruction – makes it difficult for NATO to find its future direction. As the critical issues for NATO are strong concerns for the WCC and member churches, it is necessary to follow these developments closely. In particular, member churches in Europe and the US are asked to find ways to address the disagreements between the two, in advocating for global security based on international law and multilateral cooperation.

The action of the Central Committee
The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva August 26-September 2, 2003,

1. Takes note of the previous WCC Central Committee resolution on Europe in 1992, and of the significant developments which have affected Europe during the last decade.
2. Appreciates the particular roles played by the Conference of European Churches and other European ecumenical organizations, working closely in collaboration with Roman Catholic partner organizations, in monitoring and influencing European developments and integration.
3. Welcomes the increased ecumenical cooperation in Europe, including the process stimulated by the Charta Oecumenica.
4. Reaffirms the unique roles in the European integration process of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, being the most inclusive of the European Institutions.
5. (a) Welcomes the accession of 10 new members from Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean to the European Union, as a major accomplishment to overcome the dividing line of the Cold War and encourages an integration process towards real unity and equality in Europe;
   (b) Cautions against the risk of new divisions emerging along historical, religious, ethnic and economic fault-lines in Europe, both between Eastern and Western Christian cultures, and between Christianity and Islam, and therefore;
   (c) Urges that priority is given to the integration of Bulgaria and Romania into the European Union, and to deepening cooperation, peace-building and integration between member states of the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans and of the former Soviet Union.
6. (a) Insists that poverty eradication, respect for human rights (political, civil, economic, social and cultural) and respect for God’s creation should be the overarching objectives for the European Union’s development policies and that these objectives are fully integrated in the Union’s policies in other areas such as agriculture, fisheries, trade, environment, and common foreign and security policy.
   (b) Urges the European Union to increase its efforts to develop international law and standards on human rights, humanitarian law and corporate social responsibility, to meet the challenges of globalization and to work for the recognition and functioning of the International Criminal Court.
7. (a) Recognizes the fundamental changes taking place in European security arrangements, and welcomes efforts to strengthen multilateral common foreign and security policy in the region, guided by fundamental principles of human rights, ethics and morality, and to work towards comprehensive security arrangements based on common and human security; 
(b) Challenges the practice and intention of individual countries and alliances to intervene militarily without the mandate of the UN Security Council, insists on the need for all European states to uphold the international framework of the UN Charter, and underlines the need for any military action to comply with international law.
8. (a) Recognizes the fundamental contributions of Christianity and other religions to European history and civilization, which ought to be reflected in the preamble of the draft European Constitution, and the renewed role of religion in the social, political and cultural life of European states and societies; 
(b) Welcomes and affirms the recognition of the specific contribution of the churches and religious communities as partners in dialogue with the European Institutions, as proposed in the draft Constitution of the European Union; 
(c) Emphasizes the importance of monitoring church-state relations, rights of religious minorities and religious freedom, and the need to respect the collective and individual rights of religious believers, while recognizing different models of church-state relations and diverse cultural and historical models across Europe.
9. (a) Encourages the churches in Europe to maintain and strengthen relations of fellowship, solidarity and mutual exchange with churches in other regions, and underlines the importance for churches of closely monitoring developments and speaking out in areas where Europe has a particular global responsibility, including trade and development, environment, peace and conflict prevention, migration and asylum, trafficking of human beings and racism, in order to uphold and strengthen the principles of justice and human rights.
(b) Recognizing the dangers of transatlantic divides in global security policies, encourages the member churches in Europe and the USA to work together in dialogue and cooperation, and to seek to influence their governments towards a multilateral approach for global peace and justice.
10. Appreciates the efforts of WCC staff to monitor the major developments in Europe, and commends the policy update on Europe to WCC member churches and asks the WCC general secretary and staff to continue these efforts with the member churches, CEC and other European church- and ecumenical organizations and to take action as appropriate.

Religious freedom and liberty in Eritrea
Letter to Mr Ali Ali Abdu, Minister of Information and Culture of Eritrea, 23 June, 2003

Dear Sir,

I write on behalf of the World Council of Churches. In July 2002, Dr Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, visited Eritrea and had meetings with church representatives and officials of the government. During his visit, Dr Konrad Raiser met former Minister, Mr Naizjhi Keflu Bahta, and discussed amongst others the issue of religious freedom and liberty in Eritrea.

During the past year the World Council of Churches has consistently received reports of closure of churches and harassment of Christians in Eritrea. This action of the authorities has effectively prevented Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian groups from carrying on worship services. It is in violation of the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion, conscience,
worship and organization. Such action is tantamount not only to interference in the practice of one’s religion but is also in conflict with international norms and standards of human rights laws. There have also been reports of unprovoked arrests of Christian worshippers.

Several worshippers of Rema Church, Full Gospel Church and Kale Hiwot Church were detained early this year in a crackdown by the authorities. These however are not the only incidents of harassment, intimidation and persecution of Christians without justifiable cause. There are reports of similar incidents of unwarranted arrests from other parts of the country as well. In some cases, though, detainees were released after being kept in custody for short periods.

The World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by these reports. We accordingly write to you to enquire about this situation and the reasons for the authorities to act in such a high-handed manner despite the guarantees provided in Article 19 of the Eritrean Constitution. This being a matter of urgency, an early response will be appreciated.

Respectfully yours,
Peter Weiderud
Director

Question of Religious Intolerance: Indonesia, Pakistan, India

Written statement at the UN Commission on Human Rights’ 59th Session, Item 11e: Civil and Political Rights, including the Question of Religious Intolerance, 17 March- 27 April, 2003

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) submits that since its inception the WCC has expressed concern for the rightful, wholesome growth of freedom of religions, for protection of the life of the spirit from oppression and authoritarian abuse. The first assembly of the WCC in its report, Church and the Disorder of Society, Amsterdam 1948, noted:

“Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour.

Any tendencies in state and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are denial of God’s intentions for man and his work of salvation.

A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of man who acknowledges responsibility to justice and public order and where those that hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it.”

The WCC over the years through its member churches in the regions has continued to work towards the fulfillment of the above goal. Despite extensive gains for religious liberty during the past century, recent intensification and ethno-centrism have imperilled and in some cases crushed religious freedom and liberty formerly achieved. The reports received by WCC from its members speak of increasing incidents of religious intolerance and violence resulting in flagrant violations of human rights. Individuals as well as groups have been subjected to persecution, discrimination and indiscriminate killings on grounds of religion, ethnicity and political conviction. The WCC has taken a firm and vigorous stand against such actions and has endeavoured through local and international actions to defuse tension, promote reconciliation and inter-religious harmony.
The Asian region has been the dwelling for major religions of the world – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. For centuries people practising these religions have lived side by side in peace and harmony. That situation now seems to be changing. In the last decade religion has emerged as a significant and sometimes dominant factor in intra-state conflicts. It has been manipulated to promote narrow political and nationalist interests and objectives. Religious intolerance has grown almost universally and Asian societies are no exception. In this submission we want to draw the attention of the Commission to the growing environment of religious intolerance and violence in Indonesia, India and Pakistan that have claimed many lives. It is undercutting the multi-cultural, multi-religious and pluralistic base of societies in these countries. Intolerance has encouraged a new wave of ideologies that distort and seek to rewrite history and incite communal violence, creating walls of separation and hatred between communities.

The upsurge of religious extremism and intolerance has left many minority populations virtually defenceless.

a. Indonesia

The CCIA has monitored developments in Indonesia since the downfall of President Suharto in May 1998. Of particular concern are the developments in West Papua, Central and South Sulawesi and the Malukus. The religious violence in the Poso region, Central Sulawesi, has intensified since May 2002, around the time the deadline for withdrawal of the armed forces from the region was due to expire.

Ten Christian villages were bombed and razed to the ground, 30 people killed, 19 injured, and hundreds displaced and evacuated to safer places. Similar attacks took place in July and on 15th August 2002 at Mayumba village where 68 Christian houses were burnt and a number of people killed as a result of bomb explosions.

The attacks were carried out by Lashkar Jihad who entered the region from Java on the pretext of helping their Muslim co-religionists. The security forces were unable to arrest the perpetrators of these heinous crimes and bring them to justice before courts of law. In the Malukus Islands the terror and violence unleashed in 1999 continues and has severely divided and brutalized the local Christian and Muslim communities. The conflict has its roots in local tensions, competing interests and access to resources. However, with the passage of time, it has acquired strong religious overtones. The involvement of Lashkar Jihad has led to an escalation of violence. It has devastated Christian communities throughout the region.

In some places entire communities and villages have been wiped out. Horrific crimes like rape, torture and murder have been committed in the name of religion. The death toll is around 10,000 with over 300,000 people displaced. The ongoing violence has created despondency and fear amongst the people, who no longer have confidence in the ability of the Indonesian security forces to restore law and order and to ensure their safety and security. In some cases the security forces are actively involved in fanning the flames of violence in furtherance of their political and economic interests.

b. Pakistan

There has been an increase of religious intolerance and violence in Pakistan during the last year. The victims are religious minorities that include the Ahmadiyas, Hindus and Christians. Most victims belong to poor rural areas where security forces are unwilling and/or unable to take action against Islamic extremists groups responsible for these atrocities. Christian places of worship, hospitals, schools and other institutions have come under wanton attacks of violence.
and brutality that have resulted in killings of innocent civilians. On 25th September, 2002, Islamic extremists shot dead seven staff of the Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf (Committee for Justice and Peace) of the Karachi Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan. To date, none of the perpetrators of this heinous crimes have been detained and brought before the courts of law for trial.

In view of these increasing attacks on the Christian minority, the World Council of Churches decided to send a pastoral delegation on a visit to Pakistan on November 2002. The report of the delegation on which these submissions are based is available on request.

The much abused blasphemy laws remain on the Statute Book. Many innocent Christians charged under these laws continue to languish in jails pending trial. Despite repeated efforts to draw the attention of the government to the plight of victims charged under blasphemy laws no action has been taken to amend even the procedural part of the law to prevent its abuse. According to the recent report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Christians are not the only target of Islamic extremist groups but also Shiite Muslims, including a large number of doctors who have lost their lives because of the growing religious violence and hatred in the country.

The government of Pakistan has done little to counter the present trend towards religious intolerance. On the contrary, it has continued to pursue policies and practices that discriminate against religious minorities. This is evident from the fact that very few members of the religious minorities have been able to obtain jobs in government services. Even the few who are able to break through this wall of discrimination are victimized. The attention of this Commission is drawn to the case of Mr Mohan Lal Shahani, a Christian, who was appointed a judge of the Sindh High Court on 9th January 1997. Despite exemplary performance he was not confirmed and his services were dispensed with as of 8th January 1998.

c. India

Till a few years ago India was known for its tolerance and secular polity however, in recent times it has witnessed an increase of its own brand of Hindu extremism represented by the Hindutva ideology. The practices and policies of the present government have undermined the country’s historical commitment to a multi-religious, multi-cultural, plural society. The violence against Dalits is on the increase. They are not only segregated in all spheres of social life: places of worship, education, housing and land ownership, use of common wells and roads, but also subjected to arbitrary executions. Religious violence has also increased against Christians and Muslims. Despite statements by government officials that attacks against Christians, their places of worship and clergy are isolated incidents, it is clear that Hindu extremists are pursuing a clear agenda in the persecution of Christians. Of particular concern is the ongoing campaign of hate and discrimination promoted by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) against minorities and Dalits. The Gujarat carnage left thousands of Muslims dead, brutally killed at the hands of Hindu extremists; thousands more were made destitute and rendered homeless. These inhuman acts and atrocities were carried out with full impunity under the eyes of law enforcement agencies.

The World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by these developments and has expressed its concern in letters addressed to the governments of Indonesia, Pakistan and India. It calls on this Commission to urge the governments of these countries to seek means by which dialogue may be promoted between religious communities and their governments as well as between religious communities themselves.
Religious Intolerance: Pakistan
Submitted by Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Franciscans International and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, in collaboration with the Pakistan Justice and Peace Commission of Religious men and women and the Pakistan Commission of Catholic Bishops

Expression of concern on rights of minority churches in Georgia
Letter to H.E. Mr Eduard Shevardnadze, President of the Republic Georgia, 6 February, 2003

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has been informed about the violent attacks perpetrated against those peacefully gathering to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the Central Baptist Church in Tbilisi on 24 January.

The World Council of Churches vigorously denounces this unacceptable and criminal action of intolerance which misuses the name of religion, and appeals to the Georgian authorities to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to bring those responsible to justice.

Our appeal is strengthened by the knowledge that this is not the first attack carried out by the extremist group led by the defrocked priest Basil Mkalavishvili against representatives of minority churches in Georgia in recent years. The seeming impunity of this extremist and violent group undermines the fragile inter-church relations in the country and negatively impacts Georgia’s reputation as a democratic country upholding international standards of human rights and the rule of law.

The WCC underlines the fact that those responsible for this action have been excluded from membership of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and their actions have been denounced by all the main Christian churches in Georgia, including the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches.

The WCC will continue to support and encourage all efforts in the region which promote tolerance and understanding among religious and ethnic communities during this time of uncertainty and insecurity which is affecting much of the Caucasus region.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.
Respectfully yours,
Peter Weiderud
Director

Appreciation of decision to commute the death sentence
Letter to H.E. George Ryan, Former Governor of Illinois, 17 January, 2003

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches welcomes and appreciates your decision of 11th January, as Governor of the State of Illinois, to commute the death sentences of 167 prisoners on death row to life in prison without parole. Your action based on the desire to fulfill a moral obligation because the system is “haunted by the demon of error” is a bold and significant statement that questions capital punishment.

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For years, churches and human rights organizations have said that the death penalty is a punishment that is often used in a discriminatory way on the poor, minorities, on oppressed groups within societies, or against political opponents of those in power.

The Council believes that all human beings created in God’s image have inherent dignity and are of infinite worth and that the taking of human life is against the will of God. Capital punishment operates against the Christian principles of compassion, love and forgiveness. To promote the abolition of capital punishment is an expression of Christian belief in the sanctity of life. As a long-standing advocate for the abolition of capital punishment the Council has consistently urged governments to sign and ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that aims at abolition of the death penalty.

In keeping with this position the World Council of Churches has campaigned with other international organizations for abolition of the death penalty in the United States of America and we are therefore greatly encouraged by your action.

It is our hope that the decision taken by you in this matter will stimulate others concerned in the United States, and other countries as well, to review and reconsider the flaws inherent in the system of capital punishment.

Sincerely yours,
Peter Weiderud
Director

Appeal to church leaders in member states of the UN Security Council

Letter to WCC member churches and Central Committee members, specialized ecumenical agencies, national and regional councils of churches, 24 October 2002.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the United Nations Security Council continues its deliberations this week on Iraq and the threat of war in that country persists, the World Council of Churches (WCC) looks to you, the churches, national and regional councils and specialized ecumenical agencies from the United Nations Security Council member states, for guidance and cooperation in averting this war. It is in this context that I share with you the contents of the WCC General Secretary’s letter to members of the United Nations Security Council sent October 15, 2002

(attached).

The General Secretary’s letter conveys three main policy elements of the WCC, based on the WCC Central Committee Statement of September 2, 2002:

The need to uphold the international rule of law, resist pressures to join in preemptive military strikes against a sovereign state and to search for solutions by non-military means. The WCC opposes unilateral military action by any state and deplores the view held by many of the most powerful nations in the world that war is an acceptable foreign policy instrument, in violation of both the United Nations Charter and Christian teachings.

Deep concern for the potential human costs of a new war and the large-scale displacement of Iraqi citizens. Action by Churches Together (ACT), on behalf of the WCC, is currently preparing for a potential crisis in Iraq in co-operation with the Middle East Council of Churches. Together they are working on a regional emergency preparedness plan in consideration of the
potential magnitude of the conflict and the humanitarian consequences both in Iraq and throughout the region.

Caution against the potential social, cultural, and religious as well as diplomatic long term consequences of such a war, especially a unilateral one. The WCC, through its Inter-Religious Relations team, recently hosted an international consultation on “Christians and Muslims in Dialogue and Beyond” which addressed how the already considerable division between East and West would be exacerbated by a conflict with Iraq. The conference delegates subsequently called on political leaders to resist the temptation to resort to simplistic and populist assignation of blame and demonisation of whole communities, and to resist the identification of violence and terrorism on any one particular religion or community; and for leaders of all religions at all levels to draw attention to the social, economic and other injustices which influence their environment and to resist the exploitation of these injustices to rouse religious hatred.

The WCC has been encouraged by the many actions and statements made by ecumenical councils and member churches, as well as various Christian peace movements, expressing consternation with recent political developments relating to the threat of war against Iraq (ref.: compilation attached). The next issue of Behind the News, due this week, will also include these actions for your information and further use.

In order for the WCC to ensure a coherent and collective ecumenical response, we urgently request information on any actions or advocacy plans you may have to help avert a military strike against Iraq. We would also welcome any suggestions you would like the WCC to further consider.

I pray that God will guide your actions in these troubled times.
Sincerely,
Peter Weiderud
Director
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs

Expressions of concern about internal conflict
Letter to WCC member churches in the Ivory Coast, 10 October 2002.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The World Council of Churches has followed with growing concern the events that have shaken your country during the past several weeks. We wish to assure you of our prayer, solidarity and deep sympathy with the families and those close to the victims of the violence.

We are very concerned about the nature of this conflict that brings Ivoirians into opposition with one another. Your country has been for a long time an example of political and social stability in Africa. Despite the problems inherent to each nation, a certain understanding of national unity and social cohesion have allowed the Ivory Coast to avoid the disintegration of internal tensions into confrontations. Now there is reason to fear that your country may also be threatened by the tide of fragmentation and conflict of an ethnic and religious character. Very likely, these factors of destabilization and economic inequality between the different regions also play a role.

The World Council of Churches wishes to encourage the religious communities of the Ivory Coast, and in particular the Christian churches, to do everything possible to avoid the
degeneration of this conflict into a civil war that would plunge the population into misery and suffering. With you we condemn the acts and those who have attacked the democratically elected government. In the faces of such a challenge there is a great temptation to seek a solution by armed force. Nevertheless we believe that the primary responsibility of all concerned is to explore avenues of dialogue and to persevere as far as possible in the search for a peaceful resolution. To refuse violent confrontation, even when the adversary has taken up arms, is in the spirit of the Decade to Overcome Violence that the member churches of the WCC have solemnly proclaimed at the Eighth Assembly in Harare in December 1998.

In this context, and despite the failure of their first effort that we deplore, we wish to support the efforts of the ECOWAS authorities, calling upon them to continue their mediation mission in an effort to bring the parties to the negotiation table. Through you we ask the legitimate government of the Ivory Coast to facilitate ECOWAS efforts and eventually those of other African or international bodies in seeking a negotiated solution. This is urgent: as conflict situations elsewhere in Africa have shown, once confrontations have occurred it is very difficult to break the spiral of violence with all the suffering it inflicts on the civilian populations.

We are happy to find in the declaration issued by your Catholic and Methodist church leaders a spirit of religious tolerance and reconciliation that evokes not only churches but also the mosques. The danger that the religious factor be joined with other dimensions of the conflict is real. We hope that the Christian and Muslim communities of the Ivory Coast will find the path of dialogue and help their faithful to respect and love one another and to hold in check those who would foment confrontations in the name of religion.

The World Council of Churches joins you fully in your call to prayer and efforts to mobilize all the spiritual forces in favour of the reestablishment of the peace. We encourage you to analyze the underlying causes of the crisis through which your country is going and to seek remedies that are within your reach. In that effort we wish to stand alongside you and to offer you the support of the wider ecumenical family.

Be assured that you are in the prayers of many who from near or far share your pain and your worries. We salute you in the communion of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Appeal to the Governments of India and Pakistan for normalization of relations with Pakistan
Identical letters to H.E. Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, and H.E. General Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan, 7 October 2002.

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of three hundred and forty Churches all around the world. It was founded in August 1948 in Amsterdam and has its offices in Geneva, Switzerland. The aims of the World Council of Churches amongst others include expressing the common concern of the Churches in the service of human need, the breaking down of barriers between people, the promotion of one human family in justice and peace.

Over the years the Council has closely monitored developments in South Asia. Of particular concern has been the growing incidents of religious intolerance and violence in India
and Pakistan. Also, the continuing military build-up and confrontation between the two countries has raised the spectre of a nuclear war that has serious implications for the lives of the people in the region.

Taking note of these developments, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches adopted the accompanying Statement (copy enclosed) on South Asia including India and Pakistan. The Statement amongst others calls on the member Churches of the Council to be in solidarity with Churches in India and Pakistan and assist them in their ministry of healing and reconciliation in the region.

The World Council of Churches appeals to Your Excellency to restore and normalise relations between India and Pakistan by undertaking comprehensive confidence building measures that could pave the way for a political dialogue.

Such a dialogue in turn would create an environment where other important and complex issues like Kashmir and nuclear proliferation could be addressed.

We assure Your Excellency of our continuing prayers and support in the efforts to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two countries.

Respectfully yours,
Peter Weiderud
Director
Commission of Churches on International Affairs

Condemnation of the assassination of human rights defenders
Letter to H.E. General Perwaiz Musharraf, President of the Republic, 1 October 2002.

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches deplores the September 25th terrorist attack on the office of Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf, Karachi in which seven of its Christian staff were ruthlessly gunned down at close quarters, after being blindfolded. This is the fourth in the series of such terrorist attacks that have targeted Christian churches, hospitals, schools and other institutions in Pakistan. In all these attacks precious innocent lives have been lost.

On October 29th 2001 in a letter addressed to Your Excellency, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on St Dominic’s Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches while appreciating the manner in which the government had handled the crisis, asked that a judicial enquiry be held into the incident so that those found guilty could be brought to justice. Much to our dismay neither the culprits of the attack on St Dominic’s church nor those involved in subsequent attacks at the hospital and school in Taxela and Murree have been arrested and brought to trial before a court of law.

The violent killings of the staff of Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf are all the more deplorable because the organisation works for the poor and socially marginalised in Pakistan society, irrespective of their religious beliefs. It provides a platform for interreligious cooperation in the area of social justice and for promotion of human rights.

These recurring incidents of terrorist violence, you will no doubt agree, if allowed to go unchecked and unpunished will not only encourage those who indulge in such wanton acts of violence but will also tarnish the image of Pakistan.
It is therefore necessary that law enforcement agencies in the country undertake all necessary steps to apprehend the perpetrators of these heinous crimes and bring their cases before courts of law for prosecution and judicious conclusion.

The World Council of Churches calls on Your Excellency’s government to provide safety and security to the Christian minority in Pakistan.

Respectfully yours,
Dr Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Open letter to member churches and the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, 1 October 2002.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

The World Council of Churches has received with shock and profound distress the news of the terrorist attack on the office of Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf, in Karachi in which seven of its staff were killed. This is the fourth in the series of terrorist attacks that have targeted Christian churches, hospital, school, and other institution in Pakistan. In all these attacks precious innocent lives have been lost.

The Council is deeply disturbed by the present environment of religious rage and intolerance in the country that has given rise to such attacks. On October 29, 2001 in a letter addressed to President Pervez Musharraf, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on St Dominic’s Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches expressed its concern about the safety and security of the Christian minority in the highly charged environment of religious intolerance. It called on the government to undertake all necessary measures to provide safety and security for the Christian minority in the country.

The violent killings of the staff of Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf is all the more deplorable, because the organisation works for the poor and socially marginalised in Pakistan society, irrespective of their religious beliefs. The Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf is an instrumentality of the church that not only manifests concern for involvement in social justice and human rights but also, provides a vision of a new and just society for all.

We take this opportunity to convey through you our condolences and sympathy for the families of the victims of the September 25th massacre. May our Lord’s blessings be with the kith and kin and give them courage to bear this tragic loss. We vehemently condemn such senseless and wanton blood-letting of innocent people. These acts of violence that result in taking away of innocent human lives deserve to be denounced by all peace-loving people.

Be assured of our continuous prayers and solidarity with the Christians in Pakistan at this difficult time.

Yours sincerely
Dr Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Statement on the ecumenical response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Holy Land

Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August - 3 September 2002.
The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, 26 August to 3 September 2002:

Recalling its “Minute on the Situation in the Holy Land after the Outbreak of the Second Palestinian Uprising”, adopted at its last meeting (Potsdam, February 2001) in which the Central Committee expressed its deep sadness and grave concern at the new escalation of violence in the Palestinian autonomous and occupied territories as well as Israel over the last four months that has claimed a terrible toll of human life;

Alarmed and dismayed at the escalation of violence over the past twenty-three months that has claimed hundreds of lives in Palestine and Israel, and that has created the worst humanitarian catastrophe for the Palestinian population in recent history;

Expressing once again its grief and profound condolences to all the victims of the conflict, and especially to the families of those who have been killed in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories;

Profoundly regretting the inability or unwillingness of the international community, especially the governments most directly concerned, to respond to repeated appeals to establish a presence in the area to bring the parties to the conflict into compliance with the resolutions of the UN Security Council, thus allowing illegal actions to continue and a climate of mistrust, fear and hatred to grow;

Reaffirming its conviction that a just and lasting solution of the Arab and Israeli conflict must be sought through active negotiations based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973);

Reiterating its appeal that the universally accepted norms of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is the cornerstone of international humanitarian law and provides basic legal standards for the treatment of civilians during armed conflict or under occupation, be respected in all circumstances;

Reaffirming the right of an occupied people to struggle against injustice by nonviolent means in order to gain freedom;

Reiterating its support for Israeli and Palestinian individuals and organizations who reject the logic of violence and occupation and are striving together for justice, peace, security, mutual understanding and reconciliation between their peoples;

Reaffirming the need for full respect of the Holy Places, and condemning all actions that violate them;

Condemning the occupation and misuse of church or other religious buildings and sites for military or other purposes inimical to their religious vocation;

Reiterating its support for the churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land as guardians of the Holy Places, for their efforts to sustain and serve their communities and their witness as peacemakers;

Reiterating its long-standing commitment to active dialogue and cooperation among Christians, Muslims and Jews;

Reiterating its conviction that Jerusalem must remain an open and inclusive city with free access assured for the Palestinian people and shared in terms of sovereignty and citizenship between the State of Israel and the future State of Palestine, and that Jerusalem can be a source of peace, stability and coexistence rather than of division and conflict;

1 Calls again and insistently for the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian territories, to end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories;

2 Calls upon Israel, the occupying power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949;
3 Receives with appreciation the report of the actions taken by the Council in pursuing the recommendations of the Potsdam meeting of the Central Committee;

4 Endorses the Executive Committee Resolution on Ecumenical Response to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict of September 2001 and welcomes the considerable efforts of the General Secretary and staff to implement it;

5 Reaffirms, in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence, the belief Christians share with Jews and Muslims that all human life is sacred in the eyes of God, and that the taking of human life is contrary to the moral and ethical teachings of the three monotheistic faiths;

6 Joins its voice with those many Christians, Muslims and Jews in the region and around the world who have strongly deplored all acts of violence related to this conflict, including:
   • Israel’s military invasion and reoccupation of the Palestinian territories, extra-judicial executions of Palestinian leaders, killing of Palestinian civilians, application of collective punishments, and destruction of Palestinian homes and property in Israel and the occupied territories; and
   • all acts of terror against civilians in Israel and in the occupied territories, including especially the growing and deeply troubling practice of organized and indiscriminate suicide bombings;

7 Calls upon all concerned parties, including Israelis and Palestinians, to ensure the safety of all civilians, and to respect the universally accepted norms of international humanitarian law;

8 Calls upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to enforce their declaration of 5 December 2001 in which they call upon the Occupying Power to fully and effectively respect the (Convention) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to refrain from perpetrating any violation of the Convention, ...(and) reaffirm the illegality of the settlements in the said territories and of the extension thereof, and the need to safeguard and guarantee the rights and access of all inhabitants to the Holy Places;

9 Calls insistent upon the international community, especially the Quartet (United Nations, European Union, USA and Russian Federation), to take a more active, determined, objective and consistent role in mediating between the two parties based on the relevant UN resolutions and to do its utmost to stop further bloodshed and suffering;

10 Urges the Government of Israel to recognize the election of His Beatitude Patriarch Irineos I as the head of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem;

11 Calls on all authorities concerned not to interfere in the internal affairs of the churches;

12 Welcomes the positive response of many member churches and ecumenical partners to the call to join together, in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (2001-2010), in an action-oriented ecumenical campaign to end the illegal occupation of Palestine, in support of reconciliation between Israelis, Palestinians and others in the Middle East and their coexistence in justice and peace, and urges others to join them in:
   a. Supporting the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), as a concrete manifestation of Christian solidarity through active presence and witness of a non-violent resistance to the occupation of Palestine, working towards public awareness and policy change through advocacy;
   b. Calling for the suspension of the EU-Israel Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement that conditions “relations between parties, as well as the provisions of the Agreement itself on respect for human rights and democratic principles which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement”, until such time that Israel complies with these provisions;
   c. Pressuring governments, in particular the USA, to review economic aid to the State of Israel and to halt all forms of military cooperation with the State of Israel including instituting a strict arms embargo, until such time that Israel complies with UN Security Council Resolutions;
   d. Providing generous financial resources towards the ecumenical humanitarian and human rights efforts that seek to respond to the ever increasing human suffering;
e. Praying together for peace and for all those who work for peace and an end to all forms of violence in the Holy Land, seeking to embody our shared hopes and aspirations for peace with justice for all the peoples in these lands where our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was received as the Prince of Peace.

**Note on Indonesia**


The Public Issues Committee also considered the request made related to continuing religious and communal tensions in Indonesia and informs the Central Committee that it has responded to this, according to the procedures for public issues, as part of the ongoing work of the WCC. As indicated in the Preliminary Report on Public Issues prepared by the International Relations staff, the Council has given high priority to the continuing tension and conflict between Muslims and Christian in Indonesia, especially in Aceh and in the Malukus. Of particular concern now are the developments in South and Central Sulawesi where, despite the Malino Agreements I & II between the Muslim and Christian communities and the Government of Indonesia, violence and killings continue almost unabated.

In response to the above-mentioned request, a letter will be prepared to reiterate ecumenical concerns to the President of Indonesia. International Relations staff of the Council will continue to monitor developments closely, in regular contact with the churches in Indonesia and the Christian Conference of Asia, and plans are being made for a pastoral visit by staff and key partners to give a further expression of ecumenical solidarity with the churches in the hope of helping them to restore harmonious inter-communal relations.

**Statement on South Asia**

*Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August – 3 September 2002.*

The situation in the South Asia region poses a major threat to world peace.

Two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, remain in a state of perpetual and growing military confrontation. The region has been the scene of inter-state and intra-state violence and conflict for the last five decades. It is home to over a billion people and provides a contrast of two different worlds – that of the rich elite minority and a poor, disadvantaged and socially marginalized majority. Its societies are being torn asunder as a result of nationalism, ethnocentrism and religious extremism.

Three smaller countries, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, are also in crisis. Nepal, the only Hindu kingdom in the world, is faced with a growing “Maoist” insurgency that has resulted in immense loss of life, prosperity and security for its people. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has taken a heavy toll of human lives and has brought the country’s economy to a virtual standstill. The signing of the agreement in February 2002 to cease hostilities between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) provides a sign of hope. However, since it gained independence from Pakistan through a liberation war in 1971, Bangladesh remains unable to overcome the confrontational nature of its politics. Opportunist politicians and repeated military interventions have brought the country to virtual ruin. Its economy remains stagnant and wholly dependent on massive external assistance.
South Asian societies are plagued by endemic corruption and confrontational politics that often result in grave and serious human rights violations of opposition political parties. In an ever-growing environment of intolerance, religious minorities and religious freedom are under attack not only at the hands of the authorities but also in several cases from the majority communities.

The churches and Christians in the region are overall a small minority faith. The growing climate of religious intolerance and nationalism seriously threatens their and other religious minorities’ rights to manifest their faith in public worship and practice. Christians are often pressured to be silent, suffering witnesses to hope in turbulent times. In such critical times the participation of Christians in the life and action of the community comes out of their understanding and exercise in faithfulness to the power of the gospel. In the midst of brokenness, violence and conflicts, Christians and churches are challenged to be messengers of peace and provide space for healing and reconciliation.

Against this background, and in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence, the Central Committee takes the following actions:

1. Religion, Politics and Intolerance

1.1 The South Asian Region has been the dwelling for major religions of the world, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. For centuries people practising these religions have lived in peace and harmony. That situation now seems to be changing. In the last decade religion has emerged as a significant and sometimes a dominant factor in intra-state conflicts. It has been manipulated to promote narrow political or nationalist interests and objectives. Religious intolerance has grown almost universally and South Asian societies are no exception to it.

1.2 In India the emergence of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as a major force on the political scene has seriously undermined the secular base of the country. During recent years, Christians and Muslims have come under attack and their places of worship have been burnt. Attacks against the Dalit community too have increased. Despite all the constitutional guarantees Dalits continue to suffer indignities and discriminations not only at the hands of the authorities but also at the hands of the majority. In Pakistan the environment of religious intolerance, which was nurtured during the 11 years period of General Zia’s military rule, has made the lives and properties of Christian minorities insecure. Many families have suffered because of indiscriminate use of the blasphemy laws that have targeted innocent Christians.

Christian villages and churches have come under attack at the instigation of Islamic extremist groups. The situation has worsened as a result of the US-led war in Afghanistan. In Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, Buddhist and Islamic groups have often used religion for political purposes to incite hatred and violence against religious minorities.

1.3 The increasing religious intolerance in the whole of South Asia has claimed many victims. It has undercut the multi-cultural, multi-religious and pluralistic base of societies in the region. Intolerance has encouraged a new wave of ideologies, which distort and seek to rewrite history and which incite communal violence, building walls of separation and hatred between communities and peoples.

The Central Committee calls on the churches including those in the region to:

• raise awareness of the spread of religious extremism that is affecting most religions - Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism - negatively. This negative influence of religion often originates with groups acting out of ignorance and obscurantism in order to impose their particular religious views on society;

• encourage and support civic educational projects that promote understanding, tolerance, peace and inter-communal harmony at local, national and regional levels;
• **engage in dialogue on human rights** with people of other faiths and convictions in order to build a culture of peace and address such issues as rights of minorities and intolerance;
• **draw attention to the plight of the Dalits** suffering from the discriminatory practices and policies of the Indian government and to help secure the implementation of constitutional guarantees through legal recourse, awareness building and advocacy at the national and international levels;
• **mobilise** national and international support for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan.

2. India – Pakistan Confrontation and the Kashmir Dispute

The post September 11th developments have again brought Pakistan and India to the brink of a major war. The war in Afghanistan and the US presence in the region have added a new dimension to an already tense situation in the subcontinent. The military establishment in Pakistan is again being rewarded for its support to the US-led international coalition against terrorism. Yet while the military regime actively participates in the war against Taliban and Al-Qaida networks in Afghanistan, it remains lukewarm in its political will to disband the militant Islamic groups at home that are engaged in violent actions in Kashmir.

2.1 The Kashmir dispute remains a thorn in the side of India and Pakistan. Since the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, the two neighbours have fought three major wars. The present deployment of millions of troops across the borders could lead to open hostilities with prospects of a nuclear war that neither side can afford.

2.2 Despite the UN Security Council Resolutions of the 1940s and 1950s and the Simla Agreement of 1972, there is presently an impasse with little prospect of the parties returning to the negotiating table to seek an amicable settlement of the dispute through dialogue. The situation in Kashmir took a turn for the worse in the late 1980s, when India, instead of listening and responding to the grievances of the people of Kashmir, sent in the military forces to the valley to quell a popular uprising. The situation since has continued to deteriorate with no signs of return to normalcy. The Pakistan-sponsored incursions by Islamic militants to support the struggle of the Kashmiri people have further ageravated an already grave situation.

2.3 The people of India and Pakistan have paid a high price because of this perpetual state of military confrontation between the two countries. It has led to a steady increase in defence expenditure. Such increase has come at the cost of health care, food, education, adequate housing and other projects in the human development sectors further adding to the sufferings of the common people.

*The Central Committee* 

affirms that the Kashmir dispute be resolved in accordance with the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The basis for such resolution should be the principles enunciated in the UN Security Council Resolutions of the 1940s and 1950s and it should be pursued in the spirit of the Simla Agreement of 1972;

reiterates that there is no military solution to the Kashmir dispute and the two parties should return to the negotiating table without delay;

appeals to the governments of India and Pakistan to take immediate steps to restore and normalise relations by undertaking confidence-building measures that could pave the way for a political dialogue;

calls on the government of India to allow increased access to the Kashmir Valley by non-governmental organisations concerned with human rights; and on the government of Pakistan to refrain from providing support to Islamic militant groups involved in cross border terrorism;

courages WCC member churches to be in solidarity with churches in India and Pakistan and assist them in their ministry of healing and reconciliation in the region;
urges the churches in India and Pakistan to undertake the following actions to facilitate the process of an amicable settlement of the Kashmir dispute:

• to build awareness amongst the churches in the two countries about the urgency of resolving the Kashmir dispute;
• to encourage and support people-to-people relations between India and Pakistan for better understanding and for promotion of peace and reconciliation in the region;
• to organise prayer vigils, where possible on an inter-faith basis, to promote peace and reconciliation between the two countries.

3. The Nuclear Threat

The May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan caught the international community unawares. Tensions between the two countries increased, giving rise to the prospects of an accelerated arms race in the region. The tests were condemned worldwide and on 6th June 1998 United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1172 calling on the two countries to refrain from further nuclear tests.

The Resolution laid down a set of guidelines to bring the two countries into the mainstream of non-proliferation regime. The ecumenical community is of the considered view that it is dangerous to rely on the assumption that nuclear weapons will not be used in South Asia. The Kargil episode in 1999 and the December 13th, 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament have shown that there is little appreciation of the changed situation in the sub-continent since the May 1998 nuclear test.

The Central Committee calls on the governments of India and Pakistan to:

• dismantle their nuclear weapons and become parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty;
• place all their civilian nuclear programmes under internationally recognised safeguard arrangements; and
• cooperate with other states in the region in working towards a nuclear-weapon free zone in South Asia.

calls on both governments in the meantime to immediately implement measures to reduce the risk of deliberate or inadvertent nuclear attacks by:

• jointly committing to a policy of no first use and formalising that commitment through a bilateral agreement;
• refraining from arming delivery systems;
• ensuring effective central civilian political control over nuclear policies and facilities; and
• expanding and enhancing the existing agreement prohibiting attacks on each other's nuclear installations.

further calls on the governments of India and Pakistan to:

• halt all further research, development and production of nuclear weapons or weapons components; and
• cease production of fissile materials and to support international negotiations towards a global ban on the production of fissile materials.

calls on other governments to:

• end immediately all material and political support to India and Pakistan for the development and production of nuclear weapons and/or their delivery systems.

calls on its member churches in South Asia to:

• urge their respective governments to work towards a South Asia nuclear-weapon-free zone; and to
• undertake public awareness programmes in support of the abolition of nuclear weapons in South Asia and globally.

calls on churches in other parts of the world to:
• support the churches and ecumenical bodies in South Asia in their efforts to promote a nuclear-weapons-free zone in that region; and to
• call upon their own governments to withhold all support related to nuclear weapons research, production and deployment by India and Pakistan and encourage achievement of the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in South Asia.

4. Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Conflict

The conflict in Sri Lanka, since it escalated in 1983, has claimed over sixty thousand lives on both sides of the ethnic divide. The war has left the country’s economy in tatters. For over two decades people – mostly Tamils – have been subjected to draconian laws. Torture, detention without trial, extra-judicial killings and curtailment of freedom of the press are common practices of the state. The LTTE has imposed strict conditions in areas under its control where extortion, summary executions and forced recruitment, particularly of children, for war purposes are common practices.

The escalation of the war in 1980s and 1990s resulted in the mass exodus of Tamil refugees to India, Western Europe, North America and Australia; in addition a large number of people in the North and East were uprooted as internally displaced persons. Several attempts were made to mediate a peace agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE without much success. The situation unexpectedly changed in February 2002, however, when the Norwegian Government facilitated a Memorandum of Understanding between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE to cease hostilities, pending the peace talks that are scheduled to take place in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Central Committee:
• welcomes the Memorandum of Understanding arrived at between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam;
• urges the ecumenical community to
  - accompany the sister churches in Sri Lanka in their journey to peace;
  - pray for, encourage and provide solidarity support to the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka and the Church of Norway in their joint efforts to build awareness and mobilise support for the peace process;
  - mobilise support nationally and internationally in favour of the Peace Process in Sri Lanka;
  - provide human and material resources for reconciliation and reconstruction of Sri Lanka.

5. Bangladesh and Religious Minorities

After three decades of Independence, Bangladesh has failed to evolve a viable constitutional framework of democratic governance. The country has suffered frequent changes of government and bloody military coups. Its founding principle of “Secular Bengali Nationalism” has collapsed and the country is presently caught between the throes of abrasive right-wing Islamic political parties and opportunist politicians. Lack of development of parliamentary political culture has paved the way for destructive politics of the street. There is an urgent need for building a culture of tolerance and peace in the country.

The Central Committee calls on the churches to:
• monitor the situation of the religious minorities in the country, and provide pastoral and solidarity support to the churches and Christians in the country;
• provide human and material resources to the churches of Bangladesh to enable them to initiate inter-religious cooperation and dialogue to promote tolerance and build a culture of peace.

Appeal for religious tolerance
Your Holiness,

We greet you in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

On behalf of the leadership of the World Council of Churches and of the Conference of European Churches, we are writing to express our profound concern at the continued violence facing members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its cultural and spiritual property in Kosovo and Metohija in the recent period. The WCC and CEC have been closely following developments, and note with dismay an increase in the level of these attacks during the last months.

The deliberate attacks on the churches and holy places of the Serbian Orthodox Church occurring in Kosovo and Metohija at this time are a painful and scandalous manifestation of the extremism and instability still affecting parts of this region. We condemn these and all acts of violence and destruction, and remember with sadness all of those, from all communities, who have fallen victim to extremism and intolerance in recent years. As the WCC and CEC have stated on several occasions, it is our firm belief that a lasting solution for peace in this region can only be based on a situation of mutual tolerance and respect for all ethnic and religious communities. The WCC and CEC will therefore continue to work with the Serbian Orthodox Church and with other churches to promote all efforts of dialogue and peace-building in this region.

This situation also reflects the inadequacy of the international protection provided by the interim authorities in Kosovo to the minority communities, and particularly to the Serbian community. It is our intention, therefore, as WCC and CEC have done in the past, to intervene with the appropriate international authorities to raise awareness about this situation, and to appeal for effective international guarantees for all the peoples and their spiritual and cultural inheritance in South-East Europe.

We pray that a spirit of peace and healing may be brought to all peoples in the troubled region of South-East Europe. May the churches and religious communities do all that is within their possibilities to contribute to an opening of minds and a calming of hearts at this time.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Keith Clements
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches

Dear Mr Steiner,

On behalf of the leadership of the World Council of Churches and of the Conference of European Churches, we are writing to express our profound concern at the continued violence facing members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its cultural and spiritual property in Kosovo in the recent period. The WCC and CEC have been closely following developments in the region, and note with dismay an increase in the level of these attacks during recent months.

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May the churches and religious communities do all that is within their possibilities to contribute to an opening of minds and a calming of hearts at this time.
The deliberate attacks on the churches and holy places of the Serbian Orthodox Church occurring in Kosovo and Metohija at this time are a painful and scandalous manifestation of the extremism and instability still affecting parts of this region. We condemn these and all acts of violence and destruction, and remember with sadness all of those, from all communities, who have fallen victim to extremism and intolerance in recent years. These attacks are a major obstacle to the hope of a normalisation of inter-communal relations in the province.

This situation also reflects the inadequacy of the international protection provided by the interim authorities, including UNMIK, in Kosovo to the minority communities, and particularly to the Serbian community. We appeal to you and to the responsible authorities in Kosovo to ensure effective security and justice for all the peoples and the protection of their spiritual and cultural inheritance in Kosovo.

It is the firm belief of our organizations that a lasting solution for peace in this region can only be based on a situation of tolerance and respect for all ethnic and religious communities. The WCC and CEC will continue to work with the Serbian Orthodox Church and with other churches to promote all efforts of dialogue and peace-building in this region. May the churches and religious communities do all that is within their possibilities to contribute to an opening of minds and a calming of hearts at this time.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser  Rev. Dr Keith Clements
General Secretary  General Secretary
World Council of Churches  Conference of European Churches

Appeal for urgent action
Open letter to the member churches, regional and national councils of churches and ecumenical partner organizations, 15 March 2002.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

We have all been watching with growing alarm as hour by hour the violent conflict between Palestinians and Israelis intensifies. The killings, bombings and destruction continue to escalate in defiance of the repeated admonitions and appeals of the United Nations, of governments and of people around the world.

Israel is rapidly re-occupying Palestinian lands by military force, raiding Palestinian refugee camps and engaging in mass indiscriminate detentions of civilian inhabitants under the most degrading circumstances. Attacks on medical and rescue staff, coupled with the severe new restrictions on access to hospitals and other medical facilities, add to the systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In his address to the United Nations Security Council on March 12, Secretary General Kofi Annan emphasized the critical need to end the illegal occupation and the violence.

The WCC is receiving regularly eye-witness reports from Palestinian church workers about invasions, occupation and major physical damage or destruction of church-related and internationally supported schools and other facilities. A number of statements and appeals have also come to us from the Middle East Council of Churches Department for Service to Palestinian Refugees (MECC/DSPR) and from other Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious groups and secular Palestinian and Israeli organizations pleading for determined international
action, including the deployment of UN monitors, to put a stop to the escalating violence and to address dire humanitarian needs.

The thirteen Patriarchs and Heads of Churches and Christian Communities in Jerusalem issued a statement on March 9 (attached) expressing their deep distress at the increasing bloodshed, joining their voices with every Palestinian and Israeli seeking a just peace. Saying that “Israeli security is dependant on Palestinian freedom and justice”, they call upon Israeli citizens and the Israeli government to “stop all kinds of destruction and death caused by the heavy Israeli weaponry [for the] way the present Israeli government is dealing with the situation makes neither for security nor for a just peace”. The church leaders also urge the Palestinian people to put “an end to every kind of violent response”, reiterating that the way to peace is through negotiations. They appeal too, and in particular, to the churches around the world to contact their respective governments to seek their active involvement in the quest for peace.

The WCC, Action by Churches Together (ACT), APRODEV (WCC-related development organizations in Europe) and the MECC/DSPR are all seeking to respond to the humanitarian crisis, and all need your help and support. Above all, however, an immediate common effort is required to break through the stagnation of the international community and to encourage action that corresponds to words. More than ever we must hear and respond to the cries of the churches and bring them to the urgent attention of Christians, our communities, our media and our governments.

Our united message is clearly stated by the WCC Executive and Central Committees: the violence of the illegal occupation of Palestine must come to an end. The occupation is at the root of the violence. Unless this is addressed, there can be little hope for a just and lasting peace. We therefore urge you to strengthen your efforts related to the 2002 focus of the Decade to Overcome Violence: “End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine”.

The WCC has also initiated the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). Through this the Council is organizing a continuing international ecumenical presence in Palestine to monitor and report on human rights violations, offer protection of individuals and communities and accompany local Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Israeli peace activists in their efforts of non-violent resistance to occupation, closures, and destruction of Palestinian homes and sources of livelihood. Some Christians and others are already present and have remained through the current violence. It is hoped that others will join soon. We urge you to contact your own national organizing bodies to offer participation or other forms of support.

In the present circumstances, however, this is not enough to provide the immediate protection needed. Thus we urge you to apply pressure on your governments to support proposals that have been brought to the UN Security Council, and encourage the rapid deployment of an intergovernmental monitoring body in Palestine.

The churches of Jerusalem have also asked for prayers for peace. The global fellowship of churches can join together in special prayer vigils and services of worship with the Christians of Palestine. A collection of prayers from the local churches has been published by the WCC for use on such occasions. These prayers and other materials related to the WCC initiatives are available at www.wcc-coe.org or by mail upon request.
We are not alone in our faith commitments to the peoples caught up in this tragic conflict. Thus wherever possible, we encourage you to engage in dialogue and common actions with your Jewish, Muslim and other neighbors who share a common longing for peace and justice.

This terrible tragedy of violence and injustice must end. To be silent now can only be seen as complicity with the violence, the systematic abuses of human rights and the refusal, especially by the State of Israel, to abide by its obligations under international law. Now is the time for each one of us to speak out and act, fulfilling our Christian vocation as peacemakers.

Dwain C. Epps
Director
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs

**Condemnation of inter-communal violence in Gujarat**
*Letter to member churches and the National Council of Churches in India, 5 March 2002.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The World Council of Churches has received with shock and profound sorrow the news of the tragic outbreak of indiscriminate communal violence in the cities and towns of Gujarat that has already resulted in over hundred deaths and threatens to engulf the entire country. Together with you, we condemn and deplore such wanton acts of violence that have resulted in immense sufferings of people of both Muslim and Hindu communities. Through you, we convey our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims.

In recent times there has been an almost universal increase in incidents of religious intolerance and violence. This trend must be stopped before our societies are further torn asunder by hatred and senseless killings at the hands of extremists.

It is the responsibility of each and every person to prevent such ruthless acts of destruction and disruption that are certainly contrary to all religious beliefs. It is imperative for people of all faiths to rise to the challenge to defuse violence and conflict and promote inter-communal peace and harmony amongst the people.

India has been a model of secular democracy founded on principles of plurality and diversity. These must be preserved in the interest of all. The spiritual teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, who belonged to Gujarat, are based on “**Ahimsa – non violence**”. During his lifetime the great Mahatma worked for communal harmony and mutual tolerance as a necessity for all times and for all races and called for the sharing of each other’s sorrow to strengthen the bonds of common humanity. The tragic events in Gujarat today discredit the spirit and teachings of this great leader who held both Hindus and Muslims dear to his heart.

We share the pain and sorrow of the Indian people. Our prayers are with you ever as you seek to uphold non-violence and act as bridge builders and agents of peace and reconciliation in your beloved nation.

Yours in Christ,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

**Appeal on sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi**
*Letter to H.E. Mrs. Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 10 December 2001.*
Dear Mrs. Robinson,

The World Council of Churches has received with concern reports from its member churches in Indonesia as well as from other parts of the world about the increase in the level of sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi and Indonesia. This has resulted in grave and serious human rights violations. The violence is likely to further increase if immediate steps are not taken to bring the situation under control.

In Poso during the last week of November 2001, 600 houses and 6 churches were burned; 1500 Christians were forced to flee the city in search of security. Since the beginning of December, another 21 Christian villages and 5 churches have been destroyed in Poso. The Christians living in the area have fled Poso and sought shelter in Tentena – the headquarters of the Christian Church in Central Sulawesi (GKST).

The attacks resulting in destruction of property and displacement of people were carried out by the forces of the Laskar Jihad that came largely from East Java. The groups were armed with rocket launchers and automatic weapons. They have presently surrounded Tentena, cutting off essential supplies to the region.

The church leaders in Sulawesi have repeatedly appealed to the central government in Jakarta to save them from these attacks that are being organized and carried out by the Laskar Jihad. To this date the government has not responded to their appeals, nor has it taken adequate measures to ensure their security and prevent further violations of human rights.

We therefore urge you to call upon the Indonesian government: to pay serious attention to the sectarian violence taking place in Sulawesi before it degenerates into another situation such as that of the Malukus; to ensure the safety of the people of Sulawesi; to ensure that perpetrators responsible for the acts of violence are brought to justice; and further to take necessary steps to disarm private armed groups such as the Laskar Jihad.

Sincerely,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Letter to the heads of Muslim religious communities throughout the world on the beginning of Ramadan
Sent to Muslim leaders and dialogue partners, 17 November 2001.

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear friends,

The blessed month of Ramadan and the Christian Holy time of Advent during which the faithful prepare themselves in fasting and recollection for the Nativity of Jesus Christ coincide this year. Thus, they become one among many signs that make us “nearest in affection” and draw us together in common obedience to God. The spiritual bonds that unite us need to be rediscovered anew in these trying times.

Fasting is indeed a reminder of God's presence. It invites believers, in their personal lives as well as in community, to turn to God in humility and love, seeking forgiveness and strength. Fasting is a time of mercy. We receive anew God's mercy upon us but also that which we
beseech for each other. It is a time of piety, deepened devotion and generous alms-giving. The special endurance of believers, asserting that human beings have other needs than bread and that their bodies are their servants not their masters, reminds us that to have is to share. It is a call to render justice; for dealing justly with others is inseparable from true piety.

The abominable acts of September 11 were condemned by the authoritative voices throughout the Islamic community and among the churches. The Quranic principle that no soul shall bear another's burden was widely echoed by Muslims. We have heard many Muslim friends reminding themselves and all of us of the Quranic injunction not to let the hatred of others make us swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Muslims and Christians are standing up forcefully for justice, and have warned against the temptation of blind vengeance and indiscriminate retaliation. Churches, in the USA and beyond, have opened themselves in humility to the call of the apostle not to repay anyone evil for evil. Many Christians have affirmed that the answer to terrorism must not reinforce the cycle of violence. All acts which destroy life, whether through terrorism or in war, are contrary to the will of God.

The recent tragic events have shown the vulnerability of all nations and the fragility of the international order. A world in which more and more people and even whole nations are being consigned to extreme poverty while others accumulate great wealth is inherently unstable. The tendency to impose one's will - if need be, even by force - which is manifesting itself in the policies of powerful nations provokes resentment among the weaker ones. The language of threat and the logic of war breeds violence. As long as the cries of those who are humiliated by unremitting injustice, by the systematic deprivation of their rights as persons and as peoples and by the arrogance of power based on military might are ignored or neglected, terrorism will not be overcome. The answer is to be found in redressing the wrongs that breed violence between and within nations.

The violence of terrorism - in its various forms - is abhorrent, particularly to all those who believe that human life is a gift of God and therefore infinitely precious. Every attempt to intimidate others and inflict indiscriminate death and injury upon them is to be universally condemned, whoever are the perpetrators.

The response to these inhuman acts, however, must not lead to stigmatizing Muslims, Arabs and any other ethnic groups. Churches are called to let the voices of fraternity and compassion drown those of hostility, racism and intolerance. The voice of faith, which has been expressed through the many initiatives of friendship and solidarity, needs to defeat those of bigotry, fear and nihilism.

As Christians we reject the tendency, not uncommon in many Western countries, to perceive Muslims as a threat and portray Islam in negative terms while projecting a positive self-image. Christians live under the divine commandment not to bear false witness against their neighbours. The encounter of Christians with Islam and with Muslims requires intellectual honesty and integrity. They need to be present with their Muslim neighbours in the spirit of love, sensitive to their deepest faith commitments, and recognizing what God has done and is doing among them. Here the dialogue between Muslims and Christians, to which the World Council of Churches remains strongly committed, finds its authentic meaning. Many today call for an intensification of the dialogue of religions and cultures. However, such dialogue cannot bear fruits unless it is built on trust, on an unequivocal respect for the identity and integrity of others, an openness to understand them on their own terms and a willingness to question one's self-understanding, history and present reality.
In the dialogue of life and the encounter of commitments between Christians and Muslims in various parts of the world, we have learned that our religious communities are not two monolithic blocks confronting or competing with each other. We have learned that tensions and conflicts, when they arise, do not and should not define bloody borders between Muslims and Christians. We recognize that religion speaks for the deepest feelings and sensitivities of individuals and communities, carries deep historical memories and often appeals to universal loyalties. But this does not justify uncritical responses that draw people into each other’s conflicts instead of joining efforts, across religious loyalties, to apply common principles of justice and reconciliation. Islam and Christianity need to be released from the burden of sectional interests and self-serving interpretations of beliefs and convictions. Their beliefs should rather constitute a basis for critical engagement in the face of human weakness and defective social, economic and political orders.

This is the time for giving signs of genuine cooperation, particularly by engaging in joint efforts to provide assistance to the victims and to defend human rights and humanitarian law. This area of cooperation is critical at a time when humanitarian work suffers from restrictions and suspicions and is being used for political and propaganda purposes, to the point of being linked with the war operations. It is the time to deepen our encounter, share our pains, mutual expectations and hopes.

Dear friends,
The prayer for God’s peace is at the heart of the spirituality of Muslims and Christians. At the beginning of the month of Ramadan we greet you with a word of peace and friendship. May your fast, and ours, be pleasant to God.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Expression of deep concern about the safety and security of the Christian minority in Pakistan

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned by the act of terror committed in Bahawalpur on 28 October, when masked gunmen attacked the St Dominic’s Roman Catholic Church where Sunday’s services were being conducted by Pastor Emmanuel Allah Ditta of the Church of Pakistan. As a result of indiscriminate firing by the gunmen, 17 worshippers were killed and around 30 others were injured including women and children.

The World Council of Churches has followed with concern the recent developments in the region. In a letter sent to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan on 2 October by Dr Konrad Raiser, the WCC General Secretary, the Council expressed its apprehension of the military action initiated by the International Coalition in Afghanistan. The Council appealed to the United States and the United Kingdom to bring a prompt end to this action.

We are aware of the difficulties faced by the people of Pakistan and your government as a result of the continuous bombings in Afghanistan that have resulted in an increasing number of civilian casualties. This has caused resentment and division within Pakistan society. While appreciating the manner in which Your Excellency’s government has handled the present crisis, we nevertheless are deeply concerned about the safety and security of the Christian minority in the present highly charged environment of religious intolerance.
The National Council of Churches in Pakistan has supported the government’s decision to join the International Coalition to fight terrorism. In view of Sunday’s killings in the church at Bahawalpur, it has asked that a judicial inquiry be held into the incident so that those found guilty of this heinous act can be brought to justice.

The World Council of Churches supports the demand of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan. While we remain supportive of Your Excellency’s government in these difficult times, we urge that all necessary measures be undertaken to provide safety and security to the Christian minority in Pakistan.

Respectfully yours,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

Statement on the initiation of bombing in Afghanistan
Issued by Mr Georges Lemopoulos, Acting General Secretary, Geneva, 8 October 2001.

The initiation of bombings and missile attacks against Afghanistan last night, while not unexpected, is nevertheless of profound concern to the World Council of Churches. As the churches joined in the ecumenical movement have done so often over the past century, they have again in recent weeks sought to avoid this renewed use of overwhelming military power. The WCC has reflected this consistent and widely held stance of the churches in a letter sent last week to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan by Dr Konrad Raiser, the general secretary of the WCC.

We abhor war. The first WCC assembly in 1948 called it a sin against God and humanity. We do not believe that war, particularly in today’s highly technologized world, can ever be regarded as an effective response to the equally abhorrent sin of terrorism. Our experience of ministry to the victims of war convinces us that acts of war can never spare civilian populations despite all the precautions of military planners. Nor do we believe that war can be described as an act of humanitarianism or that the practice of war can be legitimately linked to the promise of humanitarian assistance.

We therefore pray that the United States of America and the United Kingdom will bring a prompt end to the present action, and that no other state join with them in it. We pray for those who live under the bombs and missiles, hoping against hope that they will be spared. We pray for the minority Christian churches and communities who are placed in danger as a result of such action: especially now for those in Pakistan who, despite their own poverty and small minority status, began planning last week to assist the present wave of Afghans fleeing from terror.

We pray for the Muslim and other religious communities who despite President Bush’s and Prime Minister Blair’s affirmations to the contrary, are likely to consider themselves the targets of this and the other military actions foreseen to follow. We pray for the leaders of these and all nations that God will invest them with wisdom and compassion in this terrible time; that they turn away from the temptation of the sword and toward actions for global justice that provide the chief hope to overcome terrorism in all its forms and to provide true peace and security for the nations and peoples of our world.

Open letter to the member churches in the United States
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in our One Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the brief message I sent you on behalf of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches on that tragic morning of September 11, I assured you of the prayers of your sister churches around the world. That was an affirmation of faith. Now you have had the evidence of those prayers in an almost unprecedented flood of messages of compassion, love and solidarity from churches in East, West, North and South.

This expression of unity in such a time of trial gives flesh to the words Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too… Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort” (II Cor. 1:3-7).

As I write to you now, ten days after the tragedy, the words in the Revelation to John addressed to the angel of the church in Ephesus also come to mind. “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance… I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary” (Rev. 2:2-7).

In these days, you have sought to respond in faith to many contradictory voices. Some plead for a form of justice that would name the evil and identify those responsible and bring them to trial in appropriate courts of law. Others, however, want decisive military action to show the will of the nation to avenge its losses and deny victory to its enemies. Very many share the deep apprehension you have heard from churches abroad about the prospect of the United States striking out again with its uncontested military might. They fear that this would result in an ever rising spiral of retributive violence and the loss of ever more lives.

Words of condemnation and the language of “war” come so quickly to the fore. Blame is easily assigned to “the enemy.” These are reinforced by the images and messages streaming across all our television screens, wherever we live. It is far more difficult to regard ourselves in the mirror of such hatred, and to have the courage to recognize how deeply violence is rooted within ourselves, our communities and even our churches. These are lessons we are all trying to learn in the Decade to Overcome Violence.

Among those who have contributed to the remarkable outpouring of sympathy with the USA have been other communities of faith. They share both your sufferings and your fears. Partly in response to this, but also out of your own sense of justice, you have reached out to those communities in your own nation and with them have spoken out clearly against threats or open acts of violence against Muslims and Arab Americans. This powerful witness must be heard both at home and abroad. No one should be allowed to forget that in the places often mentioned as primary targets of military retaliation, Muslims, Christians, and people of other faiths live side by side. Minority Christian communities and those majority communities with whom their lives are shared stand to suffer severely at the hands of religious extremists if the “Christian” West strikes out yet again.
People in your country and around the world have gathered together during this past week in sanctuaries of the churches for silent reflection, and to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit, who stands beside us in our time of need and journeys with us through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. In these safe spaces Christians and others have sought to discern the deeper meaning of such thoughtless acts and the suffering they have inflicted. This is indeed a time for quiet discernment of the “signs of the times,” for courage and wisdom, and to pray for God’s guidance. As the prophet Isaiah says: “In quietness and trust shall be your strength” (Is. 30:15).

The message to the church in Ephesus goes on, however: “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.” The United States was one of the early architects of the United Nations and was once among the strongest advocates for the international rule of law. In recent times, however, it has repeatedly ignored its international obligations and declared its intention to ignore the rest of the world in pursuit of its own perceived self-interests. This it does to its own and the world’s peril. The events of September 11 have again reminded all nations that all are vulnerable and that the only true security is common security. The United States, so often accused, has now been the beneficiary of the sympathy and solidarity of the whole world. It could respond in kind and with humility by reversing its course now and rejoining the global community in a common pursuit of justice for all. It could set aside its reliance on military might at whatever cost and invest in efforts to find non-violent solutions to conflicts generated by poverty, mistrust, greed and intolerance.

As the writer of the Book of Revelation says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” It is one of the chief marks of the ecumenical movement that the churches understand Jesus’s prayer that they all might be one, as he is one with the Father.

They are being called to practise mutual love and to extend this love even to the enemy, to become, as our familiar hymn puts it, “one great fellowship of love in all the whole wide earth.” No one can live alone, separated from the wider fellowship, for we share one humanity. When one hurts, all suffer together.

As an expression of that fellowship, the WCC Executive Committee has expressed its desire to send to you a delegation of church leaders from around the world as “living letters” of compassion, and to engage with you in a common reflection about how we can shape a shared witness to the world in a time of such great need. I hope that you will welcome and open your hearts to them as they will to you.

I reassure you again of our constant prayers, our love and our appreciation for your ministries of consolation and of prophetic vision. May God bless, guide and continue to strengthen you.

Yours in Christ, the Prince of Peace,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, 26 August – 7 September 2001

Christians believe that *Adam*, the human being, male and female, was created in God's own image, blessed and made co-responsible with God for creation (Genesis 1:26-28). In Jesus Christ, we believe, God humbled himself and became man in order that we may be reconciled to one another and with the Creator. God makes no distinction among us based on race, colour, nationality, ethnicity belonging, religious or other belief, sex or any other difference. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, reminded us that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 4:28). To the Corinthians he wrote: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it” (I Cor. 12:26)

In a religio-cultural ethos where social hierarchies were legitimised with philosophical imagery, St. Paul re-interprets the image of the body to uphold the spiritual significance of respecting the value and worth of every human being. He presents this image to emphasise the need to recognise diversity as an expression of God’s wisdom and love, and calls for the need to be led by a spirituality that recognises one’s own worth in relation to the other. By drawing on the example of Christ, he offers a social vision embodied by the values of equality, justice and love.

The ecumenical movement, which has emerged out of this broader understanding of the Christian faith, views Christian vocation as seeking peace and justice in all human relationships at all levels. The World Council of Churches, as one of its organisational expressions at the global level, is driven by this vision of the world.

The elimination of racism, sexism, and all other forms of discrimination and exclusion have been some of its major concerns right from its inception. Since the beginning of the last century major ecumenical meetings have devoted attention to the impact of racism and intolerance in society. Particularly since the decade of the 1960s, through its Programme to Combat Racism, the WCC has done much to raise such awareness through programmes of research and education and through concrete action to counter the impact of racism in international relations. “God wills a society in which all can exercise full human rights,” the World Council of Churches Fifth Assembly said in 1975. “All human beings are created in God's image, equal, infinitely precious in God's sight and ours.” In response, the churches gathered in the World Council of Churches have accelerated their efforts to foster tolerance. In January of this year we launched “The Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace.”

On this first International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in the new millennium, people of all nations are called to rejoice in the God-given gift of human diversity, and to join together to build a world based on justice and peace.

It is our hope that Christians around the world will join with peoples of other faiths in seeking to create a world free of the poverty and forms of discrimination that are at the root of violence. As I put it at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in New York last August, dialogue within and between religions must lead not only to tolerance but to deep respect for the other in his or her authentic relationship with the Holy. Together, we must seek ways to create a global culture of mutual respect which will provide a model to those
who bear responsibility for governance at all levels of society, be it in the private, communal or public spheres.

Preparations for the forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in Durban later this year, provide for not only governments, but also business and civil society to recommit themselves to its goals. In today’s world, the biblical injunction that we be kind and tenderhearted with one another sounds pious indeed. World peace, and I dare say the future of humanity itself, depends on such commitments and on their realization in every place.

Background paper on the draft declaration and programme of action, submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 15 August 2001.

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, against the background of more than fifty years of work by the World Council of Churches against racism and its effects, notably through its Program to Combat Racism, has submitted earlier comments for consideration in the drafting of the Draft Declaration and Programme of Action.

This submission in its present form has been revised to integrate the comments and amendments presented by the participants of the Regional Preparatory Consultations organized by the World Council of Churches in Latin America, Asia/Pacific, Africa (two Consultations) and Gender, Religion and Racism for the Africa region.

These preliminary proposals reflect the experience of victims around the world who are members of or related to the 342 member churches of the WCC.

Sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

No country or society today is completely free of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Thus it is appropriate that the Declaration and Programme of Action address all governments, non-state and private-sector actors and civil society organizations - including the churches and church-based organizations and religious institutions - that bear shared responsibility for the elimination of such violations of fundamental human rights in their own societies and for the application of universal standards in all countries.

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are at the root of many contemporary internal and international armed conflicts, and efforts to eliminate these sources of injustice are integral to the global Agenda for Peace and to the building of a universal culture of peace and non-violent approaches to conflict transformation.

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are barriers to development in poor countries and to equal economic opportunity in rich ones. The negative impact of economic globalization, which includes racial/ethnic inequities and the exclusion of large sectors from the benefits of the global economy, discriminates especially against former colonies and continuing territorial colonies of European powers in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, against Indigenous Peoples in Latin America, and against native and Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples in predominately-white industrialized nations.

Colonization and slavery demonstrated the heinous nature of economic globalization driven by self-interest and devoid of compassion. The dominant source of this social ill is white racism against people of colour around the world. The rising tide of violence in internal conflicts in many regions, however, demonstrates that extreme manifestations of national identity and of
ethnocentrism are forms of related intolerance that have similar impact upon peoples of
the same or similar racial heritage in many societies. The relationship between internal conflict
and colonial heritage cannot be overlooked. Caste is a prevalent form of discrimination affecting
some 240 million people in South Asia and some parts of Africa, in violation of Art. 2 of the
Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The sources of this discrimination lie deep in the
cultures and religious formation of these societies, making it especially complex and
resistant to purely legal remedies.

The role that Christianity has played in denigrating and devaluing Indigenous contributions
to the understanding of Christianity in the context of non-Western traditions has to be
acknowledged. Religious intolerance and the political manipulation of religion and religious
affiliation are on the rise in many parts of the world, and are increasingly a factor in national and
international conflict. As a religious institution we recognize that certain religious teachings and
practices contribute to and aggravate religious intolerance, as well as perpetuate cultural and
racial discrimination. Historically certain religious enterprises have been used as catalysts
for colonization, slavery and apartheid. The efforts of the Special Rapporteur on Religious
Intolerance, who has drawn attention to these questions, should be supported and strengthened.

Governments should be further encouraged to respect the right to religious freedom, and
to acknowledge the spiritualities of Indigenous Peoples as authentic religion, as per the
recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance. The perpetuation of state
religion should be discouraged for it aggravates discrimination of those from other religious
affiliation different from the state religion.

Victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Women and children of colour often suffer first and most severely the effects of racism,
sexism, caste and class discrimination. Societies and social systems dominated by patriarchal
attitudes and use of power often favour racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
intolerance, making the oppression of women still more acute and complex. Racism, sexism and
class frequently form a triangle of discrimination in which many women of colour are trapped in
their
daily lives. Women of color throughout the world are victims of this triangle of
discrimination.

The poor are the most vulnerable to the impact of racism, racial discrimination,
xenophobia and related intolerance. With the feminization of poverty it is again women who are
most severely affected and rendered vulnerable to other violations of human rights through sex
tourism and trafficking of women, discriminatory population control policies and sterilization,
inequitable access to education and discrimination in employment which relegates them to the
most poorly paid and demeaning jobs.

Victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, especially
Indigenous and displaced peoples and those living in colonized territories, tend to be denied
ownership of, control over, access to, and relationships with their ancestral lands. This has
profound economic consequences for these peoples, and often constitutes a violation of
religious liberty for those whose spirituality is profoundly linked to the land and the natural
environment.
Regardless of where they live, what their political or social culture, or their particular beliefs, Indigenous Peoples all view the land as sacred and the essential basis of their survival. Their identities, cultures, languages, philosophies of life and spiritualities are bound together in a balanced relationship with all creation.

Victims of caste discrimination suffer the imposition of separate habitation, exclusion due to prohibitions of inter-dining and inter-marriage, untouchability, discrimination and denial of equal opportunity in public life.

Examination of contemporary manifestations of racism should address issues of environmental racism. In many countries people of African-descent, Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities are those who are more likely than whites to live in environmentally hazardous conditions and near uncontrolled toxic waste sites.

Indigenous Peoples' lands and sacred places are home to extensive mining operations and radioactive waste sites. A double standard exists as to what practices are acceptable in certain communities, villages or cities and not in others. As a consequence, the residents of these communities suffer shorter life spans; higher maternal, infant and adult mortality; poor health; poverty; diminished economic opportunities and substandard housing. Their quality of life overall is degraded.

Expressions of xenophobia – the rejection of outsiders – are increasingly evident in all regions of the world. Governments are devising more sophisticated ways of preventing would-be migrants and asylum-seekers from reaching their territories.

These policies made by such governments are designed to keep people of color out of these countries and to control their population growth. Politicians often use foreigners as a scapegoat for domestic political and economic problems. There are increasing incidents of hostility and violence towards foreigners, whether legal migrants, undocumented workers, refugees, or asylum-seekers. Undocumented migrants, particularly migrant women, are especially vulnerable. They have no recourse for redress of any form of violence to which they are subjected.

Governments should be encouraged to sign and to ratify the Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Governments should commit themselves to addressing the causes which force people to leave their communities, such as political and religious persecution, human rights violations, war, poverty, and environmental degradation. Governments should refrain from keeping asylum seekers in prison for long periods of time while their case is being processed.

Governments should develop awareness-raising programmes about the reasons for migration, the contributions which migrants make to their societies, and the need to appreciate the rich variety of cultures in the world. The relationship between xenophobia and racism needs further study.

Governments should ensure that their asylum procedures provide maximum protection to those seeking protection from persecution and that they are in full accord with international refugee law.
Governments should consider adopting measures to legalize the undocumented status of migrants in their countries, to facilitate the integration of migrants into national life and to allow long-term migrants to become citizens.

Governments should acknowledge that the institutions of their societies have been built on the values, beliefs and traditions of white society, and as such deny the values, beliefs, and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples.

The Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty and related decisions adopted by the United Nations have encouraged states to abolish or strictly limit the death penalty. Article 6(5) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) expressly prohibits the imposition of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age. In some countries which continue to apply the death penalty – including to juvenile offenders – statistics show a consistent pattern of racial discrimination and racial bias towards juvenile and adult offenders in law enforcement and the administration of criminal justice. Governments that have made reservations to Article 6(5) which are incompatible with the object and purpose of the ICCPR should withdraw these reservations.

Special measures should be adopted at the national level to address discriminatory attitudes and conduct within the juvenile and adult justice systems, including the police. Governments should also evaluate and dismantle any racist judicial structures/procedures that render people of colour vulnerable to judgement without proper legal representation or a fair trial.

Measures of prevention, education and protection aimed at the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the national, regional and international levels.

Government ministries of education, those responsible for education at all levels of society, including through private and/or religious schools should review curriculum content at all levels of schooling and education, and revise all those which either explicitly or implicitly discriminate against social groups on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, caste or descent. New, innovative educational materials should be researched and developed to promote race, ethnic and national tolerance and a culture of inclusiveness and non-discrimination. Such an approach to education should include civic education with respect to anti-racist laws and forms of legal redress available to the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. History text books and teaching materials need to be rewritten, to reflect the perspective of those who have suffered colonization, slavery, apartheid, genocide, religious conquest, etc.

Programmes promoting tolerance, language recovery, the recovery of truth in history and multi-culturalism should be encouraged in the schools and through public awareness-raising campaigns. Targets for equitable outcomes should be set, and monitoring mechanisms put in place.

Governments of countries where caste discrimination is widespread should put in place all necessary constitutional, legislative and administrative measures, including appropriate forms of affirmative action, to prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste-bound occupation and descent, and put in place effective legal standards at state and local levels.

Provision of effective remedies, recourse, redress, (compensatory) and other measures at the national, regional and international levels.
Impunity for past offenders responsible for massive crimes, including slavery, colonization, apartheid, genocide and indentured labour, committed against populations based on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance should be abolished in international and national law. Victims are entitled to the truth, to have it recognized publicly, and to compensation for offenses committed. Living offenders should be charged and tried, preferably in national courts of justice, or in appropriate international courts or tribunals.

Removing impunity and allowing formal public accounting for past offenses and compensation are important for increasing public awareness and essential to the process of social healing and reconciliation in order to break spirals of retribution and violence which pass from generation to generation. The removal of impunity for past offenders must be accompanied by the redistribution of national wealth, e.g. land and financial and industrial institutions.

The international community should establish international structures to prosecute those who benefit from armed conflict through their sale and supply of arms to warring parties, and the extortion of natural resources such as oil, diamonds and gold.

Governments of countries where caste discrimination continues should implement legislation, monitor compliance and provide accessible avenues of redress through instruments accessible to victims; ensure that persons or institutions responsible for discrimination based on caste, occupation or descent, or for the trafficking of women, do not remain immune from prosecution under the law; and assure that victims are fairly compensated. Degrading practices such as manual scavenging should be brought to an end and persons engaged in them rehabilitated and trained for occupations which respect human dignity. Their contribution to society must be recognized and adequately compensated.

The UN WCAR presents governments with the opportunity to right the wrongs of the past and design new ways of combating racism today. While the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination condemns racial discrimination, it does not provide strategies for remedies. These remedies may come in the form of reparations to victims and communities who have suffered racism, including the cancellation of debt for former colonized poor countries, which are highly indebted to financial and governmental institutions of former colonizers.

Strategies to achieve full and effective equality, including international cooperation and enhancement of the United Nations and other international mechanisms in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and follow-up.

The consistency and political will exercised by the United Nations in support of those in South Africa who struggled for decades to abolish the apartheid system stands as a pertinent example of the capacity of the international community to address effectively the root causes of racism and racial discrimination. This international, multi-sectoral approach should be reflected in the Programme of Action of the World Conference, taking into account measures ranging from economic cooperation and practice in both public and private sectors, education and awareness-building campaigns, cooperation in the military and security spheres, and others tending to sanction and/or isolate governments of countries where there is a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights based on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The international community must refrain from declaring reconciliation without justice or without the establishment of mechanisms that would prevent further racial discrimination and violence.
The call of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights for more effective coordination among United Nations bodies in the field of human rights should be reiterated and strengthened with respect to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

At the national level, participatory mechanisms for assessment of the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action should be established, possibly within the national institutions for promotion and protection of human rights. As provided in the Paris Principles of 1991, the composition of national institutions should ensure the pluralist representation of civil society, including representatives of organizations involved in efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as well as discrimination based on descent.

National mechanisms for redress, including the judiciary at all levels, should also comprise persons belonging to groups representing victims of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including discrimination based on descent.

At the international level, a thematic mechanism should be established within the United Nations human rights machinery to examine, monitor and publicly report on discriminatory practices related to occupation and descent, including caste.

The international community should institute a political and legal mechanism that will prevent the flow of resources from poor countries to rich countries through corruption and unequal trade policies, and begin the repatriation of such extorted resources back to poor countries.

A permanent follow-up mechanism should be established within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor and evaluate programmes to combat racism and to coordinate the exchange of information. This mechanism would monitor and report on the implementation of the final outcome of the World Conference.

A time-defined review of the implementation of the Programme of Action under the auspices of the United Nations should be included.

In addition to the recommendations for action included under previous headings, the following should be considered for inclusion in the Draft Program of Action:

- To establish effective mechanisms for the eradication of poverty and equality on the distribution of wealth within States and basic conditions to improve the living conditions of women and children;
- To establish effective mechanisms within States to redress the inequalities of opportunities for formal education and employment;
- To put into place effective measures to prevent and to redress practices of sex tourism and trafficking of women and children in general, and women and children whose lives have been affected by racism and caste;
- To ensure that the health systems provide equal treatment to women of racial/ethnic communities and women of descent related to caste, and that their reproductive rights are respected;
- To ensure accessibility of health facilities and medication to women of color.
- To institute compensatory measures to all victims of racial violence and discrimination, and establish programs to uplift the well-being of the victims;
• To affirm the economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual rights of Indigenous Peoples as coequals in the shaping of the world's historical, cultural and spiritual heritage;
• To establish effective policies for land redistribution in colonized countries where Indigenous Peoples have been displaced from their land;
• To foster the building of bridges between Indigenous Peoples and the wider community, and to help unite and strengthen Indigenous Peoples' experiences and their existing institutions so that they may play a full and active part in the elimination of racism. To encourage greater diffusion of information about the rights and values of Indigenous Peoples and their traditional cultures at national and international levels;
• To establish international policies to monitor and prosecute multinational corporations that are involved in the exploitation of communities of color, engaged in child labour and those that practice environmental racism;
• To reiterate the need for affirmative action to redress the injustices done to all victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia or related intolerance;
• To conduct studies on toxic and hazardous waste facilities, threatening presence of poisons and pollutants and their impact on the health and livelihood of communities of African-descent, Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities; propose measures to control such abuse and punish offenders; and propose domestic and international remedies and compensation for victims of environmental racism;
• To establish mechanisms in which to monitor the role of media in perpetuating racial stereotypes and exacerbating racial violence.
• To establish legal systems free of racial prejudices and end the criminalization of people of color;
• To conduct in-depth analysis of the negative impact of racial and gender discrimination on women of color, and implement legislation, policies and educational strategies to protect their rights;
• To render visible the multiple forms of discrimination to which women of color are subjected, in order to establish effective measures to end these forms of multiple discrimination.


Madame chairperson, distinguished delegates, people of faith and goodwill, sisters and brothers. Racism is a sin. It is contrary to God’s will and an affront to human dignity and human rights.

We believe that the churches must acknowledge their complicity with, and participation in, the perpetuation of racism, slavery and colonialism. This acknowledgement is critical because it can lead to the necessary acts of apology, confession and repentance. These elements form part of redress and reparations that are due to the victims of racism past and present.

On the issues of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and reparations, we believe that it is essential for our churches and governments to acknowledge that they have benefited from the exploitation of Africans and African descendants, Asians and Asian descendants and Indigenous

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62 The Ecumenical Caucus included representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC), United Methodist Church (General Board of Church and Society and General Board Global Ministries), United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Church World Service and Witness/National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Diakonia Council of Churches (Durban), Church of England, Sisters of Mercy, Canadian Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church USA, Church of Christ in Thailand, Medical Mission Sisters, Christian Reformed Church of Canada, and Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. (Procedural difficulties at the Conference prevented the presentation of the more substantial statement given subsequently to the press by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.)
Peoples through slavery and colonialism. We are clear that the trans-Atlantic, trans-Pacific and trans-Saharan slave trades, and all forms of slavery, constitute crimes against humanity. On the issue of Palestine, we are calling for the end of Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the achievement of the right of self-determination by the Palestinian people, including the right of return, and for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State. We encourage dialogue between Jews, Muslims and Christians to promote peace, tolerance and harmonious relationships.

On the issue of Dalits and caste-based discrimination, we call for the recognition of Dalits among the victims of racial discrimination and for caste-based discrimination to be included in the list of sources of racism. Further mechanisms must be evolved by the United Nations, governments and civil society to prohibit and redress discrimination on the basis of work and descent.

Finally, with regard to Indigenous Peoples, we are calling for joint efforts among all entities to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in their struggles for self-determination and in their efforts to build peaceful and sustainable communities; and to safeguard their Indigenous knowledge and resources, free from discrimination and based on respect, freedom and equality.


Racism is a sin. It is contrary to God’s will for love, peace, equality, justice and compassion for all. It is an affront to human dignity and a gross violation of human rights.

Human dignity is God’s gift to all humankind. It is the gift of God’s image and likeness in every human being. Racism desecrates God’s likeness in every person.

Human rights are the protections we give to human dignity. We participate in the human rights struggle to restore wholeness that has been broken by racism. The struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is the struggle to sanctify and affirm life in all its fullness.

Racism dehumanizes, disempowers, marginalizes and impoverishes human beings. Its systematic and institutional forms have resulted in the death of many peoples, the plunder of resources, and the decimation of communities and nations.

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance all work, singularly and collectively, to diminish our common humanity. They thrive within the intersections of race, caste, colour, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, landlessness, ethnicity, nationality, language and disability. The dismantling and eradication of racism requires that we address all its manifestations and historical expressions, especially slavery and colonialism.

As people of faith, we call on all peoples, non-governmental organizations and governments to earnestly strive to break the cycles of racism and assist the oppressed to achieve self-determination and establish sustainable communities, without violating the rights of others.

The time to dismantle and eradicate racism is now. To be credible, it is urgent for us and our churches to acknowledge our complicity with and participation in the perpetuation of racism, slavery and colonialism. This acknowledgment is critical because it leads to the necessary acts of apology and confession, of repentance and reconciliation, and of healing and wholeness.
All of these elements form part of redress and reparations that are due the victims of racism, past and present.

As a faith community we pledge to struggle against racism and all its manifestations in the hope that God's people fulfil today the Gospel mandate that we “may all be one” (John 17:21).

To the above ends we commit ourselves to put the following priorities before the World Conference Against Racism as well as to our churches and related ecumenical bodies and institutions

1. *Slavery, Colonialism, Apartheid and Reparations.* Our churches and governments should acknowledge that they have benefited from the exploitation of Africans and African descendants and Asians and Asian descendants, and Indigenous Peoples through slavery and colonialism. We further call upon our churches to address the issue of reparations as a way of redressing the wrongs done, and to be clear that the trans-Saharan and transoceanic - Atlantic, Pacific and Indian – slave trade and all forms of slavery constitute crimes against humanity.

2. *Palestine.* For the end of Israeli colonialist occupation in the occupied Palestinian territories, the achievement of the right to self-determination by the Palestinian people, including the right of return, and for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. We encourage dialogue between and among Jews, Muslims and Christians to promote peace, tolerance and harmonious relationships.

3. *Dalits and Caste-based Discrimination.* Dalits must be recognized as among the victims of racial discrimination and caste-based discrimination must be included in the list of sources of racism. Further, mechanisms must be evolved by governments and the United Nations to prohibit and redress discrimination on the basis of work and descent.

4. *Roma, Sinti and Travellers.* For churches and governments to recognize that they have exploited Roma through slavery, ethnocide and assimilation. Governments should adopt immediate and concrete measures to eradicate the widespread discrimination, persecution, stigmatization and violence against the above peoples on the basis of their social origin and identity. They must be assured of public welfare, including accommodation, education, medical care, and employment, as well as citizenship and political participation. All these concerns must be addressed with the participation of Roma, Sinti and Travellers and their communities.

5. *Migrant Workers and Globalization.* To ensure that all migrant workers have the right to fair working conditions, decent wages and the right to organize, free from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, both in sending as well as receiving countries. We urge governments to legislate against and stop the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation and domestic labour. Poverty and landlessness breed racism. The relation between migration, poverty and landlessness must be analyzed especially under schemes of privatization and globalization.

6. *Migrants, Asylum-seekers, Refugees, and Internally Displaced Peoples.* To acknowledge that racism and all its manifestations are at the root of discrimination against refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, displaced peoples, undocumented persons and internally displaced persons. We urge the United Nations to call on governments to take appropriate action to protect the rights of such individuals in both the receiving as well as the sending countries, ensuring them freedom of movement, equitable access to education and health, housing and legal services.

7. *Indigenous Peoples.* We must join with others in efforts to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in their struggles for self-determination and in their efforts to build peaceful and sustainable communities and to safeguard their indigenous knowledge, resources, land and ancestral domains, free from discrimination and based on respect, freedom and equality. We also
call on all of us to embrace the richness of the social, cultural, spiritual and linguistic diversities of Indigenous Peoples.

8. Religious Liberty and Religious Intolerance. We must promote religious freedom and religious liberty as human rights. Any intolerance, aggression towards, or denial of this freedom to anyone and any community or society is an attack on human dignity. Even as churches must examine their complicity in religious intolerance in the past and present, we call on churches and governments to respect the freedom of religion or belief and protect the act of religious worship. We must acknowledge the negative impacts of religion, including the uncritical use of sacred texts that unduly results in the assertion of superiority of one group over another, but especially so on women, and take immediate steps to address the violence that stems from such impacts.

9. Children and Young People. We must ensure and empower children and young people to have a voice and be included in anti-racism strategies. Nongovernmental organizations and governments should develop programmes in consultation with children and young people on all matters aimed at educating them about their rights, involving them in cultural, political and economic decision-making, and assisting them in creating positive self-identity and confidence, ensuring that their ethnic, indigenous, linguistic and religious heritages are valued.

10. Follow-Up and Monitoring Mechanisms. To ensure that there are clear follow-up measures and monitoring mechanisms to both the implementation of and adherence to the aspirations contained in the Declaration and the concrete actions contained in the Programme of Action of the World Conference Against Racism.

Considering the specificity of women’s experiences of racism, the Programme of Action must incorporate gender analysis. National action plans must be developed and resources identified and allocated for the implementation of this Programme. The Programme of Action must be gender-sensitive on all levels - local, national and international.

UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS), New York, 25-27 June 2001


HIV/AIDS has been correctly described as the greatest threat to human wellbeing and public health in modern times. Millions of people have already died from this disease and millions more are directly or indirectly affected. The Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) presenting this statement wish to express our appreciation and respect to the United Nations for organising this timely and most important Special General Assembly. We are committing ourselves to support all efforts already undertaken by local communities, governments, non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations to alleviate the human suffering caused by this pandemic and to prevent its further spread.

FBOs are acutely aware of the complex nature of the infection and the root causes that have fuelled this pandemic, such as global socio-economic inequalities, marginalisation of vulnerable people, poverty and gender issues. It has become increasingly apparent that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS rises in association with poverty and indeed causes poverty. Women and girls are disproportionately represented among the poor. Women often bear a triple burden as a result of HIV/AIDS, and men carry a special responsibility to change these factors:

1. Women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection due to biological and social factors including their lack of rights in regard to self-determination in sexual relationships.
2. HIV positive women often face a greater degree of discrimination when trying to obtain treatment, look after children, etc.

3. Women are the traditional caregivers to the sick and HIV/AIDS orphans. FBOs are joining many other actors in the global fight against this devastating pandemic and can offer specific resources and strengths. At the same time we acknowledge that we have not always responded appropriately to the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS. We deeply regret instances where FBOs have contributed to stigma, fear and misinformation.

However, it is also fair to say that FBOs have often played a positive role in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. Countries such as Senegal, Uganda, and Thailand, which have involved religious leaders early on in the planning and implementation of national AIDS strategies, have seen dramatic changes in the course of the epidemic. For example, religious communities in Uganda, working hand-in-hand with AIDS service organisations and the government, have championed peer education, counselling and home care programmes. A church leader has led the National AIDS Commission in Uganda since 1995. In Uganda, Zambia and Tanzania, prevention efforts have resulted in changed sexual behaviour including delayed sexual activity among adolescents, and a reduction in the number of sexual partners. These modifications of behaviour have been part of the message of many FBOs. In Thailand, Buddhist and Christian groups have introduced home-based care services and greatly contributed to the destigmatisation of the disease.

Right from the beginning of the HIV/AIDS crisis, local communities have been at the very forefront of caring for those affected by HIV/AIDS. FBOs are rooted in local structures and are therefore in an excellent position to mobilise communities to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis. In many cases, religious organisations and people of faith have been among the first to respond to the basic needs of people affected by the disease, and indeed have pioneered much of the community-based work. And yet these FBOs are often overlooked. More often than not, the capacity of FBOs has not been maximised because we have not received adequate levels of training or resources to address the impact of the disease.

We have learnt that prevention works provided there is openness and dialogue. Many HIV prevention strategies, such as promoting temporary abstinence leading, for example to delayed sexual activity in young people, voluntary testing and counselling, mutual faithfulness in sexual relationships, and the use of condoms, have contributed to the reduction of the risk of HIV transmission. These methods should be promoted jointly by governments and civil society including FBOs.

Resources that FBOs offer in the fight against HIV/AIDS Reach. FBOs are present in communities all over the world. We have deep historical roots and are closely linked to the cultural and social environment of the people and have effective channels of communication that can be utilised. Experience and capacity. FBOs have been seeking to serve the needs of people affected by HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the pandemic. We have developed pioneering innovative approaches such as home-based care, both for people living with HIV/AIDS and for affected children. In many countries, particularly in Africa, we provide a significant proportion of health and educational services. These institutions can and should be utilised in any extended programmes on care and treatment.
Spiritual Mandate. FBOs are in a unique position to address the spiritual needs of people affected by the disease. We provide a holistic ministry for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, addressing the physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of the individual and the community.

Sustainability. It is not just the scale of the AIDS pandemic that presents a fundamental challenge to the world, but also its duration. Long-term commitments are necessary to control this disease. As FBOs, we have proven our sustainability through continuous presence in human communities for centuries.

We have withstood conflict, natural disaster, political oppression and plagues. Members of religious organisations have demonstrated commitment to respond to human needs based on the moral teachings of their faith, and they do this voluntarily and over long periods of time. It is acknowledged that HIV/AIDS has decimated communities and fragmented families, resulting in the breakdown of traditional caring relationships; community-based FBOs are in a position to make sustained efforts to address this deficit.

Recommendations For Future Collaboration

We are asking the leaders of Faith-Based Organisations to consider:

1. Putting in place programmes that would eliminate traditional and cultural inequalities that exacerbate the vulnerability of women and children.
2. Using resources to ensure that all people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS are receiving the highest possible level of care, respect, love and solidarity.
3. Raising the consciousness of leaders and members of society at all levels and training them on HIV/AIDS prevention and care.
4. Strongly advocating fair and equal access to care and treatment according to need and not depending on economic affluence, ethnic background or gender.

We are asking governments to consider:

1. Providing extensive support to FBOs (access to information, training and financial resources) in order that we may fulfil our role effectively.
2. Acknowledging and promoting the importance of community involvement in prevention efforts, including community-based health care as the basis for effective care and treatment.
3. Continuing all efforts for debt relief of highly indebted countries to make sure that a significant proportion of the released funds are used for the fight against HIV/AIDS.
4. Governments of countries belonging to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) should re-intensify their efforts to meet the 0.7 % of Gross National Product (GNP) target for Official Development Aid (ODA). HIV/AIDS can only be controlled if serious efforts to overcome global economic inequalities are undertaken.
5. Ensuring access to life-saving drugs for the treatment of HIV/AIDS and its opportunistic infections, including antiretroviral drugs. This should include the reduction of prices of patented drugs and generic production in highly-affected countries where appropriate.

We are asking UNAIDS and other UN organisations to consider:

1. Involving FBOs in the planning, implementation and monitoring of HIV/AIDS programmes at local, national and international levels.
2. Calling on religious leaders wherever possible to make use of their moral and spiritual influence in all communities to decrease the vulnerability of people for responding to HIV/AIDS and to contribute to the highest level of care and support that is attainable.

The international community can take this opportunity offered by UNGASS to build on the unique resources offered by FBOs given our local community presence, influence, spirit of volunteerism and genuine compassion facilitated by our spiritual mandate. Governments alone will not be able to launch the broadbased approach that is required to address this problem.
decisively. This Special Session on HIV/AIDS should lead to a broad coalition between governments, UN organisations, civil society, and NGOs including faith-based organisations.

Given this joint co-operation and the necessary resources we can make a tremendous difference to the fight against AIDS in terms of prevention, care and treatment.

The FBOs represented at this Special General Assembly on HIV/AIDS realize that we cannot claim to speak for all world religions and religious organisations. But we wish to express our sincere commitment to continuing to work within our own communities for the dignity and rights of People Living with HIV/AIDS, for an attitude of care and solidarity that rejects all forms of stigma and discrimination, for an open atmosphere of dialogue in which the sensitive root causes of HIV/AIDS can be addressed and for a strong advocacy to mobilise all the necessary resources for an effective global response to the pandemic.

This statement has been endorsed and supported by:
Anglican Communion MAP International
Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid in the Netherlands
Presbyterian Church USA - International Health Ministries Office
Christian Aid, UK Religion Counts, interfaith organization based in Washington, D.C.
Church Women United, USA Salvation Army
Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)- Office for Ecumenical Relations and Ministries Abroad
United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India
Family Life Movement of Zambia Vivat International, New York
Institute for Islamic Studies, Mumbai, India
World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
International Christian AIDS Network
World Alliance of Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)
International Council of Jewish Women, UK
World Conference on Religion and Peace Lutheran World Relief
World Council of Churches (WCC)
World Vision International.

Expression of condolences after church bombing

Your Excellency,

It was with great sadness that we received the sad news of the bombing of the Roman Catholic Church in Baniarchar, Muksdpur, Dist. Gopalganj, on 3rd June, conveyed to us by Mr Subodh Adhikary, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh.

I write to express through you to the Government and people of Bangladesh, and especially to the friends and loved ones of the deceased and injured our most sincere condolences.

The outpouring of public condemnations of this atrocity, the prompt visit of the Home Minister to the site of the tragedy, and the assurances of the Prime Minister that a full enquiry
will be undertaken as to the responsibility for this violent act all attest to the will of your nation to hold firmly to the principles and practice of tolerance.

We are confident that every possible effort will be made to bring those responsible to justice as a means of assuring all that strict respect for the rule of law will reign in your nation. In a global climate that too often witnesses today the resort to violence as a result of religious bigotry and intolerance, these timely and decisive measures are clearly essential to the public welfare of believers of all faiths and that of the public as a whole.

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

(Rev.) Dwain C. Epps  
Coordinator  
International Relations

Minute on Indonesia  
Adopted by the Central Committee, Potsdam, Germany, 29 January – 6 February 2001.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches notes with great pain and sorrow that the inter-communal violence in the Malukus region which began in January 1999 has left over 5,000 people dead, some 500,000 displaced, and property worth billions of rupiah destroyed. Trust between the Muslim and Christian communities has seriously eroded. Though cease-fires and moratoriums on killings have periodically been agreed between the two communities, these have all been of short duration and fighting has been renewed with a vengeance. The Indonesian security forces have often been irresponsible and inept in the carrying out of their responsibilities, and have repeatedly failed to stop or control the violence and bring the perpetrators to justice. In fact there is clear evidence that members of the Indonesian army and police forces have participated directly in some of these attacks. National authorities have to date failed to take any disciplinary action against such offenders.

The situation has been further compounded by the organized entry of the Java based radical Islamic group called “Lashkar Jihad,” thousands of whose members have indulged in systematic “religious cleansing” of Christians and acts of forced religious conversions. This group has been provided arms and training by a section of the Indonesian armed forces and has also received support and encouragement from Jakarta-based politicians.

The Central Committee:
- reiterates the WCC’s expressions of solidarity and continuing prayers for the people and churches in Indonesia in this trying time;
- reiterates the WCC’s call upon religious, political and military leaders in Indonesia to spare no effort in pursuing a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the disarming of militias on all sides, and the restoration of law and order;
- calls upon the WCC to continue to monitor developments here and to support and encourage the efforts of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia to engage the Islamic Community in dialogue to promote a just and lasting peace;
- asks the WCC, as a matter of priority, to explore further avenues of cooperation amongst the world faith communities to address together the underlying causes of inter-religious violence in the Malukus and Poso, and the situation in Aceh, particularly the victimization of women;
- calls to the attention of the member churches and related agencies the large-scale
displacement of people; the rehabilitation needs of large numbers of persons injured or maimed in the fighting, and other humanitarian needs and urges them to respond generously through Action by Churches Together (ACT).

Appeal for the release of blasphemy law protestors

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has learnt with deep concern of the arrests of Fr Arnold Heredia, former Executive Secretary of the Committee for Justice and Peace, and presently the priest of St Francis Parish in Karachi, and a Council member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan; Mr Aslam Martin, project co-coordinator for the Committee for Justice and Peace; Mr Riaz Nawab of Caritas, Karachi; and fourteen others on 10th January, while they were engaged in a peaceful demonstration near the Rainbow Center, Saddar, Karachi. The protestors were taking part in the procession to the Governor’s House, organised by the newly formed All Faith Spiritual Movement, to submit a memorandum demanding the repeal of the Blasphemy Law.

According to reports we have received, the peaceful demonstrators were not only restrained from proceeding to the Governor's House but they were also teargassed and beaten by the security forces. As a result Fr Heredia and some of the other protestors were injured. The seventeen protestors are presently under detention on remand by the authorities at the Preedy Police Station. The World Council of Churches has previously drawn the attention of the Government of Pakistan to the serious situation that has arisen as a result of discriminatory practices and of persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan including Christians, Ahmadiyas and Hindus. Extremist forces and groups have in particular used the blasphemy law to incite religious hatred and animosity against these religious minorities. These incidences have been well documented by both national and international organisations, including the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. They have greatly contributed to the growing environment of religious intolerance often resulting in serious disturbances of law and order and serious abuses of human rights.

These developments are in violation of Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan that guarantees the legitimate rights and interests of the minorities. Despite the assurances given to the religious minorities by Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah that “minorities are a sacred trust of Pakistan,” their security is not protected and they continue to be victimised at the hands of unscrupulous sections of the society. We have thus appealed to the Government of Pakistan to take immediate steps to repeal Section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code.

It was not in defiance, but in defence of the Constitution of Pakistan that the above-mentioned persons presently under police detention peacefully protested, demanding repeal of the blasphemy law. We therefore urge you to assure their immediate release, their protection from unlawful abuse from any quarter, and at the same time to guarantee the security and physical integrity of others under your jurisdiction presently charged under the blasphemy law.

Respectfully yours,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

Commission and Subcommission on Human Rights
Oral intervention on religious intolerance presented to the Commission on behalf of the WCC, LWF, WARC and CEC noting violations in Uzbekistan and Pakistan, and supporting the work of the Special Rapporteur, Geneva, 9 April.
Oral intervention on impunity in Guatemala, 13 April.
Oral intervention calling for rapid progress on Indigenous Peoples’ concerns, 19 April.
2000: “Sharing the land, the truth and the peace,” oral intervention at the Fifth Special Session of the Commission devoted to the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Geneva, 17 October.
Written submissions to the Commission on religious intolerance; discrimination against Dalits in India; and on human rights violations in Indonesia.
Oral intervention at the Commission on mass exoduses and displaced persons.
2001: Oral intervention to the Subcommission on measures to improve the situation and ensure the human rights and dignity of all migrant workers, February.
Written statements to the Commission on economic, social and cultural rights in the context of globalisation and on religious freedom, liberty and religious intolerance.
Oral intervention on violations of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine to the Commission, Geneva, 28 March.
Oral intervention on the violation of human rights and fundamental freedom in West Papua/Irian Jaya, Indonesia and Cyprus, 2 April.
Oral intervention made on behalf of the CCIA by Monsignor Alvaro Ramazzini, Roman Catholic Bishop of the San Marcos Diocese, Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI), on the protection of freedom of opinion and expression in Guatemala, calling for the renewal of the UN mandate for oversight of the human rights aspects of the Guatemala peace accord, 6 April.
2002: Written Statement on civil and political rights, including the question of torture and detention.
Oral intervention on Israeli violations of human rights and international law, especially of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and endorsing the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ call for an international presence to reduce violence, restore respect for human rights and create conditions propitious for negotiations, Geneva, 2 April.
Oral intervention on the urgent need for increased human rights protections for refugees and internally displaced persons, Geneva, 4 April.
Oral intervention on the increasing environment of repression in West Papua/Irian Jaya, urging the Commission to use its influence with the Government of Indonesia to cease human rights violations and repression in this territory, Geneva, 16 April.

General Secretary's Christmas Message, 2000

It has been a centuries-old unwritten rule that at Christmas a cease-fire be observed in all situations of military conflict. Will this be the case this year as well?

What do those warlords who force young people – and often enough children – to fight their dirty wars know and care about this rule? From Sierra Leone to Indonesia, from Israel and Palestine to Sri Lanka, from Colombia to Chechnya, our world seems to be engulfed in a deadly cycle of war, violence and destruction.
A real culture of violence has taken root and is spreading, in open contempt of all the rules of humanitarian law. It manifests itself not only in armed conflict.

Violence has become omnipresent in the streets, in subways, in schools and sports stadiums, in families and homes. Its victims are most often those who are different: members of ethnic, racial or religious minorities; refugees; people with disabilities; or simply the poor and marginalized.

Can this dynamic be stopped? In many places, people have begun to stand up and to form alliances resisting the culture of violence. Through its “Programme to Overcome Violence”, the World Council of Churches has tried since 1994 to support such initiatives and give them greater visibility. Now at the beginning of the year 2001, the WCC will reinforce its efforts and launch a “Decade to Overcome Violence”. This Decade is rooted in the conviction that Christians and their churches are called “to provide to the world a clear witness to peace, to reconciliation and non-violence grounded in justice”. It is the objective of the Decade to open the space where an alternative culture of peace and reconciliation can grow.

Building a culture of peace and non-violence is an urgent demand, not only for political reasons. Churches are called to articulate the protest of the gospel against the cult of force and greed, against unbridled competition and impunity where fundamental human rights are being violated. The culture of violence is the result of a perversion of basic values; it manifests the inability to sustain relationships.

Overcoming violence therefore has to begin in the hearts and minds of people. A culture of peace cannot be imposed from above. It grows where space is provided for learning how to resolve conflicts peacefully, to sustain difficult relationships, to encounter the stranger without anxiety.

Each year at Christmas, we hear the message of the angels: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those whom he favours” (Luke 2:14). We celebrate the birth of the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), the one who reconciled us to God and with each other and thus proclaimed peace (Eph. 2:17) and a new relationship between those who had been separated by alienation and hostility.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us consider what we can contribute to overcoming violence and building a culture of peace. Living in a situation where violence has become omnipresent, those who have heard and accepted the gospel of the peace of Christ are entrusted with the message of reconciliation. They are made ambassadors for Christ and called into a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

This, then, is our mission today as Christians: wherever the walls of hostility are being broken down, wherever communal conflict is being resolved peacefully, wherever women and children are being saved from becoming victims of violence, the peace of Christ is being proclaimed to the glory of God.

Congratulations to H.H. Patriarch Abuna Paulos on the award of the Nansen Medal
Letter sent to the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, 15 November 2000.

Your Holiness,
It was a pleasure to meet you, however briefly, when we were together in New York for the Millennium Summit of World Religious Leaders. I was encouraged to have through Norwegian Church Aid a report of the important meeting you had in that city between the Religious Committees of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and to see the further agreements for future actions you adopted there.

Now I have had the welcome news that you have been named as a corecipient of the prestigious Nansen Medal for service to refugees this year. I want to congratulate you warmly for this merited recognition of your work, which includes the leadership you have given to the joint efforts of the Religious Committees. The granting of the Nansen Medal for 2000 to persons who themselves have suffered the rigors of exile and thus the fate of refugees is a significant step. We know well how you yourself were impacted in those difficult years of your own imprisonment and exile during which we accompanied you, and we can attest to the ways in which you have applied that personal experience in your years as spiritual leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

A mark of your commitment both to the plight of refugees and to the causes of uprootedness in your part of the world has been your effort to build bridges between the religious communities, the peoples and the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea at a time when they provided virtually the only contact across a growing divide. I am sure that this high distinction now given to you bodes well not only for your own ministry, but for the realization of the important goals the committees have set for themselves to build a lasting peace and harmonious relations between your two peoples.

Yours in Christ,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Resolution on Jerusalem Final Status Negotiations
*Adopted by the Executive Committee, Geneva, 26-29 September 2000.*

Recalling the appeal of the WCC Eighth Assembly (Harare, 1998) that negotiations on the future status of Jerusalem should “be undertaken without further delay and considered to be part of rather than a product of a comprehensive settlement for the region;”

Noting that negotiations on the final status on Jerusalem have begun; and

Sharing the conviction expressed by Their Beatitudes the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches and Christian Communities in Jerusalem in their statement of 26 September 2000 “that the political negotiators (must) take all necessary steps to (conclude them in a way that would) best ensure true peace with true justice and security for the ‘two peoples and three religions’ of this land – Palestinians and Israelis, Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.”

The Executive Committee, meeting in Geneva, 26-29 September 2000:

Expresses its appreciation for the comprehensive analysis of issues related to the present final status negotiations contained in the document, “Background paper on the Status of Jerusalem – December 1998 to the Present,” prepared by International Relations staff, and commends it to the churches and ecumenical bodies for study and appropriate action;

Commends the initiatives taken in follow-up to the Statement on the Status of Jerusalem adopted by the Eighth Assembly;

Firmly believes that Jerusalem can be a source of peace, stability and coexistence rather than of division and conflict that destroy human dignity and hope;
Reaffirms the principles contained in that statement as particularly relevant in the context of the present negotiations;
Remains convinced of the urgency of pursuing negotiations on Jerusalem based on these principles;
Encourages the parties to have the courage to abandon narrow, exclusive claims in favour of efforts to build an open, inclusive and shared city where free access to Holy Places and freedom of worship is assured for people of all faiths;
Reiterates its conviction “that the solution to the question of Jerusalem is in the first place the responsibility of the parties directly involved, but that the Christian churches and the Jewish and Muslim religious communities have a central role to play in relation to (the) negotiations;”
Welcomes in this connection the recent initiatives taken by Heads of Churches of Jerusalem and the supportive steps taken by church leaders in the USA; and Urges all member churches
• to bring the WCC’s Eighth Assembly Statement on the Status of Jerusalem to the attention of their governments;
• to speak out boldly and in unison for the application of these principles; and
• to remain constant in prayer and in solidarity with the local churches for a just peace in Jerusalem and for the whole of the Middle East.

Advent message to the churches and Christian communities of Jerusalem
Letter from the General Secretary to the patriarchs and heads of Christian communities in Jerusalem, 12 December 2000.

Your Beatitudes, Graces and Eminences,

The Officers of the World Council of Churches, meeting on the eve of the Advent Season, have once again turned their thoughts to you and all the people of Palestine. They have asked that I write you to assure you of their and the World Council of Churches’ constant prayers. I do so with a heavy heart, deeply conscious of your pain and suffering in these days when you mourn the deaths of so many of your children and friends; when Palestinians suffer the destruction of many more of their homes and pass once again through the valley of the shadow of violence and death. Nor can we ignore the victims on the Israeli side of the continuing conflict.

In my Christmas message I have pointed out that the World Council of Churches will soon launch the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches seeking reconciliation and peace. I also recalled the centuries-old unwritten rule that at Christmas a cease-fire be observed in all situations of military conflict. Here I had particularly in mind our sisters and brothers caught up in the new spiral of violence in Israel and Palestine.

Desirable as it would be, a cease-fire is clearly not enough. Our shared goal must be true peace, a peace built on the foundations of justice. Together with you, therefore, we long for justice for the Palestinian people. Just peace and an end to the vicious cycle of violence is more than an urgent political necessity. It confronts us with the call to repentance and a change of heart, the readiness to recognize the God-given dignity and the rights of the other. It was surely this transformation that the Prophet had in mind when he foretold the coming of the Prince of Peace.

In these days Christians around the world prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, confessing anew our faith in God who humbled himself and took on human flesh in order that we might be reconciled to God and with one another.
Many will draw hope once again from the song of the Virgin Mary, praising God who “has regarded the lowly estate of his handmaiden”, and saying, his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

For two millennia Christians have turned at this time of year to the Holy Place of the manger, Bethlehem, to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Many have longed once to make the pilgrimage to the manger, there to kneel down before the birthplace of the Christ child. This year especially, millions anticipated making this journey, and you have gone to great lengths to prepare hospitality for them.

Tragically, the present circumstances have rendered virtually impossible such pilgrimages and even those of Christians in Palestine itself.

Nevertheless, the bonds of faith and love cannot be broken by violence and war. You are not alone in this tragic time. We and other Christians around the world will be making a pilgrimage of the heart to the manger, surrounding and sustaining you now and always in prayer.

May the hope that abounds in this time of preparations for the Holy Feast of Christmas give birth to a new day of peace and joy and prosperity for you and all who live in the land which has been forever blessed by the coming of Christ.

Yours ever in Emmanuel,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders

Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President of the General Assembly, Mr Secretary-General of the World Peace Summit, Excellencies, Eminences, fellow participants, friends.

We gather here in this Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at a time when many millions of our sisters and brothers hunger and thirst for righteousness, for justice, for peace. We have come as those who bear responsibility for keeping alive hope for the least of these, our sisters and brothers.

In an age of the cynical use of power, we come as religious leaders to assert the truth that it is God who reigns over all for the good of the whole Creation and those who dwell in it.

We meet in a time of great transition from an age of secularism which tended to despise religion. Today, peoples around the world are looking again to religion as a source of spiritual values which transcend earthly power. In religion people are finding new sources of community bonds, of human solidarity, of hope for a better future.

As General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of 337 Christian member churches in over 100 countries in all the world’s regions, I speak to you this morning out of the experience of more than fifty years of efforts to promote dialogue among Christian churches and between them and people of other faiths.
All true religion wills justice, peace and harmony. Yet, as we engage here in dialogue we are conscious of the fact that wars are being fought in many parts of the world appealing to the name of religion. Our own religious communities are being divided along lines of competing doctrines or as a result of alliances between religious and national, ethnic and other secular groupings which have assumed a holy character. As was the case in the age of secularism, religion continues to be misused by those controlling power whose interests have little to do with religion, faith or the spirituality of believers.

Mr Secretary-General,

Dialogue within and between religions requires not just tolerance but deep respect for the other in his or her authentic relationship with the Holy. True dialogue should enable each partner to deepen his or her own faith or belief, not to weaken or abandon it. We seek not an amalgam of spiritual truths, some sort of global set of minimum religious values or a shared code of behaviour comprised of eternal truths drawn from our various faiths. Rather we seek ways to create a global culture of mutual respect which will provide a model to those who bear responsibility for governance at all levels of society, be it in the private, communal or public spheres.

Most of us will agree, I think, that the spirit of secularism which either sought to abolish religion, or to restrict it to the sphere of personal spirituality has contributed to a breakdown in both public and private morality. But as religious and spiritual leaders we should be honest with ourselves and with the world and therefore admit that we have too often remained silent in the face of this breakdown in ethics and morality. Some of our own institutions have at times been complicit with or have even succumbed themselves to such abuses of public trust and responsibility to God.

Here in the Main Hall of the United Nations General Assembly where normally leaders of the world’s governments meet, we who respond to a higher power must have something to say about dialogue in the sphere of global governance. The international community has failed to eradicate poverty, to provide for the general social welfare of all peoples, to resolve conflict short of the use of overwhelming military power and to rid the world of the scourge of weapons of mass destruction. We still do not have a truly democratic forum in which rich and poor, powerful and weak nations alike can share equitably and fully in responsibility for global affairs. All of this defies the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and the lofty aims set out in its Preamble. We cannot blame the United Nations alone for these failures which have allowed the law of the most powerful to dominate over the international rule of law. We must assume collective responsibility. Yet there is reason to lament the lack of civil courage and statesmanship of many government leaders who have been more concerned about the preservation of national self-interests – and often their own personal privileges – than for the collective interest of the peoples of the United Nations.

Is it possible that we who are gathered here, without any pretense of assuming the responsibilities of governments, can provide a global free space within which accountability, public morality, ethical standards, and spiritual values can be fostered?

There is an emerging global civil society movement which seeks to hold global institutions and the instruments of global capital accountable to the peoples, especially the victims of globalization. Many of those involved in this movement do so out of their spiritual understandings and religious convictions. Is it possible that religions together can help widen a global free space for this new, vital expression of the global popular will?
Mr Secretary-General, Eminences and friends,

The last Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Harare, Zimbabwe, declared an ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence. It will be launched next January in Berlin. It is based on our conviction that dialogue today must have at its centre the overcoming of violence in our world and the creation of a global culture of peace.

The dimensions of this task are manifold, and in all of them religions have a crucial role to play together. Nowhere, however, is our concerted effort more urgently needed as in the address to international and internal conflicts in which religions are involved, or that are being fought in the name of religion. It is my sincere prayer and hope that in the dialogue we shall pursue in these days, and in close collaboration with the United Nations, we can strengthen the commitment to a culture of peace and in particular deny the sanction of religion to those who seek to make it a tool of violence.

May God guide our deliberations in the paths of righteousness and of peace for God’s sake, for the sake of God’s world and for the sake of all God’s people.

In the certainty that you all share this prayer, I bid you peace and thank you sincerely.

**Appeal on the situation in the Malukus**

*Letter to H.E. Mrs Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 13 July 2000.*

Dear Madame,

The World Council of Churches is concerned at the increase in violence in the Malukus region that has resulted in scores of people being killed and properties belonging to Christians, including church buildings and schools, destroyed. The state of Civil Emergency declared on 27 June by the Government of Indonesia has failed to stop the death and destruction taking place. The situation is particularly precarious in Ambon, Halmahera and Poso. We have received regular information from our member churches and from the Communion of Churches in Indonesia about these attacks on Christians and their establishments by armed religious zealots from Java. In the face of this onslaught, many Christian villages have been forced to evacuate for security reasons. There is a complete breakdown of law and order.

The Indonesian military personnel who have the responsibility to ensure the safety and security of the citizens and their properties have miserably failed in discharge of their duties. In fact, some members of the security forces are alleged to have joined hands with the intruders in attacks against Christians.

The World Council of Churches has, on several occasions in the past, brought to the attention of the Indonesian Government the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Malukus. Despite assurances of the Government of Indonesia that measures were being taken to restore law and order, the situation has failed to improve. The Council has just received reports that Waai and Batugandung in Ambon have been subjected to mortar attacks by the intruders supported and backed by the personnel of the Indonesian military. In Batugandung seven people have lost their lives. There are reliable reports of an imminent attack on Tobelo in the coming days.

It is now two weeks since the Indonesian Government declared a state of Civil Emergency, an action of extreme measure, to control the violence in the Malukus, but it
continues unabated resulting in grave and serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity. The recent attacks of the intruders indicate a design to annihilate Christians or force them out of the Malukus. To save the Christian community from this ordeal church leaders in the region have been constrained to call on their followers to evacuate their homes and move to secure areas.

Given the gravity of the situation, the World Council of Churches appeals to you to undertake an immediate visit to Indonesia and urge the Government to stop the human rights violations and atrocities being committed in the Malukus by intruders backed and supported by the Indonesian army. The Indonesian Government should be asked to take steps to effectively stop the entry of intruders into the Malukus region. The Government should also immediately bring to trial those guilty of committing human rights violations.

Sincerely,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Appeal for the restoration of law and order in the Malukus

Your Excellency,

Earlier this year, in a letter addressed on 11th January to the President of Indonesia, Dr Abdurrahman Wahid, the World Council of Churches expressed its concern at the increased incidence of communal violence in the Malukus region.

The Council emphasized the need for the government of Indonesia to contain violence and take steps to restore inter-communal harmony. In February you were kind enough to receive me and my colleague, Mr Clement John, to discuss the planned visit to Indonesia of the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr Konrad Raiser. At the time we discussed the Council’s concerns about the attacks on Christian minorities and the insecurity they had created.

In March Dr Raiser visited Indonesia in connection with the inauguration of the Assembly of the Communion of Churches of Indonesia (PGI). During that visit Dr. Raiser met and discussed the situation in Indonesia with President Abdurrahman Wahid. Particular reference was made to the inter-communal violence in Ambon and Halmahera. President Wahid explained the complexities of the situation in the Malukus and assured Dr Raiser that the government was taking all possible steps to restore law and order and to bring an end to the violence in the region. He requested understanding and patience to allow his government to address this complex problem.

It is now three months since these assurances were given but the situation has not improved. On the contrary it has become worse. The violence in the region continues unabated with no signs of respite, despite the fact that the government has deployed additional forces. In recent days we have received reports of the bombing of Churches in North Sumatra, a region which has hitherto remained peaceful and with good inter-communal relations. Church leaders in the region have called on their followers to exercise restraint and not to be provoked into retaliation. In Central Sulawesi, another region known for inter-communal harmony, communal tensions and violence have increased in recent days.
The World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by these developments, and particularly those in the Malukus region where in recent days over a hundred people have been killed, and churches and houses belonging to members of the Christian community burned. Late last week, the day after we received warnings of imminent danger, the Indonesian Christian University and the Roman Catholic hospital in Ambon were burned. This has come as a shock not only to the people of Indonesia but also to people all over the world.

The continuing influx of intruders in the Malukus region from Java and other parts of the country troubles us deeply. Outsiders entering the region are armed and are held largely responsible by citizens in the region for the present state of lawlessness. The heavy deployment of security forces by the government has failed to deter the miscreants from carrying out their nefarious activities. Needless to say, this state of affairs tarnishes the good name of the Indonesian government both at home and abroad. Christian minorities that have been the target of these attacks are increasingly vulnerable and insecure. There is a growing feeling that the government has not taken adequate steps to enforce law and order and to provide for the safety and well-being of its people.

The World Council of Churches has repeatedly reiterated that it is concerned about the impact of continuing violence and loss of lives of Muslims and Christians alike. We are particularly dismayed that local efforts on the part of both communities to restore community harmony and peace are being destroyed by armed zealots from outside.

We therefore ask that you convey our sentiments to President Wahid, with the request that his Government take the strongest possible measures to restore law and order in the Malukus region, ensure the impartiality of security forces deployed there and in other affected regions, and apprehend and bring to justice those suspected of responsibility for killings and destruction.

With the assurance of our deepest respect, and looking forward to an early response, I am

Respectfully yours,

Dwain C. Epps
Director
Commission of the Churches on
International Affairs

Peace in Sierra Leone
Statement of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone Freetown, 10th May 2000

The deteriorating security situation and breach of the Lomé peace agreement resulting in the current spate of hostilities and renewed suffering of the people is of worrying concern to the inter-religious council of Sierra Leone.

The peoples of Sierra Leone want peace! Their long suffering has been borne with great courage, and this has only strengthened their commitment to reconciliation and the establishment of a society based upon respect for truth and justice.

The peoples of Sierra Leone want all the parties to the peace process to bear their full responsibilities for ending hostilities and building the peace. Genuine peace must benefit all. The people want the responsible, disciplined, and effective assistance of the UN mandated mission during this period of transition. And, in the final analysis, they want an honest process designed to ensure an effective representative government committed to the common good and the constructive engagement of all parties to the conflict.
Acts of commission or omission that threaten peace with justice are an attack on the peoples of Sierra Leone and a violation of their sovereign will. This has gone on for far too long and it must stop now! We acknowledge civil society for its great awareness and constructive approach in expressing the wish of the citizenry.

As leaders of the religious communities in Sierra Leone, we, the members of Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), take as our sole standpoint a shared moral commitment to peace with justice, which is deeply held and widely shared by our religious communities. The IRCSL hereby calls upon all concerned to immediately desist from any acts that violate the terms of the Lomé peace agreement or retard its progress. IRCSL also calls upon those with special designated responsibilities for peace-building to exercise their commitments with responsibility and vigour.

Specifically, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone calls upon:

4. Cpl Foday Sabanah Sankoh and his RUF Rebel Forces involved in recent hostilities to immediately and unconditionally release all captured UN personnel and other abductees, desist from all acts of violence, and re-enter in full faith into the Disarmament and Demobilization Programme. The IRCSL further calls for effective leadership within the rebel movement designed to ensure full compliance with the peace process among all its members.

5. The Government of Sierra Leone and President Kabbah to exercise their due and legitimate responsibility of protecting and serving all the citizens of Sierra Leone in their desire for peace, right to protection, and demand for effective governance.

6. The United Nations to implement with vigour and strength its full mandate to protect peace in Sierra Leone, and

7. The International Community to fulfill its commitments to the government of Sierra Leone, the United Nations and relevant non-governmental organizations to enable them effectively to fulfill their respective mandates vis-à-vis the Lomé peace agreement.

As a religious body, the IRCSL offers its good offices to all concerned to re-engage the entire country in the process of comprehensive peace-building and reconciliation.

**Minute on Indonesia**

*Adopted by the Executive Committee, Geneva, 29 February – 3 March 2000.*

In light of the report it has received on the situation in Indonesia, and in particular on the terrible suffering inflicted on Christians and Muslims alike as a result of the inter-communal strife in recent months, the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches:

- **extended** to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), and especially to the churches and Christians in the Malukus its deep compassion with them in this terrible, trying time, and mourns with them the deaths of so many of their fellow Christians;
- **shared** with the Muslim community of Indonesia its sorrow at the suffering it has undergone, including the loss of many lives;
- **recalled** that Indonesia has provided in the past a model of tolerance which respects the cultural diversity and religious pluralism of its people;
- **acknowledged** the efforts of the present government of Indonesia to introduce much needed political reforms; to revitalize the economy in a way which would share out the wealth of the nation equitably among its citizens, irrespective of race, culture or religion; to promote full respect for human rights and to bring offenders to justice; and to re-establish law and order through security forces under strict civilian control;
- **called** upon Muslim and Christian leaders in Indonesia to redouble their efforts to mediate in this dispute and to restore harmonious inter-communal relations;
called upon the member churches of the World Council of Churches to pray for the people of Indonesia and to offer generous assistance to the victims of violence and for the rebuilding of their communities and places of worship.

Appeal for continued dialogue on church-state legislation
Letter to President Emile Constantinescu, 4 February 2000.

Your Excellency,

As a worldwide fellowship of churches, the World Council of Churches has always been concerned with issues of church-state relations. In this regard, it has come to our attention that the government of Romania is continuing its consideration of legislation on religions. Some of our member churches in Romania have expressed to us their concerns about this legislation, particularly the requirements for registration of religious communities.

We strongly encourage further dialogue and negotiation involving the representatives of churches and religious communities themselves before the legislation is finalized.

As you are aware, we have signaled this concern previously to your Government. In a spirit of constructive dialogue I sent our Coordinator for International Relations, the Rev. Dwain Epps, to Romania to share our experiences. In his extensive conversations with Dr Gheorghe F. Anghelescu on the broader issues of church-state relations in 1998, Rev. Epps offered our continuing support in the resolution of some of these issues.

It is in this same spirit that I reiterate our sincere hope that you and your Government will respond positively to this new request.

Respectfully yours,

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Appeal to Indonesian Government to end impunity
Letter sent to H.E. President Abdurrahman Wahid, 12 January 2000.

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has closely monitored the developments in Indonesia over the past year. Last January, an international ecumenical delegation sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia made a pastoral visit to Indonesia. The delegation in its meeting with former President B. J. Habibie and his senior cabinet colleagues expressed concern, amongst others, at the communal violence and destruction taking place in the port city of Ambon. The delegation was assured by the former President that perpetrators responsible for acts of violence and for fostering religious hostilities would be brought to trial before courts of law.

In the aftermath of the violence between Muslims and Christians, the churches and the National Council in Indonesia have unfailingly cooperated with the authorities in their efforts to restore peace and harmony in the Malukus region. It is one year since the trouble began, yet there is no sign of the situation being brought under control. Several attempts were made to restore peace and to defuse tension; the most recent one was the signing of the Declaration to
End the Conflict by the leaders of the two communities. This was followed by Your Excellency's own visit to the region in mid-December 1999. All these efforts seem to have gone in vain as the spate of killings and destruction continues unabated.

The burning of the Silo Church in Ambon a day after Christmas came as a rude shock not only to the Christians in Indonesia but also to the people at large. In recent days the situation in the Moluccas has rapidly deteriorated despite heavy deployment of the additional units of the Indonesian security forces. It is the primary task of the security forces to maintain law and order and to protect the lives and property of the people; in this however they have not succeeded. In fact the perceived partisan approach of the personnel of the security forces has further aggravated an already difficult situation. The inability of the security forces to restore law and order and to bring the killings to an end is a sad reflection on the Indonesian Government.

We are convinced that Your Excellency personally and the leaders of your Government sincerely seek a solution to this matter which will reduce the violence, stop the killings and contribute to communal harmony and the wellbeing of the people. Nevertheless, as your National Human Rights Commission has documented, some leaders of the security forces are either responsible for or have directly committed grave abuses of human rights in the past, adversely affecting the credibility of these forces. Part of the process of containing violence and restoring harmony in the Moluccas must certainly be to place such officials under charges and to try them for crimes they are alleged to have committed. To allow impunity for official actors to continue will tarnish the image of the Indonesian Government in the eyes of the international community. This will postpone the restoration of the process to encourage interfaith dialogue between the Islamic and Christian communities which is badly needed to restore normalcy and peace in the region.

We are deeply concerned at the loss of lives of both Muslims and Christians and express our profound sympathy for all who have suffered as a result of the continuing violence in the region. We want to assure the Indonesian people that the ecumenical community upholds them in prayer and is ready to render all possible assistance and to work with them for reconciliation with a view to restoring peace and harmony in the Moluccas region.

Respectfully,
Georges Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

**Commission and Subcommission on Human Rights**

2000: “Sharing the land, the truth and the peace,” oral intervention at the Fifth Special Session of the Commission devoted to the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Geneva, 17 October.

Written submissions to the Commission on religious intolerance; discrimination against Dalits in India; and on human rights violations in Indonesia.

Oral intervention at the Commission on mass exoduses and displaced persons.

**Condemnation of the destruction of churches**
Joint letter to H.H. Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 3 December 1999.

The continuing tragedy facing the communities in Kosovo and Metohija remains a cause of serious preoccupation for the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. In your recent letter, Your Holiness highlights a particularly disturbing aspect of the current situation.

The systematic violation of churches and holy places of the Serbian Orthodox Church is a painful manifestation of the division and hatreds which dominate this region even today. The desecration of these often ancient churches represents a loss not only for the Christian community, but for the cultural and spiritual heritage of the world, and is vigorously denounced by WCC and CEC.

Places of worship are often both the visible face and the living memory of the community. The recent history of former Yugoslavia, and most recently in Kosovo and Metohija, has been marked by a frenzy of destruction of communities and of cultures, including both Christian churches and Muslim mosques. The WCC and CEC, and the families of churches which they represent, remember with sadness all those who have fallen victims to the violence and evil in this region, and those who have been left homeless and orphaned as a result. The continuous persecution of the minority Serb, Roma and other communities in the region must come to an end if peace and security are to be established.

We appeal to the interim civilian and military structures responsible for public order in Kosovo and Metohija to ensure that every possible measure is taken to ensure the safety and tranquillity of all religious and civilian communities and monuments, and in particular the churches and monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church which are specifically targeted at this time. The cause of human rights which motivated the international intervention in this region will be weakened indeed if those which now have authority are unable to ensure the survival of minority communities and the protection of their religious and material patrimony.

The revival of hope in this region can only be founded on a renewal of stable human communities. As we approach the Feast of the Nativity of Christ our Lord, the 'Prince of Peace', we pray that healing and reconciliation can be brought to all peoples in this region, and that societies may once again be built on mutual tolerance and trust. May the churches and religious communities do all that is possible to contribute to the softening of hearts and opening of minds at this time.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Keith Clements
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches

Expression of profound concern about the continuing intervention in Chechnya by Russian armed forces.
Joint letter to His Holiness Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, 15 November 1999.

Your Holiness,
We greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 'for He Himself is our peace' (Eph. 2:14).
On behalf of the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches we express our profound concern at the continued escalation of the conflict in Chechnya and the human tragedy in the North Caucasus region, and we acknowledge with gratitude the recent statement of Your Holiness on this very matter.

The CEC and WCC recognize the context of lawlessness and terrorism which has preceded the current armed intervention by the Russian armed forces. We remember the many victims of terrorist acts, kidnapping and executions in Chechnya, including a number of Christian pastors and workers. However, we raise our voices that even legitimate political or military objectives cannot justify the innocent victims and suffering of peoples in the region.

We deplore the disproportionate and irresponsible use of force employed by the Russian military forces, which is contributing to a humanitarian crisis of the utmost seriousness. We appeal to the Russian and Chechen political authorities, and to the combatants on all sides, to manifest mercy to all people, especially the civilian population, the prisoners and the wounded.

The CEC and WCC appeal to Your Holiness and to the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church to do everything in your authority to enable unimpeded and secure international humanitarian assistance to be brought to those uprooted by this conflict, and to promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The ecumenical organizations will continue to work closely with the Russian Orthodox Church and with other partners to provide relief to those most in need, through its emergency office ACT - Action by Churches Together.

We share with the Russian Orthodox Church the rejection of any attempts to manipulate religion for political ends, which Your Holiness has drawn attention to in previous statements. We oppose any radicalisation on religious grounds, and we encourage all efforts by Islamic and Christian leaders which actively promote peace, tolerance and a real solution to the conflict.

The CEC and WCC pray with the Russian Orthodox Church and other churches, and with all people of good will, that a political solution, which expresses the genuine will of the Chechen people, may be found, and which will lead to the restoration of the rule of law, a lasting and just peace for all the peoples of this region.

Konrad Raiser Keith Clements
General Secretary General Secretary
World Council of Churches Conference of European Churches

The crisis is not over! Europe, the Kosovo Crisis and the Churches

Report of the consultation convened by CEC in cooperation with the WCC and the Serbian Orthodox Church, Oslo, 14-16 November 1999.

Church leaders and representatives from the Balkan region and other parts of Europe and North America met in Oslo, Norway, from 14 to 16 November 1999 to assess the Kosovo crisis and its impact on the Balkan region and the rest of Europe.

The Conference was organised by the Conference of European Churches in cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the World Council of Churches and the informal Vienna group of church leaders. We express our thanks and gratitude to the Church of Norway and the Norwegian government for hosting and generously supporting the conference.
We offer the following conclusions to the churches in Europe and North America and through the churches to governments and a wider public. Meeting just prior to the OSCE Summit, which is meant to adopt a European Security Charter, we also address ourselves to the heads of state and government gathered in Istanbul on 18 and 19 November.

1. The Kosovo crisis is not over. It is a European tragedy and also has consequences for global, international relations. Large parts of Kosovo and also other parts of Yugoslavia have been devastated. Hundreds of thousands of people have become refugees or internally displaced people. Neighbouring countries have had to share their scarce resources with an overwhelming number of refugees.

Some refugees return, finding their houses bombed, burnt or looted. Others are fleeing just now or do not see any possibilities for return.

National and international political and religious leaders support the idea of a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious Kosovo. The reality is that Kosovo day by day is becoming more and more mono-ethnic. We are far from lasting peace and reconciliation among the different communities.

The crisis has revealed a complex situation which requires careful analysis and a multifaceted approach before stable solutions can be found.

2. The crisis in Kosovo has again reminded us about the need to understand Europe as one organic entity. We have seen that the recent crisis and other recent conflicts have exploited the old differences in Europe between the part which adheres to the Eastern Christian legacy and the part which emerges from the Latin-Roman legacy - the dividing line from the year 1054. In this situation, it is important to underline that the Orthodox and Western Christian traditions are as two lungs in one European organism. Any attempt to deny the contribution of either of these traditions for European identity is a denial of our common heritage. There is no place for paternalism either between churches or between church agencies. All churches must be respected for the insights they have in their own societies and for the ability they have for contributing to the welfare and wellbeing of the peoples they serve.

We recommend that CEC organise a study of theological and historical reasons for present divisions in Europe and encourage the churches in Western and Eastern Europe to engage in renewed efforts to understand one another better and come closer to one another.

3. This crisis has again shown us how easily we accept stereotypical images of each other, and how easy it is for mass-media to contribute to the demonisation of individuals or groups of people. There is a need to counter this with balanced information and by seeking human and ecumenical fellowship with each other.

We recommend: The churches need to devise mechanisms whereby they together can share and evaluate information about potential conflicts with religious and ethnic components and also act to help prevent the escalation of conflicts.

4. Religion is an element in many conflicts, and it is also being exploited by many politicians. In the light of recent crises, there is an urgent need for dialogue among churches, and more especially for dialogue between churches and Muslim communities. There needs to be contact and cooperation between religious leaders, but first and foremost these dialogues have to take place primarily at the local level. In this way religious communities can play a role in conflict prevention and mediation. The future of Europe is also dependent upon its ability to let people and peoples with different religious convictions live side by side - all with equal rights and duties.

We recommend: The participating states of OSCE should also recognise the important role religious communities can play in conflict prevention and mediation.

5. The NATO bombing did not bring an end to human suffering in the area. It contributed to the humanitarian disaster and had devastating effects on the environment. One group of victims was replaced by another. The results of the military intervention show that this kind of action is
not what is required to solve complex conflicts such as this one. As churches, we are committed
to peace and reconciliation. If more resources and energy had been used as part of a long-term
strategy in conflict prevention, military action could have been avoided. Such a strategy is less
costly, saves human lives and helps build a culture of peace and friendly coexistence.
We recommend: As a contribution to the stability of the area, CEC should initiate the
establishment of a centre for the support and coordination of peace and reconciliation work of
religious communities across conflict lines in the Balkan region.

6. We are watching with great concern the developments in the Northern Caucasus, where
civilians are becoming victims of military intervention. While fully understanding the necessity to
overcome terrorism, we urge all parties involved in the conflict to ensure that the civilian
population is not victimized and that the OSCE code of conduct of 1994 is fully respected, and
to do everything possible to bring the conflict to a peaceful solution.

7. There is an urgent need to start the reconstruction of Yugoslavia. Nobody is served by a
Yugoslavia in the midst of Europe which is physically devastated and isolated. It is a joint
European and North American responsibility to secure funds and other resources for this effort.
We do not believe that the present sanctions regime serves the reintegration of Yugoslavia into
Europe. In fact the victims of the sanctions are primarily innocent people, including children and
elderly persons.
We recommend that the Security Council of the UN review the effects of the present sanctions
against Yugoslavia.
We recommend: There is a need for a cooperative mechanism to facilitate interchurch aid,
information sharing and a continuous discussion of current problems in Yugoslavia with political
leaders and other important sectors of the society. We invite ecumenical organisations and
churches in the region to consider how this might best be given effect.
We recommend: The Churches should devise proposals and projects for immediate
reconstruction. One such project could be an ecumenical effort to rebuild a bridge across the
Danube, Europe’s river of life. This bridge would be a symbol of the bridges we need to build
between different parts and religious traditions of Europe.

8. The immediate need in the Balkan area is to help people through the winter with proper
housing, food and energy supply. Churches and humanitarian organisations have already raised
and distributed sizable funds to aid afflicted people and regions. This must be continued. Care
should be taken to secure good cooperation with local church leaders as the most effective way
of aiding people.

9. Young people are an integral part of the present reality in the Balkan region. It is important to
see that they can be a yeast of peace and reconciliation. It is crucial to involve young people in
dealing with the complex implications of the Kosovo crisis. Support offered to youth networks
and organisations is necessary in order to create a secure and non-violent society in the future.

10. As churches, we are painfully aware of the inadequacy of our own response to the tragedy in
Kosovo. We have learned once more that peace-building is costly, in terms of spiritual stamina,
political courage and physical resources. But peace making is our calling and we can fulfill it in
many ways. Strengthening links between churches in different countries will give us early
warning of situations which can lead to conflict. When we support each other and our
communities, we can speak with credibility to political decision-makers. By doing this we also
fulfill our biblical calling: *Carry one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of
Christ.* (Gal.6,2)

**Expression of condolences to victims of the bombings in Moscow**

*Letter to H.H. Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, 15 September 1999.*
Your esteemed Holiness,

We have received with shock and great dismay news of the bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow in which scores of innocent victims have been killed. On behalf of the World Council, I wish to convey through Your Holiness our most profound sympathy and condolences to the families and loved ones of all those whose lives have been taken through these acts of terrorism. Christians in our member churches around the world share a deep sense of revulsion, and hold you, the families, and the Russian nation in their prayers in these difficult and frightening times.

It is one of the characteristics of our time that acts of isolated extremists are used by some to create suspicion, intolerance and even hatred against the religious groups of which they are assumed to be a part. Few churches have been as diligent as the Russian Orthodox Church in building relationships of mutual respect between believers of different faiths in and beyond your own society. You yourself have sustained this long tradition of spiritual leadership, and have spoken out clearly against all efforts to divide Russian society along religious or other lines, or to demonize any group because of the faith they hold. We are sure that you will not fail now, in this time of dramatic need, to renew your call for tolerance and national unity in the face of such adversity.

I assure you of our readiness to assist you in any way you may find helpful in your ministry to the victims and their families, and in the witness you give to your people.

With deep respect,
Yorgo Lemopoulos
Acting General Secretary

Minute on Jerusalem
Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August – 3 September 1999.

The Central Committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, 26 August - 3 September 1999, has received with gratitude the (attached) letter signed and sealed by the Patriarchs and Heads of the Christian Communities in Jerusalem, addressed to the General Secretary on August 12, 1999. This letter expresses the appreciation of the Church of Jerusalem for the WCC Statement on the Status of Jerusalem, adopted at the Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1998, recognizing that it will help strengthen the Christian witness in the Holy Land and promote the achievement of an agreement on the status of Jerusalem which affirms the principle that it should be shared and include two peoples and three religions.

The Central Committee requests the General Secretary to respond to the Patriarchs and Heads of Christian Communities, reaffirming the WCC’s conviction that Jerusalem is central to the faith of Christians and Christians’ responsibility to pray and work for the peace of Jerusalem.

Minute on Indonesia
Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August - 3 September 1999.

The WCC, in pursuance of the minute adopted by the Eighth Assembly at Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1998, and in cooperation with the Christian Conference of Asia, sent an ecumenical delegation to Indonesia in late January 1999. This was followed up with a staff visit to East Timor in late June and early July 1999 related to the planned United Nations supervised referendum. Since the fall of Suharto in May 1998, the Council has monitored
developments in the country and has kept close contact with the churches, particularly those in East Timor and Irian Jaya.

The WCC sent a message to the government of Indonesia expressing concern about the growing incidence of communal violence and attacks on places of worship in Ambon and other parts of Indonesia, and about continuing human rights violations by the security forces, particularly in East Timor and Aceh, where women and children have suffered most. The WCC and many of its member churches and partner agencies have provided support to the Indonesian churches' efforts to assist the people and provide witness in these difficult circumstances.

The Central Committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, 26 August - 3 September 1999, expresses particular concern now about the dangers confronting East Timor in the post referendum period, as a consequence of the division of the community between the pro-autonomy factions, some of whom have been armed by the Indonesian military, and pro-independence sectors. In light of the present climate of hostility and conflict, the Central Committee requests the General Secretary to address an appeal to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, urging him to consider an alteration and a further extension of the mandate of the UN presence in East Timor beyond the referendum period until peace and security there is restored.

The continuing communal violence in Ambon and the increase in repressive measures by the security forces in Aceh and Irian Jaya remains a matter of grave concern for the WCC. The Central Committee assures the churches in Indonesia of the WCC's ongoing support for them as they struggle through this difficult period.

The Central Committee calls upon WCC member churches to:

- *pray* for the churches and people of Indonesia;
- continue to monitor developments and exchange information; and
- *offer support and encouragement* to the churches of Indonesia as they work for peace and reconciliation, for human rights and for justice for all.

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**Minute on Peace and Reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea**

*Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 26 August - 3 September 1999.*

The World Council of Churches and many of its member churches and related agencies around the world have been deeply concerned about the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which has been raging with ever greater intensity since May 1998. We have grieved at the terrible, mounting toll of human life this war is again inflicting on peoples who have suffered so terribly and for so long from war, repression and abject poverty. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, the General Secretary wrote to the leaders of the two countries, imploring them to stop the fighting and to resolve the border issue, which was the immediate source of contention, by peaceful means.

Earlier this year an ecumenical delegation led by the WCC, including a representative of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Fellowship of Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), visited both Ethiopia and Eritrea, to express the concerns of the churches around the world and to offer whatever assistance the WCC and the wider ecumenical movement may be able to render. The delegations met with government...
leaders, and especially with Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Muslim leaders, who on both sides have formed religious committees to promote a peaceful solution.

These two religious committees will be meeting for a third time soon at the invitation of Norwegian Church Aid. Fervently hoping that the conversations they resume now may lead to agreement on joint steps to be taken for peace, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, 26 August - 3 September 1999, conveys to the religious leaders on both sides our encouragement and the assurance of our prayers.

We know from our own experience how difficult is the road to peace, but we know that God Almighty expects all those who believe in Him to travel that road. We know how demanding is the way to justice, but God is a God of Justice. We know how long is the way to reconciliation, but God wills that we live together as sisters and brothers who love and care for one another. Be assured that we stand ready to accompany and support you when you are ready and able to travel together for the sake of God and all God’s people. May God inspire your deliberations, unite your spirits, and equip you to bring a word of hope, a word of peace to the leaders of your countries and to all those who look to you for spiritual guidance.

Ecumenical delegation visit to Kosovo
Findings of the delegation sent by the WCC and CEC, 29 June – 2 July 1999.

Following the visits of delegations from organisations based at the ecumenical centre in Geneva to Novi Sad and Belgrade 16-18 April, and Macedonia and Albania 18-25 May, during the time of the NATO bombing, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) decided to send a delegation to Kosovo as soon as possible after the war. This visit took place 29 June to 2 July 1999.

The aims and objectives of the visit were:
• to strengthen first-hand contacts with the religious communities, in particular with the Serbian Orthodox Church, in Kosovo
• to gather information about the present situation, especially with regard to security and the implementation of human rights for all peoples in the region
• to assess the future role of churches and ecumenical bodies in establishing a civil society to discuss humanitarian aid
• to suggest mid-and long-term ecumenical action. …

Findings and Conclusions
Humanitarian Aid. Wherever the ecumenical delegation went, the signs of war were highly visible. We met convoys of Albanian refugees returning home.

According to UNHCR officials, 500,600 had returned so far and these were the ones who had some resources and a home to return to. In fear of revenge, Serbs are forced to leave the country, to live in ghettos or to seek refuge in monasteries under the protection of KFOR troops. It is feared that large parts of Kosovo are covered with land mines and unexploded devices that may take years or even decades to trace and remove. Accidents and new victims are reported daily, but the full scale of the problem is not yet clear. In all parts of the region we saw destroyed and burnt houses, including churches and mosques; the further north, the higher the degree of devastation. People of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds are suffering and lack food and medical supplies. According to the Muslim leader, Mr Naim Ternava, humanitarian aid for the region around Drenica is a high priority. Bishop Artemije referred to those Serbs that live in fortresses and are unable to move freely.
Humanitarian aid needs to continue and even be increased, especially in the light of the forthcoming winter, which starts in some parts of Kosovo as early as October. A sustained commitment to Kosovo by all aid organisations should be encouraged. ACT should continue to follow its principle of helping all those in need beyond religious or ethnic border-lines. Coordination among the many relief organisations present in Kosovo should be strengthened.

The ecumenical organisations should support the establishment of a UN Kosovo Mine Action Centre as well as the NGO mine clearance efforts Towards a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kosovo. All of our contacts expressed their vision for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kosovo. The present situation, however, forces the ethnic Serbian population as well as the Gypsies/Roma to leave Kosovo. Though the KFOR troops do their utmost to bring about stability and security, they are unable to protect every civilian of the minority population. Serbs have either left (Prizren), live in fortresses, seek refuge in monasteries or are separated from the ethnic Albanian majority by the KFOR troops (Mitrovica). We have seen little evidence that Kosovo can remain multi-ethnic under the present circumstances.

We recommend that the KFOR and UN civil administration mandates which guarantee the security of ethnic minorities and all citizens be made explicit and that personnel and resources be provided to complete the task. Advocacy for the rights of Serbs and other ethnic minorities as well as maintaining a multi-ethnic and diverse Kosovo is critical. The number of KFOR troops originally planned (50,000) should be fully deployed in Kosovo and the civilian police force must immediately be oriented, trained and put to work in communities across Kosovo.

We urge the demobilisation of small arms. All of our contacts based their hopes on a strong KFOR presence. The presence of international protection forces, however, cannot guarantee the peaceful coexistence of the different parts of the population.

Therefore we strongly recommend the establishment of a civil administration and the rebuilding of a civil society as soon as possible. The fact that the KFOR troops and the UN moved in too slowly allowed the UCK to take over the civil administration in many parts of Kosovo. We regard it as indispensable that the religious communities be invited and heard at the EU meeting on reconstruction scheduled for 31 July.

Even these efforts will not prove to be sufficient in the long-run to guarantee the peaceful co-existence of ethnic Albanians, Serbs and Gypsies in Kosovo.

Therefore the ecumenical delegation tested with all contacts the possibilities for mediation and civil conflict transformation. The response was, however, that it would be much too early to think about initiatives to this effect. Nevertheless we want to encourage those organisations which have experience in this field to jointly explore possibilities in the mid-term future. It may be that some local communities can be identified, which are already working towards reconciliation, or that representatives from different communities can be invited for training courses in civil conflict management in the near future. It would be advisable for mediation efforts to link with intergovernmental bodies, such as the OSCE or SIMIC. In addition, we recommend that a collection of resource materials on peace, tolerance and reconciliation etc. should be collected in Serbo-Croatian and Albanian in order to duplicate and spread it in Kosovo as widely as possible. The Patriarch himself spoke about the need for public repentance and forgiveness. The Patriarch also reacted positively towards the idea of a pastoral meeting of the ecumenical community and the Serbian Orthodox Church. We therefore recommend that plans for a pastoral meeting be developed and an invitation be issued.
We heard from all religious communities about their commitment to a multi-ethnic Kosovo which respects human rights, justice and the rule of law. We therefore call on all nations to share intelligence data gathered during the conflict that might lead to indictments by the ICTY. We urge nations to provide additional professional staff (e.g. forensicists, criminal investigators) to support the efforts of the ICTY.

Reacting to a quickly changing reality. The visit of this delegation was too short to prepare a full assessment of the situation in Kosovo. Moreover, the situation is changing by the day, if not by the hour. At the same time the media seem to be losing interest. We saw several media representatives leaving Kosovo. We recommend that the ecumenical organisations strengthen their efforts to keep in close contact with the Serbian Orthodox Church and all visited contact persons.

Additional contacts within the religious communities as well with other NGOs and the intergovernmental organisations will have to be made. The director of the Muslim Academy explicitly invited us to continue the dialogue and to also meet with all leaders of the Muslim community. We also suggest that another small delegation be sent to the region in August in order to re-assess the situation, to express solidarity with the peoples in Kosovo and to recommend appropriate actions to be initiated by the meetings of the Central Committees of WCC and CEC in September.

Members of the delegation
• Ms Penny Panayiota Deligiannis (Diaconia Agapes, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania)
• Ms Linda J. Hartke (Church World Service and Witness, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA)
• Mr Saso Klekovski (Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation)
• Mr Artan Kosti (Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania)
• Ms Miriam Lutz (Action by Churches Together)
• Rev. Rüdiger Noll (Conference of European Churches)
• Mr Huibert van Beek (World Council of Churches)
• OKR Klaus Wilkens (Evangelical Church in Germany)
• Mr Vladimir Shmaly (Russian Orthodox Church) could not join the team due to technical problems.

Pastoral letter to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church

Your Holiness,

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the statement of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church on 15th June, which includes a call for the resignation of the president and the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In taking this clear and courageous position the voice of the Church has been heard, not only in your country, but also by the international community and in the churches in Europe and beyond. Those of us in the WCC and CEC, and in the churches who have been in close relationship with you over the past years,
knew that the Serbian Orthodox Church had been critical of the regime of Mr Milosevic for a long time. The statement has helped many better to understand the position of the Church.

We know that you have been concerned with the plight of the Kosovar Albanians. As more facts are being revealed about the atrocities of which they have been victims, we are aware of the crucial role the Church will be called to fulfill in assisting the Serbian nation and the faithful to come to terms with what has happened under the responsibility of the federal president and government.

We are moved and encouraged by the decision of your Holiness to move your patriarchal residence temporarily to the historic site of Pec. This will certainly be an encouragement for many members of the Serbian community in Kosovo, persuading them to stay. We are concerned about the lack of security for the Serbian community and support your call to the authorities of KFOR to provide swift and effective protection for everybody. We were particularly sad to learn about attacks directed at some of the monasteries, obliging Bishop Artemij and some of the monks to leave Prizren.

It is our sincere hope that with time, the Serbian people and the Kosovar Albanians will again be able to live together in peace. Reconciliation may take many years, but it must be the long-term objective of the churches and the international community. In this spirit, Your Holiness and the Church have consistently affirmed the right of all the refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes, and called on the Serbian people in Kosovo not to leave theirs. As WCC and CEC, we would like to assure you of our prayers and our willingness to assist the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the other churches, in the present difficult situation as well as in the long term.

With regard to humanitarian relief to all in need, Action by Churches Together (ACT), which is acting on behalf of the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation, is already in Kosovo. In the coming days and weeks ACT will establish cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In order to discuss with Your Holiness, and with the bishops and clergy, other ways in which our organisations can be of assistance, and to gain a better insight into the situation, we are planning to send a WCC/CEC delegation to Kosovo next week, from 29th June to 1st July. We hope that Your Holiness will bless this initiative and will receive the delegation in Peć.

Yours ever in Christ,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
World Council of Churches
Keith Clements
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches

Ecumenical statement on the peace agreement for Kosovo
Issued jointly by the WCC, CEC, LWF and WARC, Geneva, 11 June 1999.

Churches, Christians and people of other faiths around the world have worked and prayed for an end to the terror of ethnic cleansing, and to the destruction inflicted on Kosovo and Serbia by eleven weeks of NATO bombing. They have contributed aid and stood in solidarity
with the hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians, Serbs and others who have been forced to flee Kosovo and other parts of Yugoslavia. We thank God that the parties have finally reached an agreement to bring an end to the conflict, and for the efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and all others who have worked so tirelessly to achieve this result.

We welcome especially the agreement of the parties to return to the framework of the Charter of the United Nations in pursuit of a lasting settlement of this dispute, believing that it is only in this context that peace and harmonious relations among the peoples of Yugoslavia and in the wider Balkans region can be appropriately and effectively pursued. We welcome and affirm the reiteration by the Security Council that a lasting solution must be sought which respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. We also strongly support the affirmation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that any durable solution to this crisis must be built on the solid foundation of respect for human rights.

Reconstruction in Kosovo is a central task and a prerequisite for the return of refugees, but the repair of damage done in Serbia and the removal of punitive economic constraints are also essential to the establishment of peace, to alleviating the suffering of the people, and to reconciliation in the region. The delegation sent two weeks ago to Albania and Macedonia by the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches underscored the fact that the impact of the war extends far beyond Yugoslavia’s borders. The international community must give priority to rebuilding infrastructure, homes and economies throughout Yugoslavia, and take a comprehensive, regional approach to reconstruction and reconciliation in order to create conditions for economic and political stability, and peace throughout South-East Europe.

All those who have been internally displaced or expelled from Kosovo must be allowed to return to their homes in safety. At the same time, the international principles with respect to the protection of refugees hold that no one should be forced to return against their will so long as there is a well-founded fear of persecution or violation of their human rights. The principle of reuniting separated families must also be fully respected both in Kosovo and in the diaspora. As refugees return, the local ethnic Serb communities in Kosovo must be protected from reprisals and violations of their human rights.

The Security Council has clearly indicated that the task of establishing and building the peace on the ground and of restoring an effective civilian administration has both military and civilian components. These roles should not be confused. Those who will assume military responsibilities for security must exercise the greatest possible restraint with respect to the use of armed force. Responsibility for the reestablishment of civil administration and an effective civilian police force should be the exclusive responsibility of the civilian component in which the OSCE should have a leading role. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should be given clear responsibility and support for monitoring during the implementation phase of the peace accord and for the establishment of effective local and national human rights mechanisms.

The churches will have a key role to play in the enormous task of reconstruction, refugee repatriation and reconciliation which must begin immediately. We call upon the churches, especially those of Europe and North America, to respond actively and generously to this challenge, in Kosovo and the other Yugoslav Republics, in Albania and Macedonia, and among refugees who have sought asylum in their own countries.
The agreement reached will, we pray, stop the war; but a just and lasting peace will require a long-term, intensive commitment by the international community, the national government, and the churches to the promotion of reconciliation.

May God bless and guide the way to such a peace for all those who have suffered so much before and during this war.

Konrad Raiser  Keith Clements
General Secretary  General Secretary
World Council of Churches  Conference of European Churches
Ishmael Noko  Milan
General Secretary  General Secretary
Lutheran World Federation  World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Ecumenical delegation visit to the FYR Macedonia and Albania
Conclusions from the report of the joint delegation sent by the WCC, CEC and the LWF, 18-25 May 1999.

In April 1999, the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches and the Lutheran World Federation sent a delegation to Yugoslavia to meet with the churches to discuss the causes and the consequences of the present conflict in the Balkans. As part of their continuing response to the war, WCC and CEC in cooperation with LWF, organized a second delegation to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania from 18-25 May. This delegation was asked:

• to express solidarity with the churches and related organizations that are ministering to the needs of the Kosovar Albanian refugees;
• to learn about the actual situation facing refugees in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, including church ministry to uprooted people, the actions of non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, and the response of refugees to their present situation;
• in consultation with local partners and ACT members, to recommend specific actions to be taken by the churches to support humanitarian principles in the region.

Members of the Delegation
Wilhelm Nausner, United Methodist Church, Geneva area
Antonios Papantoniou, Church of Greece
Sylvia Raulo, Evangelical Church of Finland
Elizabeth Ferris, World Council of Churches
Alessandro Spanu, Federation of Italian Protestant Churches (Albania only)

Observations and general conclusions
1. The present conflict in the Balkans is not a religious war. While ethnic identities are deeply held, people of different ethnic and religious groups have lived together with respect and tolerance for centuries. Efforts to portray the war as a religious conflict are very dangerous. In this highly politicized context, neither the churches nor other religious communities should allow themselves to be used by governments or political groups for political purposes.
2. The present crisis in the Balkans is a long-term one. The effects of this war will last for many years - while the attention of the international community will most likely be short-lived. The refugees from Kosovo have many needs which demand both immediate and long-term attention. At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the impact of the conflict and the presence of refugees on the countries which host them. If a new global crisis develops or if humanitarian
agencies are able to work inside Kosovo, it may be that attention will shift from the on-going needs of refugees in Albania and Macedonia to other areas. Given the volatile situation in both of these countries, this could have devastating consequences for those countries and for the region as a whole.

3. The war is creating a very dangerous situation for the neighboring countries and deserves more sustained attention from the international community. It is impossible for the countries of Macedonia and Albania to continue to host large numbers of refugees without the sustained support of the international community. We must also remember that in both countries the transition from communist rule to democratic institutions is a very difficult one.

4. People throughout the region are afraid of the de-stabilizing effects of the arrival of large numbers of people of different ethnicities and express concern that the conflict will “spill over” into their countries. Thus, the problems of the region are interrelated and a comprehensive plan needs to be developed in response to the region as a whole. A peace agreement, for example, would need to take into account not only the return of refugees to Kosovo from Macedonia and Albania, but also the impact of the war on Greece, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and other countries in the region.

5. Yugoslavia is the center of the Balkans. What happens in Yugoslavia has repercussions throughout the region in terms of trade and economic transactions, infrastructure, transportation, and political developments. Until there is democracy in Yugoslavia, the whole region will be at risk.

6. The challenge for the churches in the region is to build and sustain pluralistic societies where people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds can live together in peace and mutual respect. Although recent years have witnessed conflicts on a large scale, we must also remember that there have been periods of peace in which multi-cultural societies have functioned well. In this context, proposals to re-define national borders are very dangerous.

Communication to religious leaders in Ethiopia
Letter to the members of the Interfaith Committee in Ethiopia via the Rev. Yadessa Daba, General Secretary of the Mekane Jesu Church and member of the WCC Executive Committee, 13 May 1999.

Dear friends,

It has been several weeks now since our visit with you. Though we have been silent in our communication with your Committee, I want to assure you that we have been working continuously on our shared concern for peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Our time with you was enormously valuable, and we remain deeply grateful for your openness and willingness to take such extensive time to speak with us.

We are deeply troubled about the continuation and even intensification of the war, and its effects on the civilian populations, and are more convinced than ever that joint religious initiatives, both with respect to the present fighting and with regard to long-term peace and reconciliation initiatives are urgent.

The World Council of Churches has been in regular contact, since our visit, with Norwegian Church Aid in order to assure that ours is a common ecumenical engagement in support of your own efforts. We have agreed that, as soon as possible, another joint meeting should be held. The WCC is prepared to provide auspices for this in cooperation with NCA.

In order to move further in the direction of realizing this desire, Mr Stein Villumstad will be paying a follow-up visit to Addis Ababa next week. He comes also on behalf of the WCC, and as a new member of our Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.
We are prepared to convene a joint meeting as early as possible in the month of August. This could be held at a place near Nairobi where a protected meeting site could be arranged. It might also be held near Geneva. We believe that there are now sufficient grounds to believe that the two sides can reach agreement on joint initiatives, based on the positions you have represented to one another in Oslo and Frankfurt. Given the importance that all attach to this, there could be merits in holding the meeting here in Geneva with the possibility of announcing the agreement in a formal press conference with the UN international press corps.

This we leave to you to decide.

We have reported the conversations we had with you to the officers of the World Council of Churches, who endorsed wholeheartedly this interfaith initiative for peace. We continue to pray for peace, and with you to work for it. With warm fraternal greetings, and in the fervent hope that we may meet again soon, I remain

Yours respectfully,
Dwain C. Epps
Coordinator, International Relations

Commission and Subcommission on Human Rights


Easter appeal for a cessation of armed conflicts


In this season of Easter, Christians around the world share the profound pain of all those caught up in tragedies such as Kosovo. Our hearts go out to all those who are suffering the terrible consequences of the violence being inflicted on God’s children in this region and in many other parts of the world. We lament the failure of imagination, collective will and human spirit made manifest in the incapacity to address the causes of conflict through peaceful means. As we remember again the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the one proclaimed by the prophets as the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, our hearts are heavy for we recognize that we have not yet been able to overcome our inclination to turn to the sword in moments of doubt and fear.

Kosovo is but one of the many conflicts around the world today where people take up arms against one another out of fear, hate, greed or hopelessness. Many of these wars are largely hidden from the view of the wider world, and some of them have claimed an even more terrible toll than is now being inflicted in the Balkans.

So we pray this Easter for all of those in Yugoslavia and elsewhere whose lives are shattered by war.
Leaders of Christian churches in both East and West, and leaders of other religious faiths have appealed in recent days for a cessation of such acts of violence and for the settlement of conflict by negotiation. Regrettably, such voices have not yet been heard over the clamor of charges and countercharges, and the roar of bombs, landmines and guns.

One of these leaders, His All Holiness The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, has summarized many of these sentiments in his appeal of 29 March 1999, saying, in the name of God who loves humankind, in the name of the human race, in the name of civilization, at this season of the religious feast of the Muslims, the Easter of Roman Catholics and Protestants, the Passover of the Jews and the Pascha of the Orthodox, on bended knees (I) fervently appeal from the tormented depths of my heart to all world government leaders, to military commanders and to those who bear arms throughout the world, that they cease fire immediately and permanently. We beseech them to use mutual understanding and mutual concession to resolve peacefully their regional, international and worldwide disputes, in order that the God of peace and mercy might bless them and all people.

In this same spirit, we appeal to Christians around the world in these high holy days to join their hearts and spirits in this prayer that the bombings may cease and that the guns may fall silent. May the Spirit descend among us and inspire in us the courage to sacrifice our individual wills in order that the peace of the Risen Christ may prevail.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
World Council of Churches
Joe Hale
General Secretary
World Methodist Council
Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
Lutheran World Federation
John L. Peterson
Secretary General
Anglican Communion

Keith Clements
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches
Denton Lotz
General Secretary
World Baptist Alliance
Milan Opocensky
General Secretary
World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Easter Appeal for a Cessation of Armed Conflicts
Issued by Konrad Raiser (WCC), Keith Clements (CEC), Ishmael Noko (LWF), Milan Opocensky (WARC), Joe Hale (WMC), Denton Lotz (BWA), and John L. Peterson of the Anglican Communion, 31 March 1999.

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their hearts and spirits in this prayer that the bombings may cease and that the guns may fall silent. May the Spirit descend among us and inspire in us the courage to sacrifice our individual
wills in order that the peace of the Risen Christ may prevail.

Message to the Conference on Peace and Tolerance in Kosovo
Conveyed to the conference held in Vienna, 16-18 March 1999.

To the distinguished participants in the First Summit of Kosovo Religious Leaders,

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has closely monitored the civil conflict in Kosovo
over recent months, and welcomes all attempts to seek a just and peaceful settlement to the crisis
in the region. The WCC supports the statements and actions of the churches and religious
communities that seek to promote a lasting peace, including the present summit of Kosovo
religious leaders of the Serbian Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic communities.

As churches and religious leaders in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and elsewhere
have said from the beginning of this conflict, violence cannot bring peace. The use of force and
intimidation cannot secure a lasting and just solution to this complex and painful conflict. The
only viable future for the region lies in a negotiated settlement based on the establishment of full
democracy and respect for the human rights of all communities, majority and minority, and the
due recognition of the need for tolerance and peaceful co-existence. The WCC affirms the
principle that the representatives of all national communities in Kosovo should be involved in
any political settlement, if this is to be just and durable.

The Council condemns in the strongest terms the use of violence in any form by the
conflicting parties. The efforts by the international and regional organizations and mechanisms
to actively promote a settlement to the conflict, in particular the Rambouillet peace process, and
all supportive measures short of military force to achieve this end, are commendable and need to
be encouraged. The WCC welcomes the active involvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is in accordance with the resolutions of the UN Security Council. The WCC emphasizes the necessity for the international institutions to ensure that any future political settlement enhances stability in the region and builds confidence among all its peoples.

The Council remains greatly concerned about the humanitarian disaster created by the armed conflict which has resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians. The WCC therefore urges all parties, and especially the authorities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to honour their commitments to maintain and uphold the right to access by international humanitarian organizations to the affected region, and to facilitate the safe return of all those displaced by the fighting. The WCC, through its emergency office ACT-Action by Churches.

Together, will continue to provide assistance to the victims of the humanitarian crisis, regardless of their origin.

The WCC expresses its profound solidarity with all the peoples of Kosovo, and joins the common prayer of the faithful of all religious communities that justice and peace may be restored in this land.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Appeal for decided action to stop inter-communal violence
Letter to H.E. President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, 1 March 1999.

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has closely followed the developments in Indonesia since the May 1998 riots. The Council and its member churches have watched with growing concern the unfolding ethnic violence and communal conflicts that have left thousands of families in pain and despair. These events are all the more appalling because they are against the very spirit and proud traditions of the Indonesian people for religious pluralism.

Concerned by these developments, the Eighth WCC Assembly, held in Harare last December, decided to send an ecumenical delegation on a pastoral visit to Indonesia from the 26th of January to 4th of February. I take this opportunity to thank you and your other senior cabinet colleagues for taking the time to meet with the delegation on the 2nd of February. The meeting not only provided the delegation with the opportunity to express the concern of the churches around the world on the situation in Indonesia, but it also helped the delegation to understand and appreciate the difficulties encountered by your government as it endeavours to defuse the present climate of violence and conflict that has affected large parts of Indonesia. At the meeting Your Excellency deplored these acts of violence and condemned those responsible for the attacks on churches and mosques, as well as the fostering of religious hostilities. The delegation was assured that the government was doing everything in its power to bring the perpetrators responsible for these reprehensible acts to justice. The delegation returned hopeful with the assurance given by you.
It is now a month since that visit, yet the violence and communal conflicts continue unabated. New areas have been engulfed in a frenzy of fresh communal violence. Those responsible for the killings and arson have yet to be brought to justice.

We are distressed by these developments, more particularly with the situation in Ambon where the trouble began in mid-January last and continued while the delegation was in Indonesia. At that time the General Secretary of the Indonesian Council of Churches together with the leaders of other religious communities accompanied government officials to Ambon to help authorities in their efforts to restore peace and harmony in the region. This is a region where Muslims and Christians have long lived side by side in peace.

We have now received reports from our member churches that Ambon remains in the grip of communal frenzy, never witnessed before. There are daily reports of casualties and of attacks against Christian homes and places of worship, particularly in Batu Merah Dalam in the northern part of the city. It is a matter of deep concern for us that the special army units whose duty it is to protect the lives and properties of all Indonesians are accused of a partisan approach. This has spread insecurity and unrest amongst the members of the Christian community.

We urge Your Excellency to ensure that military personnel act as custodians of law and order and carry out their duties in accordance with the guiding principles of ‘Pancasila’. Also that immediate steps are taken to apprehend those responsible for violence, arson and killings and that they are brought before the courts of law to stand trial. Failure to do so will encourage the perpetrators to continue to indulge in these heinous crimes with impunity, thus further damaging Indonesia’s image in the comity of nations.

We trust that, in accordance with the assurances given to the Ecumenical Delegation, Your Excellency will give this matter urgent and serious consideration.

Sincerely yours,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Expression of solidarity with Christian leaders
Letter to the Rev. Dr Ipe Joseph, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, 1 February 1999.

Dear Brother in Christ,

Your letter of 29 January and the information you sent on the initiatives taken by NCCI and its member churches on the tragic events in South Gujarat and elsewhere in India were very welcome. We have been following the unfolding situation with growing anxiety, and many of the member churches have sought our advice about how they could helpfully respond to reports of the violence on Christmas against churches and Christians, and to the tragic murders of Dr Graham Stewart Staines and his sons, Timothy and Philip.

We are grateful for the witness the churches of India are giving on behalf of the worldwide ecumenical fellowship in this time of trial. Our hearts go out to all those who have suffered, to their families, to their churches, and to all those in your beloved land who are bereaved as a result of these senseless and brutal acts of violence.
We understand, and shall respect your wish that the World Council of Churches issue no public statement on the matter for the moment, and will share the information you have sent with concerned churches and ecumenical councils around the world.

We are grateful to know of the meeting scheduled tomorrow at CNI Bhavan between leaders of the several Christian traditions to consult together on the situation and on next steps to be taken. We await eagerly the results of your deliberations and your further guidance. We assure all those present of our prayers that this night of darkness will soon be dispelled by the light of the love, tolerance and interreligious harmony to which the people of India have been so committed.

We are especially dismayed that some of the media in your country have so falsely and maliciously mis-stated the positions and intentions of the churches joined in the World Council of Churches. From its very beginnings, the ecumenical movement has stood for the principle of religious freedom and tolerance in a way which is in consonance with Art. 25 of the Constitution of India. From the first time this concern was mooted, at the 1910 International Missionary Conference, the churches advocated that religious freedom is a basic right shared by all citizens, irrespective of their faith, and warned Christians and churches against claiming this right as their exclusive privilege. Throughout this century, the WCC has actively defended the equal claim of all religious communities to the full rights of religious freedom articulated in Art. 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As your appeals make clear, it is the responsibility of the Central and State Governments to maintain the present Constitution of India, to guarantee respect for its provisions related to the rights of religious and other minorities, and to uphold the obligations India has assumed by ratifying the International Covenants on Human Rights. Only when the rule of law prevails, when the rights of all, of every community and individual, are respected, can there be hope for justice, peace and well-being of both the majority and the minorities. As a result of their bitter experiences with religious intolerance at the time of the birth of their nation Indians know this better than most. The founders of the Indian nation thus provided constitutional guarantees to protect against a recurrence of such tragedies. The present-day leadership must assume its responsibilities to the Constitution, to fairness and equity, and to maintain order in the face of extremist acts.

We pray constantly that God may give you the strength to persevere in your commitment to serve the whole Nation and the people of India. We remain with you in spirit as you consider what you are called to do now as Christians together with people of other faiths throughout the land who share your devotion to peace, progress and mutual respect.

In the name of Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever,

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Ecumenical delegation visit on request of the WCC eighth assembly
Press release issued at the conclusion of the visit to Indonesia, 27 January – 3 February 1999.

Following a visit to Indonesia, a joint World Council of Churches (WCC)/Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) team has called on the Indonesian government urgently to identify and bring to justice those responsible for the burning and destruction of places of worship, as
well as communal violence involving Christians and Muslims, and members of the ethnic Chinese minority.

During the visit, which took place 27 January - 3 February 1999, the nine-member team held talks with President B. J. Habibie and told him they found it difficult to understand why the Indonesian government had so far failed to identify those who in the May 1998 riots and subsequently had organised or carried out acts of violence against people and property.

Indonesians are proud of their tradition of religious pluralism. However, despite this, 544 churches have been destroyed since the country's independence in 1945 and this phenomenon continues today. In mid-January 1999, a few days before the delegation arrived in Jakarta, the port city of Ambon, where Muslims and Christians have long lived side by side in peace, witnessed a wave of communal violence and destruction that left over forty people dead and many mosques and churches destroyed.

In discussions with the WCC/CCA team, President Habibie and other senior government officials spoke strongly against those responsible for the violence, and condemned the attacks on churches and mosques, as well as the fostering of religious hostility. The president pledged to bring the perpetrators to justice. However, in the context of recent developments in Indonesia, the President told the team, “I am involved in Mission Impossible”.

The ecumenical team is convinced the violence in Indonesia is not primarily an expression of religious hatred but rather the result of economic and political factors. Also, Indonesia is a place where freedom of expression was repressed for many years but now the country is experiencing a new kind of liberty. No one is sure what will happen in the future, particularly after the parliamentary elections in June for which over 200 parties have registered. The team says the situation in Indonesia is one of absolute confusion in which religion and ethnicity have been exploited by members of power elites. The delegation was encouraged to hear of Muslim neighbours who had provided shelter to Christian families under attack, and of Muslim young people who had protected a church from being destroyed.

As well as a smooth election process and the bringing to justice of the perpetrators of violence, the team also concluded that conflict resolution in Indonesia requires the enactment of legislation to ensure greater autonomy for the provinces, a just resolution of the demands for self-determination in East Timor and Irian Jaya, the establishment of social organisations to build harmony among the country's diverse religious and ethnic groups, increased capacity to mobilise domestic and foreign human and financial resources in order to eradicate persistent poverty and improve the overall economic outlook of the country, and a change in the conditions imposed by Indonesia's international creditors, particularly the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The WCC/CCA team visit included time in Irian Jaya. Here, the team found a clear wish for independence among all sectors of society, including the churches. However, in Jakarta, government officials, including Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, made it clear to the team that Irian Jaya is an integral part of Indonesia and there is no parallel with East Timor. Nevertheless, the team found that the hopes of Irianese people were understandably raised by the government's recent announcement on the independence of East Timor.

The team discovered the delay in convening the National Dialogue, proposed in September 1998 and agreed to by President Habibie, has caused frustration and confusion in Irian Jaya. The delegation was concerned that church leaders, both Protestants and Catholics, as
well as tribal chiefs, NGOs and student representatives had spent little time in discussion with each other, in preparation for the National Dialogue.

The WCC/CCA delegation now calls on the Indonesian Government to initiate the National Dialogue without delay and to ensure the people of Irian Jaya are properly represented in that dialogue without conditions.

The team also calls on the UN Commission on Human Rights to look into human rights violations in Irian Jaya which include arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial killings, and the violation of the right to freedom of expression and of the socio-economic and cultural rights of the Irianese people as a result of the Indonesian government's programme of transmigration.

Statement on U.S. and U.K. attacks on Iraq

The World Council of Churches condemns in the strongest possible terms the attacks on Iraq initiated during the night of 16 December by forces of the United States and the United Kingdom. We call for an immediate cessation of these attacks.

With the Secretary General of the United Nations we regard this as a sad day for the UN, for international diplomacy, and for the international rule of law.

Nearly eight years ago, the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches condemned the Gulf War, which was raging as that Assembly met, and warned of its consequences for world order. The resolution of that Assembly and succeeding ones issued by the Council's Central and Executive Committees expressed deep concern about the consequences of such attacks, and of never-ending sanctions, on the civilian population of Iraq, and we reiterate that urgent concern today.

The leaders of the two nations engaged in these attacks have said that there is no realistic alternative to the use of military force. The Eighth Assembly of the WCC, just concluded in Harare, Zimbabwe, has rejected such reasoning, and reaffirmed the Council's appeal that churches and nations give up the spirit, logic and practice of war as a solution to world problems. This Assembly has again decried the application of double standards by the nations, by which attacks such as these, which ignore the will of the civilian population of Iraq, are allowed, while the appeals of peoples such as those in Central Africa and Sudan for strong international intervention for peace fall on deaf ears.

The present attacks against Iraq which take place during the Christian season of Advent, and on the eve of the Muslim season of Ramadan, will be seen by people of these faiths around the world as an act of profound cynicism which injures religious sensitivities of believers in this season when both Christians and Muslims pray fervently for peace.

We therefore reiterate our appeal for the immediate cessation of these attacks. We reassure the people of Iraq of our constant prayers for their safety and well-being. And we appeal in this Christmas season especially to the Christian leaders of the United States and Great Britain to open their hearts, to turn to God, and to respond to the promise and hope offered the world by the Almighty One who chose to reveal Himself to the world as the infant Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
The Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-14 December 1998

1. **Reaffirms** earlier positions of the World Council of Churches that

1.1. Jerusalem is a holy city for three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, who share responsibility to cooperate to ensure that Jerusalem be a city open to the adherents of all three religions, a place where they can meet and live together.

1.2. Christian Holy Places in Jerusalem and neighboring areas belong to the greatest extent to member churches of the World Council of Churches, specifically to the local Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches. Any proposed solution as to the future of the holy places in Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate rights of the churches most directly concerned.

1.3. The special legislation regulating the relationship of the Christian communities and the authorities, guaranteed by ancient covenants and orders, and codified in international treaties (Paris 1856 and Berlin 1878) and the League of Nations and known as the *status quo* of the Holy Places, must be safeguarded.

1.4. The settlement of any problems with regard to the holy places should take place through dialogue and under an international aegis and guarantees which must be respected by the parties concerned and by the ruling authorities.

1.5. The question of Jerusalem is not only a matter of protection of the holy places, but is also organically linked with people who live there, their living faiths and communities. The holy shrines should not become mere monuments of visitation, but should serve as living places of worship integrated and responsive to all communities who continue to maintain their life and roots within the city, and for those who, out of religious attachment, want to visit or venerate them.

1.6. The future status of Jerusalem is to be seen as part of a general settlement of the wider Middle East conflict as related to the destinies of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples alike.

2. **Reiterates** the significance and importance of the continuing presence of Christian communities in Jerusalem, the birthplace of the Christian Church, and **condemns once again** the violations of fundamental rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem which oblige many to leave.

3. **Considers** that negotiations with respect to the future status of Jerusalem must be undertaken without further delay and considered to be part of rather than a product of a comprehensive settlement for the region, and that such negotiations should take into account:

3.1. the contemporary context of the Middle East, especially developments in negotiations on the Israel-Palestine conflict since 1991;

3.2. the implications of the continuing conflict for international peace and security;

3.3. the legitimate concerns of all the peoples of the region, and particularly of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, for justice, peace, security, equal rights, and full participation in decisions related to their future;

3.4. the historical commitment to the *status quo* of the Holy Places and the rights and welfare of the churches, living communities and peoples associated with them;

3.5. the statements of mutual recognition exchanged between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Israel, and the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to statehood.

4. **Recalls** the framework established in international law related to the status of Jerusalem, including:

4.1. The terms of the British Mandate for Palestine confirmed by the Council of the League of Nations in 1922 which set a broad framework with respect to rights to the Holy Places and of religious communities;
4.2. The 1947 report to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) of its Special Committee on Palestine and the “Partition Plan” (res. 181 (II), 29 November 1947) in which the General Assembly addressed in detail the Holy Places and Religious and Minority Rights, and established the City of Jerusalem as a corpus separatum with precisely defined geographical boundaries and a statute.

4.3. UNGA res.194 (December 1948) which specified the special status of Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and successive resolutions affirming resolutions 181 and 194;

4.4. The Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) which was and remains applicable to parts of Palestine regarded as “occupied territory;”

4.5. UNGA res. 303 (IV), 9 December 1948, by which the General Assembly restated “its intention that Jerusalem should be placed under a permanent international regime....” and “be established as a corpus separatum under a special international regime...administered by the United Nations;” and

4.6. UN Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) demanding Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories including Jerusalem, and subsequent resolutions addressed specifically to Jerusalem.

5. Notes that the international community as embodied in the United Nations retains authority and responsibility with respect to Jerusalem and the right to authorize or consent to any legal change in the status of Jerusalem, and that no unilateral action nor final legal status agreed by the parties can have the force of law until such consent is given.

6. Welcomes especially the Joint Memorandum of Their Beatitudes and of the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem on the Significance of Jerusalem for Christians (14 November 1994) in which they call on all parties “to go beyond exclusivist visions or actions, and without discrimination, to consider the religious and national aspirations of others, in order to give back to Jerusalem its true universal character and to make of the city a holy place of reconciliation for humankind.”

7. Recognizes that the solution to the question of Jerusalem is in the first place the responsibility of the parties directly involved, but that the Christian churches and the Jewish and Muslim religious communities have a central role to play in relation to such negotiations.

8. Conscious of the churches’ responsibility with respect to Jerusalem, adopts the following principles which must be taken into consideration in any final agreement on the status of Jerusalem and as the basis for a common ecumenical approach:

8.1. The peaceful settlement of the territorial claims of Palestinians and Israelis should respect the holiness and wholeness of the city.

8.2. Access to the Holy Places, religious buildings and sites should be free, and freedom of worship must be secured for people of all faiths.

8.3. The rights of all communities of Jerusalem to carry out their own religious, educational and social activities must be guaranteed.

8.4. Free access to Jerusalem must be assured and protected for the Palestinian people.

8.5. Jerusalem must remain an open and inclusive city.

8.6. Jerusalem must be a shared city in terms of sovereignty and citizenship.

8.7. The provisions of the IV. Geneva Convention must be honored with respect to the rights of Palestinians to property, building and residency; the prohibition of effecting changes in population in occupied territories; and the prohibition of changes in geographical boundaries, annexation of territory, or settlement which would change the religious, cultural or historical character of Jerusalem without the agreement of the parties concerned and the approval of the international community.
9. With Their Beatitudes and the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem, we regard Jerusalem to be a symbol and a promise of the presence of God, of shared life, and of peace for humankind, especially among the peoples of the three monotheistic faiths, Jews, Christians and Muslims.

10. With the Psalmist, we pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
   “May they prosper who love you.
   Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.”
   For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.”
   For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. (Ps. 122)

Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
adopted by the Third General Assembly of the United Nations
Paris, 10 December 1948

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,
Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,
Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,
Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,
Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,
Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,
Now, therefore,
The General Assembly,
Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Declaration of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
The first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam fifty years ago had high hopes for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under discussion by the United Nations at that time. As we, representatives of churches in some 120 countries, gathered here in Harare on 10 December 1998 in the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, to reconsider the words of the
Preamble, we find that they are as pertinent and challenging today as they were when they were adopted.

We remember with gratitude those who advocated on behalf of the ecumenical fellowship at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 the inclusion within the United Nations Charter of provisions for human rights, including a special Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms to develop and implement guarantees for religious freedom and other rights.

We are thankful to those whose faith and vision contributed to the shaping and adoption of this common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. We remember those all around the world who have dedicated their lives to the further development of these rights, in order that there be a progressive subordination of force to the international rule of law.

We hear the cries of the victims of human rights violations, and feel their anger, frustrations, agony, loneliness, desperation and pain. We remember particularly those Christians and people of other faiths and convictions around the world who have suffered persecution and martyrdom in defense of human rights.

We recognize that in some languages the use of masculine terminology in the original wording of the Declaration would appear to exclude women. Nevertheless, women as well as men today find in the Declaration a foundation for their hopes and aspirations. The adoption of this Universal Declaration stands as one of the landmark achievements of humanity.

Most governments have now committed themselves to respect its provisions, but we are painfully aware that these principles have yet to receive universal observance and no country fully respects them. As a result of poverty, ignorance, exploitation and repression, very many people remain unaware that they are invested with such inalienable rights. More still are unable to exercise them.

As Christians, we believe that God created every person infinitely precious and endowed with equal dignity and rights. Yet we confess that we have often failed to respect such equality, even in our own midst. We have not always stood up courageously for those whose rights and human dignity are threatened or violated by discrimination, intolerance, prejudice and hatred. Indeed Christians have sometimes been agents of such injustice.

The World Council of Churches has affirmed that human rights, including the right to religious freedom, are not to be claimed by any religion, nation or group as an exclusive privilege, but rather that the enjoyment of these rights is essential in order to serve the whole of humanity. Yet we are aware that universal human rights have been repeatedly violated or misused in pursuit of particular religious, ideological, national, ethnic and racial interests.

In this Jubilee Assembly of the World Council of Churches held under the theme, “Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope”, we continue to pursue the goal of unity for the Church and the whole of humankind.

We look forward with hope and reaffirm our faith that God will continue to guide us and give us strength to confront the potent forces of division, dehumanization and social exclusion which assail us today.

In this spirit, we recommit ourselves to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to promote and defend them in a way which takes into account:

- the values and insights into human rights and dignity derived from the rich heritage of peoples’ religions, cultures and traditions;
- the rights of peoples, nations, communities and their cultures, as well as the rights of each individual within them;
the indivisibility of human rights, including social, economic and cultural, civil and political rights, and the rights to peace, to development and the integrity of the Creation;
• the right of every person and community, be they in the majority or in the minority, to participate fully in decisions about their common future;
• the equal rights of young and old, of children and adults, of women and men, and of all persons irrespective of their origin or condition.

We commit ourselves to pursue this goal in a way which does not further divide, but rather unites the human community through:

• encouraging and supporting the efforts of the United Nations;
• urging our governments to ratify and respect international and regional instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights, to monitor compliance with them in their own countries and around the world, and to underwrite that commitment with human and financial resources;
• seeking cooperation with peoples of other faiths and convictions;
• joining in partnerships with other civil society groups and organizations, and with governments and political authorities who share these aims.

This we do for the benefit of the present generation which desperately needs universal respect for and the exercise of the full range of human rights. We undertake these commitments especially for the children and youth of today, that they may take hope and claim the promise of the future. We do it so that the world in which we are among God’s stewards will be passed on to future generations resting upon the firm foundations of freedom, justice and peace.

Call for the repeal of “blasphemy laws” and the release of those being held under the charge of blasphemy

Copies were sent to National Councils of Churches in Britain and Ireland, Germany, Japan the Netherlands, Norway, USA, the China Christian Council, the Moderator of the Church of Pakistan and to Archbishop Simion Perrera, Karachi Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church.

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of 325 member churches in more than 100 countries in all continents from the Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican Christian traditions. Its objectives include working for peace, justice and sharing human and material resources for the benefit of all God’s people. The Council links churches and communities of the North and South to strengthen bonds of commitment among peoples of all regions as well as to foster relationships with persons of other faiths and with other faith communities. While responding to specific situations and issues such as emergency needs, and the role of religion in conflict situations, and problems of religious minority communities, the Council endeavours to promote interfaith dialogue to build an environment of tolerance, justice and peace.

The member churches of the Council have in times of need provided humanitarian relief assistance to Pakistan in cooperation with the churches and other non-governmental organizations in the country, and inter-governmental organizations. Relief and assistance programmes have also been organized in response to the needs of victims of the Afghan war and the war of secession in Bangladesh.

Today, we write on a matter of grave and urgent concern. For some time, the World Council of Churches has been receiving reports of discriminatory practices and of persecution of
religious minorities in Pakistan, including Christians, Ahmadiyas and Hindus. These are well documented by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, other non-governmental organizations and the churches with whom we are in close contact. Our immediate concern is the frequent persecution and victimization of Christians that have resulted from unwarranted and indiscriminate application of Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) relating to the laws of blasphemy. Misusing the blasphemy law, extremist elements and groups have freely incited religious hatred and animosity against the religious minorities. This has greatly contributed to the growing environment of religious intolerance and has placed religious minorities under a state of siege. Serious disturbances of law and order have resulted as witnessed in the aftermath of the Salamat Masih case, the Shantinagar incident and now with the death of Bishop John Joseph. These incidences have tarnished the image of Pakistan as a modern progressive state.

Presently, Ayub Masih (Sahiwal), against whom the death sentence has been passed by the Sessions Court, remains in custody pending his appeal to the High Court. Given the environment of intolerance, even if his appeal succeeds, there is no guarantee he will not be killed by extremist elements as happened in the cases of Manzur Masih and Niamat Ahmar. Under the present circumstances, his only option and that of others under trial on similar charges, would be to seek asylum in some Western country, like Salmat Masih, Rehmat Masih and Chand Barkat have done.

These developments do not augur well for Pakistan. Article 36 of the Constitution guarantees the legitimate rights and interests of minorities. Yet despite this, and the assurance given to the religious minorities by Quaid-E-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, that “minorities are a sacred trust of Pakistan,” their security is not protected.

The recent death of Dr. John Joseph, the Bishop of Faisalabad diocese is evidence of the level of frustration and despair among members of the Christian community in Pakistan. In the present climate of fear and intolerance, it has become difficult for those charged under the blasphemy law to get a fair trial. In fact, since the killing of Retd. Justice Arif Iqbal Bhatti, it has become extremely difficult to engage the services of a defense lawyer. Most lawyers now decline their services because of threats from extremist groups against them and their families. According to reliable information we have received, even judges of the Superior Courts are reluctant to have the blasphemy law cases fixed before them for hearings for similar reasons.

In the circumstances, the World Council of Churches urges the Government of Pakistan, through you, to take immediate steps to repeal Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code and to guarantee the security and physical integrity of those presently charged under the blasphemy law.

We would be grateful if you would convey these concerns to your Government. The contents of this letter are being shared with member churches in several countries who have expressed their concern. We hope for a prompt, positive response from the government of Pakistan which we may also convey to these and other concerned churches and groups.

Yours sincerely,
Dwain C. Epps
Director
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs

Visits to Romanian State officials for church and religious affairs
Press release on the visit of the Coordinator for International Affairs in response to requests received from member churches in Romania, 23-24 March 1998.

International Affairs staff coordinator Dwain Epps visited Romania on 23-24 March 1998 for conversations with the State Secretary for Religious Affairs, Gheorghe Anghelescu, and Presidential State Counsellor for Religious Cults, Education and Culture, Traian Radu Negrei. The visit, which was made in response to requests from Protestant and Orthodox member churches in Romania, focused on new religious legislation being developed in the Romanian Parliament. “As in all Central European states making the transition to democracy, questions related to religious liberty in Romania are extremely complex, and often contentious,” Epps reported. “At stake are equality of minority and majority churches under the law and in its application when it comes to return of confiscated property, education in national languages and compensation of church workers. At the same time the right of a country to develop legislation and practice which corresponds to its own traditions is under severe pressure from foreign governments and private groups, each pressing for the application of standards in its own perceived self-interest.” Epps said that his conversations had been positive, and had opened the door to future cooperation in pursuit of laws which would serve all communities and contribute to national harmony.

The visit was prepared in discussions with leaders of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, and included extensive conversations with Patriarch Teoctist, head of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Appeal to church leaders to contribute to a non-violent, negotiated solution to the conflict in Kosovo

Joint letter from the general secretaries of CEC, the WCC and the LWF to their member churches in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 10 March 1998.

Dear Brothers in Christ,

We write to you on behalf of our respective church organizations to express our profound concern and solidarity with all those caught up in the unfolding tragic events in Kosovo.

Our organizations appeal to the leadership and members of the churches in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to do everything possible to contribute to a peaceful and negotiated solution to the civil violence in the province of Kosovo.

It is of utmost concern to Christians and churches everywhere that a repetition of the violent conflict experienced in Bosnia in recent years must be avoided. Everything must be done to overcome the confrontation and to avoid a further spread of this conflict to neighbouring countries.

In order for a just and lasting solution to be negotiated, all parties must refrain from acts of violence and intimidation. We therefore share the condemnation by His Holiness Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church and his representatives of the use of police violence against unarmed student and civilian populations in Kosovo, and we denounce the grave violation of human rights witnessed in the region.

Furthermore, we recognise and share the concern that the identities and history of all ethnic and religious groups in the province be respected. We strongly support the efforts of people of all communities in Kosovo and elsewhere which seek a peaceful and negotiated
solution to the present crisis, and which will allow a just and free coexistence for all. We join with the Patriarch in appealing that all peoples may live together as human beings according to Divine justice in this country.

We are urging the international ecumenical community to be prepared to offer any humanitarian and other assistance to the victims, the uprooted and those vulnerable groups most affected by the conflict, through ACT-Action by Churches Together, the emergency co-ordinating office based in WCC and LWF.

It is our hope and prayer that no effort will be spared to allow people to return again to a life of dignity and mutual respect.

Keith Clements  Ishmael Noko  Konrad Raiser
Conference of European  Lutheran World  World Council
Churches  Federation  of Churches

Appeal for stay of execution of Karla Faye Tucker in the USA
Letter to Mr. John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 3 February 1998.

Dear Mr. Assistant Secretary:

In light of the 23 January Interim Report of the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, which we have read with care and considerable appreciation, I write to you, seeking your urgent intervention with President Clinton or with the other appropriate authority with respect to the tragic case of Karla Faye Tucker who faces execution tonight in the State of Texas.

Your responsibilities, I very much understand, are for United States foreign policy in the field of human rights. I address you in light of the widespread international attention focused on the internal human rights practices of the United States by this case. The credibility of United States Government efforts to deal responsibly and energetically with human rights abuses abroad, including threats to religious freedom, depends substantially on its internal practices.

I do not need to emphasize to you the fact that the United States is the only major Western nation which still applies the death penalty, or that this practice is widely considered to be a violation of fundamental human rights. The World Council of Churches long ago called for the universal abolition of the death penalty, based on both international human rights considerations and on our deep theological concern for the sanctity of human life.

The case of Karla Faye Tucker is a poignant example of all that is wrong with this irreversible penalty. For Christians, it is difficult not to recall in this connection Jesus’s loving forgiveness of the Samaritan woman, a prostitute, to whom Jesus chooses to reveal himself as the Messiah, the wellspring of eternal life. For advocates of victims’ rights, the appeals for clemency on Ms Tucker’s behalf by close relatives of her confessed victims should suffice to show that her execution would only serve to heap pain upon pain, injustice upon injustice. For those who see in the death penalty a deterrent, the clear evidence of Ms Tucker’s sincere repentance and change of life should demonstrate that her execution would defy reason.

Trusting that you more than perhaps any other United States Government official will see the broad international implications of allowing this execution to proceed, I urge you to
intervene with the President, pleading with him on behalf of many around the world to use his position to stay this execution.

We are convinced that hearts of stone can be replaced with hearts of flesh, and hold out the sincere hope that the deep-seated American values of justice will prevail in an appeal to the Supreme Court to revisit this case, and to set aside the death penalty in this case. It would be a great tragedy if the possibility of true justice were to be rendered impossible by the execution of this woman.

It is with deep respect for your own sense of justice, and in view of your commitment to international respect for human rights that I address this urgent appeal to you. I pray that you will spare no effort to make your voice heard now when it counts so much. Your recent report states well, “Concretely helping the victims of persecution must be the focal point of all policy.” Here is an opportunity to show the coherence of US human rights policy in both domestic and international affairs.

Respectfully yours,
Mary Ann Lundy
Acting General Secretary

Expression of concern about violations of religious freedom and conflict
Letter to the Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, 1 February 1998.

Dear Brother in Christ,

Your letter of 29 January and the information you sent on the initiatives taken by NCCI and its member churches on the tragic events in South Gujarat and elsewhere in India was very welcome. We have been following the unfolding situation with growing anxiety, and many of the member churches have sought our advice about how they could helpfully respond to reports of the violence on Christmas against churches and Christians, and to the tragic murders of Dr. Graham Stewart Staines and his sons, Timothy and Philip.

We are grateful for the witness the churches of India are giving on behalf of the worldwide ecumenical fellowship in this time of trial. Our hearts go out to all those who have suffered, to their families, to their churches, and to all those in your beloved land who are bereaved as a result of these senseless and brutal acts of violence.

We understand, and shall respect your wish that the World Council of Churches issue no public statement on the matter for the moment, and will share the information you have sent with concerned churches and ecumenical councils around the world.

We are grateful to know of the meeting scheduled tomorrow at CNI Bhavan between leaders of the several Christian traditions to consult together on the situation and on next steps to be taken. We await eagerly the results of your deliberations and your further guidance. We assure all those present of our prayers that this night of darkness will soon be dispelled by the light of the love, tolerance and inter-religious harmony to which the people of India have been so committed.

We are especially dismayed that some of the media in your country have so falsely and maliciously misstated the positions and intentions of the churches joined in the World Council.
of Churches. From its very beginnings, the ecumenical movement has stood for the principle of religious freedom and tolerance in a way which is in consonance with Art. 25 of the Constitution of India. From the first time this concern was mooted, at the 1910 International Missionary Conference, the churches advocated that religious freedom is a basic right shared by all citizens, irrespective of their faith, and warned Christians and churches against claiming this right as their exclusive privilege. Throughout this century, the WCC has actively defended the equal claim of all religious communities to the full rights of religious freedom articulated in Art. 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As your appeals make clear, it is the responsibility of the Central and State Governments to maintain the present Constitution of India, to guarantee respect for its provisions related to the rights of religious and other minorities, and to uphold the obligations India has assumed by ratifying the International Covenants on Human Rights. Only when the rule of law prevails, when the rights of all, of every community and individual, are respected, can there be hope for justice, peace and well-being of both the majority and the minorities. As a result of their bitter experiences with religious intolerance at the time of the birth of their nation, Indians know this better than most. The founders of the Indian nation thus provided constitutional guarantees to protect against a recurrence of such tragedies. The present-day leadership must assume its responsibilities to the Constitution, to fairness and equity, and to maintain order in the face of extremist acts.

We pray constantly that God may give you the strength to persevere in your commitment to serve the whole Nation and the people of India. We remain with you in spirit as you consider what you are called to do now as Christians together with people of other faiths throughout the land who share your devotion to peace, progress and mutual respect.

In the name of Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever,

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Expression of sympathy and concern following the bombing of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul
Letter to His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios, 3 December 1997.

Your All Holiness,

It is with deep shock and great sadness that we have heard of the bomb attack last night on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. We wish to express to those who were injured, and to all who were harmed in any way, our sympathy and the assurance of our solidarity in thought and prayer. To you, your All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, our dear brother in Christ, we especially extend our loving support and prayers, that through God's grace you may receive every needed strength to comfort, lead and guide the Christian community under your care, and before the people of Istanbul to bear witness to the peace of Christ at this time of anxiety and fear.

Such acts of violence, from whatever quarter, can never further the cause of justice. They are repugnant to people of all faiths who believe in the holy and merciful God who is compassionate to all his children. We are appealing to the Turkish authorities to make every effort to ensure that the perpetrators of this violent act be brought to justice.
Christians throughout Europe and all around the world will, we are sure, join us in prayer for the peace of Istanbul and for reconciliation to prevail over all manifestations of religious or political conflict.

Accept, Your All Holiness, the expression of our respectful and warm greetings.

Revd Dr Keith W. Clements  Ms Mary Ann W. Lundy
General Secretary  Acting General Secretary
Conference of European Churches World Council of Churches

Support for Protestant Churches’ efforts to achieve equal treatment under the law
Letter to the Rev. Bishop Francisco Anabalón, President of the Council of Evangelical Pastors of Chile, 24 November 1997.

Dear Bishop,

We have received with deep concern news of the differences that separate the Catholic Church from the Protestant churches of Chile with respect to the draft law on religion under consideration in the Senate in these days.

The World Council of Churches has devoted considerable attention, in particular since 1945, to the right to religious freedom, that it considers fundamental to the universal body of human rights. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the fruit of this work, as are the similar norms included in various international instruments that were elaborated subsequently. For the WCC, the right to religious liberty is both an integral part of the body of human rights and at the same time a cornerstone of the edifice of the rule of law and of the modern state. This right should not be considered, as the V WCC Assembly said in Nairobi (1975), as a privilege of any particular church, but rather as essential for every church to serve fully the nation and society of which it is a part.

For many years, the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC had differing perspectives in this field. But the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Council brought us closer together, eliminating nearly all earlier differences.

The WCC had the great privilege of working in close collaboration with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Episcopal Conference in the dark times of the military dictatorship after 1973, as did the Protestant churches of Chile that joined with that church in the struggle for human rights. We are astonished to hear, now, that the ecumenical spirit that marked those past 25 years is falling apart in the face of a new draft law that seeks to establish the principle of equality of rights among churches and other manifestations of religion.

We hope that the Roman Catholic Church in Chile will not insist in asking for a special status for reasons either of history or the State. We firmly believe that the present draft law should not be considered under such a light. The Government and people of Chile have now a great opportunity to take leadership in the field of human rights in Latin America with respect to religious freedom.

It is with this hope and with deep respect for the Roman Catholic Church in Chile that we will be following discussions on this matter in the coming days. May the Holy Spirit guide you all, men and women of the churches and of the Senate, that you may reach a fair agreement,
correction the errors of the past, and opening up a future without discrimination of any sort based on freely adopted expressions of belief by every Chilean citizen.

In Christ, the One Lord,
Dwain C. Epps
Director, Commission of the Churches
on International Affairs

Letter to Mrs. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights

Dear Madam,

We are delighted by the news of your assumption of office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We avail ourselves of this opportunity to offer you our warm congratulations.

The World Council of Churches and its more than 300 member churches have over the years contributed greatly to the work of promotion and protection of human rights. At the international level, this has been done through the various agencies of the United Nations, particularly with the Commission on Human Rights, with which we have a long history of collaborative relationship. At the local and national levels, in different regions of the world, our member churches have, on a regular basis, undertaken training and awareness-building programmes for human rights defenders.

The Council, in the first year after its foundation, actively participated in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly in respect of the provisions relating to religious freedom and liberty. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the Council reiterates its support for the principles enunciated in the Vienna Declaration and the Programme of Action that “the universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond question.”

You assume responsibilities of the office of the High Commissioner at a time when the human rights debate at the inter-governmental level is not only highly politicized but also sharply polarized. As we enter the next millennium and confront the myriad challenges and issues that face human rights advocates - globalization, right to development, rights of uprooted and indigenous peoples, violence against women, impunity, growing ethno-centrism and religious and racial intolerance - there is an urgent need to listen to the diverse voices emerging from different regions and sectors in order to build a consensus that can further strengthen and undergird the principles of universality. This is a daunting task for which you will need the support, not only of governments, but also of NGOs, churches and civil society as well. We are certain, under your able leadership and with the background and experience you bring to your new job, these challenges will be adequately met.

Given the churches’ commitment and involvement in concerns for justice, human rights and peace, it will be an honour for me to extend to you in person our congratulations and to share and exchange views on how the World Council of Churches and its members can assist and support you in your new responsibilities. I have requested my staff to be in contact with your office, to explore such an opportunity at your convenience.
May our Lord’s blessings be with you, to guide and sustain you as you begin to discharge your new responsibilities.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Statement on Sudanese Church Leaders’ Initiatives in Sudan


The war in Sudan has continued unabated since it was rekindled in 1983. Since then over three million people have lost their lives, five million have been displaced inside the country and another five hundred thousand have been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, especially in Kenya and Uganda. The World Council of Churches has responded by providing humanitarian relief assistance to the victims, and has remained in contact with all the parties to the conflict. Through visits and consultations, it has endeavored to promote a just and lasting solution.

The Sudanese churches, acting in the framework of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, are increasingly overcoming the separation imposed between them by the war, and are forging an important new witness for peace. Shortly after the last meeting of the WCC Central Committee, church leaders from North and South Sudan met in Morges, Switzerland (September 1996). Confessing that their divisions had weakened their ability to serve as agents of peace and reconciliation, they expressed a new determination to make common cause to stop the war and attempt to mediate a peace settlement. The position paper they developed together, “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace,” has since been presented by church delegations to the faction leaders in the South and to the Government of Sudan in the North. On each occasion, their initiative has been welcomed. This position paper has also been shared with churches in Africa, the Middle East, Europe and North America, and constitutes a solid basis for broad ecumenical advocacy for peace in the Sudan.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, 11-19 September 1997:

*Warmly welcomes the resolve of the church leaders in North and South Sudan, as expressed in their position paper, “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace,” to stop the war and to promote dialogue for peace among the armed factions in the South and between them and the Government of Sudan;*

*Calls attention to the principles elaborated by the Sudanese church leaders upon which a just and meaningful peace in Sudan must be built:*

- freedom of religious expression, worship and witness
- open participation of all in political, social and economic life, irrespective of racial, ethnic, social or religious background
- openness to trusting dialogue between alienated political, social and religious groups within society
- acceptance of cultural, linguistic and social diversity
- resolution of political and social conflicts by peaceful means
- resolve to steadily widen the effective participation of all people in decision-making and the political process;
Urges WCC member churches, and particularly those which have direct links with the Sudan, to continue and intensify their efforts to encourage and support the unified peace initiatives of the Sudan Council of Churches and the New Sudan Council of Churches;

Calls for an immediate cease-fire among the warring factions in the South and by the Government of Sudan as essential to creating a climate conducive to serious discussions among Sudanese at all levels for a peaceful end to the conflict;

Further welcomes the joint statement of Sudanese Church leaders following the signing of the Khartoum Peace Agreement of 21 April 1997 by the Government of Sudan and the leadership of the SSIM (South Sudan Independence Movement) and four other rebel factions, in which they state that:

◦ this Agreement could contribute to peace, but only if it were opened for broad discussion among all the people of Sudan and especially with the leaders of other opposition movements; and

◦ if such dialogue is not forthcoming, this Agreement could become an instrument of manipulation that could lead to an escalation of the conflict and prolong the suffering of the Sudanese people;

Notes with concern that before such dialogue has taken place, the leader of SSIM has accepted to serve in a ministerial post of the Government of Sudan, thereby jeopardizing the possibility of making the April 1997 Agreement one which could enjoy the support of all parties;

Reiterates its conviction that any lasting peace for Sudan must be negotiated with the support of the partner states in the region gathered in IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority for Development);

Urges all parties, their supporters abroad, and those seeking to assist in the achievement of a negotiated peace, to support the resumption of the IGAD Peace Process, to cooperate with it, and to place their various initiatives within the framework of the IGAD Principles.

Message of the International Consultation on the Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum

Convened by the WCC in Geneva, 4-6 September 1997.

Introduction.

Some forty persons representing councils of churches in the Great Lakes Region and churches and church agencies in Europe and North America have gathered in Geneva, 4-6 September 1997, in response to the initiative of church leaders in the Great Lakes Region of Africa to convene a Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum. The aim of such a Forum is to further ecumenical cooperation in pursuit of justice, peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes.

This process began at a landmark gathering of church leaders from the Great Lakes region in Johannesburg, South Africa, in November 1996, where a Core Group was created to follow-up the plan of action developed there. The critical situations in Rwanda and Burundi and in Zaire have been the central foci of this effort, but church leaders recognized that none of these situations could be addressed effectively outside the broader regional context of countries and churches directly affected by these tragic occurrences.

The Core Group, comprised of representatives of councils of churches in Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo), Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, has met twice. At the first meeting, in Entebbe, it decided to create a Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum in the region to include all churches, and another at the global level to which external church and
agency partners would be invited. At that meeting it was also decided to invite the churches of the Sudan to join in the process, and the South African Council of Churches as an observer.

A second Core Group meeting was held recently in Kigali to further its work and to prepare for this Consultation. We have based ourselves substantially on the recommendations of that meeting, and have been guided by the Common Principles for Witness developed there. We consider that, together, these represent considerable growth in understanding and mutual commitment among churches in the countries most directly concerned. Peace and reconciliation initiatives in the region itself are the indispensable foundation of effective ecumenical efforts worldwide.

Here in Geneva we have heard reports from the councils of churches in most of the countries in the Great Lakes region and from external partners about their concerns and efforts to witness and serve in this region. The Consultation sincerely regretted the absence of representatives of the National Council of Christian Churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and expressed the hope that they would be able to join soon as regular participants in these deliberations. The consultation equally conveyed its solidarity with the National Council of Churches of Kenya and with the churches of Kenya as they seek to fulfill the heavy responsibilities incumbent upon them at this time of political crisis.

Broadening the Framework

We recognize that we are only at the beginning of what must necessarily be a long process. As the Core Group meeting in Kigali stated, it is essential for a process to be set in motion by leaders of national churches and councils to be shared with and assumed by local churches/congregations in all the countries concerned, and to be expanded to include churches that are not currently members of the present national councils. It must lead to the building of new alliances with other faith groups and actors in civil society beyond the churches. And it must be surrounded and supported by churches and agencies in the global ecumenical movement.

This broad international consultation strongly reaffirms the value of this process, and the need for an ecumenical forum in the region for sharing of ideas, mutual support and challenge within the Christian fellowship, and the development and sharing of strategies of action. We underscore the Kigali understanding of this process that it must be brought into the daily life of all the churches in the region. The regional Ecumenical Forum must provide a place for points of contention within and between the various societies to be confronted directly and in a loving spirit. It must come to the point where topics which are presently taboo can be aired without fear. It must strengthen Christians, their churches and church leaders to give a faithful, costly, prophetic witness for justice, peace, equality and freedom in inclusive societies. It must not only embrace, but be an instrument of all ethnic groups and of women, youth and the elderly, including the uprooted in or from every society. It needs to shape a vision of true democracy appropriate to African society as a challenge to the notion that the holding of elections alone is sufficient to qualify a country as democratic.

Above all, it must be a means by which to help churches in individual societies to establish priorities for action appropriate to their individual needs, to work out cross-national actions within the region, and develop means of sharing of information and resources with partners beyond the region.

Building on the Kigali Common Principles for Witness
While affirming the Common Principles for Witness elaborated by the Core Group in Kigali, this Consultation recommends that the following be considered for inclusion in the near future:

1. The need for churches to remain independent of governments or political parties in their respective countries in order to be effective in their prophetic role and free to perform the role of mediator when needed.
2. While forgiveness is a demand of the Gospel, as the Kigali Principles state, the relationship between confession, repentance, compensation and forgiveness is complex, and this needs further careful reflection. To forgive is not to forget, but is necessary for the healing of memory and of society.
3. There is a need to eradicate the culture of impunity which persists in society. This is true for those responsible for past crimes against humanity and systematic violations of human rights. It must also apply to present crimes and abuses of power.
4. Absolute justice is never achievable. However, to start the process of individual and collective healing in society, the truth must be told about crimes and their perpetrators in order for victims to sense that society has taken their pain and loss into account. There is also a need to tell the truth about the present, to eliminate taboos, and to help create a climate in which the fear of speaking the truth may be overcome.
5. Churches, church agencies and councils both within and beyond the region must provide a model of fully participatory democracy to society as a whole by seeing to it that their own processes of decision-making and financial dealings are transparent and fully accountable to their own members and to partners.

Building an effective Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum

This Consultation welcomes the call of the Core Group for the development of a Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum in the Region and related initiatives in each country of the region which will strive to be inclusive of the entire Christian community, and of its call for a global expression of the Forum in which churches and agency partners beyond the region can be engaged.

We welcome and encourage the Core Group’s initiatives, and express appreciation to the World Council of Churches and the All-Africa Conference of Churches for their support and encouragement of this process.

We welcome in particular the efforts of the Core Group to adopt rigorous discipline and means to sustain the ecumenical effort in the region with their own resources. This consultation recognizes, however, that we bear shared responsibility for seeking resources necessary for the implementation of the priorities identified by the Core Group in the region.

We share the view that future meetings of the global Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum be held, if at all possible, within the region.

Proposals for urgent follow-up actions

The situation of continuing violence, insecurity and fear in the Great Lakes Region demands that the priority programs of the Core Group be implemented with urgency. Tensions grow within and between countries as a result of this crisis which demand the attention of the churches within and beyond the region in order to avoid a deepening of conflict.

In light of these realities, this Consultation endorses the priority areas for action outlined by the Kigali meeting of the Core Group. We agree to support the Core Group, in particular, by:
1. Seeking an early invitation from the National Council of Christian Churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo to the Core Group to complete its round of pastoral visits in the region with a visit to that country.

2. Seeking, in consultation with the councils in the region, qualified ecumenical enablers, both men and women, to assist the churches in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda in identifying priorities in mission, witness and action for peace and reconciliation.

3. Assisting as may be required in responding to the request from the Councils of Churches in Burundi and Tanzania to send an ecumenical delegation to provide an independent assessment of the situation and to advise the churches on steps they may take to help ease the tensions.

4. Strengthening the management and leadership capacities of councils and churches in the region, including their capacities to equip lay leadership - men and women, young and old - better to serve local communities.

5. Assisting in the identification of resources to develop a capacity to provide trauma counseling for individuals and groups in societies struggling to recover from genocide and massive violations of human rights, including the churches themselves and their leadership.

6. Helping to develop more effective systems of information-sharing among partners in the region, and between them and partners abroad in order to develop more effective advocacy and international solidarity.

7. Facilitating their efforts to elaborate concrete proposals, taking into consideration the results of this consultation, to be brought to their constituencies at the meeting of the Regional Ecumenical Forum scheduled for February 1998.

**Conclusion.** We give thanks to God for having brought us together in this Forum and pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide and strengthen us in our resolve to remain together in faithful service to our one Lord and common calling.

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**Message from the World Council of Churches to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, 25 June 1997**

Grace and Peace to you from our One Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ,

The World Council of Churches shares the anticipation and high expectations expressed by European Christians of this Second European Ecumenical Assembly and pays high tribute to the Conference of European Churches and the Conference of the European Bishops' Conferences for your renewed initiative.

The WCC's roots lie deep in the soil of Europe. It was European Christian laypersons and church leaders who, at the beginning of this century, recognized most clearly the common responsibility of the churches to promote understanding and reconciliation among the nations and the peoples of Europe both before and especially after the tragedy of the First World War. Though by the grace of God the WCC has grown over these nearly fifty years to become a global instrument of the churches, it remains deeply committed to Europe and its churches.

Europe is in need of the reconciliation you seek. Its divisions have led to two world wars, and brought the world to the brink of nuclear conflagration. Its colonial enterprises have exploited and divided the peoples of much of the rest of the world. It was within Europe that the Church was divided between East and West, opening a deep chasm which still today...
threatens the peace among nations and posing the chief stumbling block in the way of the pursuit of Christian unity. Thus the expectant eyes of the world are upon this great gathering, and Christians around the globe pray for its success.

The New European Reality

The changes which have swept over this continent since you were gathered at Basel have focused world attention on Europe in new ways. The hopes of the nations soared that the overcoming of the chasm which divided the peoples of Europe and then the entire globe into warring camps would bring global renewal. Indeed, the benefits of the new entente were rapidly felt as one after another the bleeding sores of conflicts in Africa, Asia, Central America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East began to be healed. Soon, however, Europe itself was again a theater of war as nations shattered along the fault lines of ancient national, ethnic, racial, religious and confessional enmities.

Europeans know better than anyone how complex and daunting is the task of reconciliation. The bloody European ethnic wars of the past decade, and the commemorations around Europe of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe have shown that past wounds were “healed too lightly.” As the prophet Jeremiah warned, many have shouted out “peace!” where there was no real peace. (Jer. 6:14) In the Message of the Basel Assembly European Christians called upon God for forgiveness of both their collective and individual sins for having contributed to bringing about a global crisis. “Repentance,” they affirmed, “is the condition of credible witness.” But reconciliation does not come cheap. Confession of guilt is not enough unless it is accompanied by concrete acts of repentance and metanoia and is perceived by the victims as genuine. Europe is in need not only of a reduction of tensions, but of a deep healing of the memories of its peoples. Without justice, no apparent peace is trustworthy.

True reconciliation is indeed a gift of God. For, as recent European wars of “ethnic cleansing” have shown, our collective failure over the centuries to face the truth of the victims has often made it impossible to find truly just solutions to today’s conflicts. Legitimate claims for justice by one party deny the other’s equally legitimate claims to correct injustices inflicted at another point in time. Yet the forgiveness of sins and the new life we have through Christ’s saving act on the Cross demands that Christians live out their faith in acts of love for the other, both in society and in the Church. Christians will be seen as credible reconcilers only to the extent that they are able to become reconciled one with another. The failure of churches to accomplish this has had dire political consequences throughout history, and very particularly in recent years. Thus the pursuit of the unity of the Church which is given in Christ is both an imperative of the faith and a political necessity. Europe and the world await not only your expression of hope, but the elaboration of the vision of a reconciled Christian Church capable of contributing concretely to the healing of a still deeply divided Europe.

A Vision for a Reconciled Europe

Such a vision for a reconciled Europe must deal both with the legacy of the past and with the new challenges of the present.

It must be a vision of justice based on the notion of the socially responsible society, one of Europe's most significant contributions to the understanding of the role of the State. It is noteworthy that you meet in the sixtieth anniversary year of the landmark Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State which warned eloquently of the dangers inherent in the tendency of the State in Europe to abandon its social responsibility to its citizens. The growing
mobilization of working people in Europe these days in protest of disappearing jobs and diminishing social protections signals the crucial need for the churches to turn their attention once again to these dangers.

It must be a vision of tolerance and freedom, revisiting Church-State relations, and relationship of churches to European institutions in search of greater respect for religious plurality, tolerance and freedom. The churches must take up the challenge to help shape the “Soul of Europe,” while avoiding the temptation of thinking that they themselves are that “Soul” or the risk of becoming so bound up with institutions that they surrender their freedom and can no longer hold those institutions accountable to the peoples. It must also give guidance about how to achieve a tolerant society in social terms: how to turn back the resurgent tide of xenophobia, racism and antisemitism, how to assure full protection of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, how to foster positive interfaith relations, how to guarantee the rights to political dissent and conscientious objection.

It must be a vision of a more secure future. European security remains based primarily on military considerations. New approaches need to be elaborated, based on the notions of common security and of a “common European house” discussed in Basel which correspond to the new European reality. The comprehensive approach to European security elaborated in the Helsinki Final Act needs to be retaken and updated in ways appropriate to today's pan-European requirements.

It must be an inclusive vision. Europe's continuing reliance on Cold War thinking based on the need for an enemy must be recognized and finally overcome, in international relations, between the majority and minorities in society, between men and women, and very particularly in the internal theological, doctrinal or confessional divisions within the Church.

It must be a fair and generous vision. It needs to ask whether the expansion of existing West European institutional frameworks either for security or for European cooperation is a legitimate answer to the unique needs of Eastern and Central Europe, or whether other approaches might not be more appropriate and responsive.

It must be a vision for Europe which seeks to reconcile Europe with the world and with the Creation. It must be repentant of the suffering Europe has inflicted upon its former colonies, locating Europe in its global context and taking account of Europe's responsibility to promote global justice and peace. It must be repentant of its theologies and approaches to science and the economy which have contributed to despoiling the global environment, assuming shared responsibility for respectful stewardship of the Creation.

You have given yourselves a daunting, but urgent and necessary task. We share your high expectations, and look forward both to what you shall accomplish here, and to the agenda you lay out for the future cooperation of the churches in pursuit of such an ample vision for a reconciled Europe. May the Holy Spirit inspire and guide you.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Statement on the crisis in Albania
In various messages to Archbishop Anastasios, primate of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church in Albania, the only member church of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches in that country, we have expressed the deep concern and solidarity of the ecumenical family in Europe and worldwide with his church and the people of Albania in this time of crisis.

The World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches warmly welcomes the initiatives taken by the religious leaders in Albania to promote a solution to this crisis. Their joint actions reflect the traditional harmonious relations among the churches and Islam in Albania, and belie any suggestion that this conflict arises from ethnic or religious tensions.

We welcome in particular and endorse the repeated appeals of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church in Albania calling for an end to violence and bloodshed, and for a just and negotiated solution to the crisis, the establishment of an interim government and for new elections as soon as they can be prepared responsibly.

We share the appeal of the Church for the restoration of order, and a cessation of all acts of violence and attacks against property, including in particular those directed against places of religious worship and social service institutions in Albania.

We also welcome the efforts of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to defuse this crisis, to assist in the shaping of representative and durable democratic institutions, and to provide relief to the most vulnerable in the country.

We urge churches and agencies to be attentive to opportunities, through ACT (Action by Churches Together), to assist in the task of meeting human need created by this crisis, and to strengthen church ministries in Albania to the people of the country. Similarly, we urge governments, especially those in Europe, and all responsible inter-governmental institutions to turn their urgent attention to the long-term economic and social development of Albania.

In this Ecumenical Year of Churches in Solidarity with Uprooted People, we are especially sensitive to the need for host governments to protect and assist those who have fled from chaos and violence in Albania in order to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. This is not their responsibility alone, however. The international community, particularly the governments of Europe, must assist the host governments in meeting their responsibilities.

The World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches recommit themselves to strive with churches and partners in Albania for the restoration and rehabilitation of communities and properties, and for the nurturing of a society based on justice, freedom and respect for all.

We and our member churches around the world continue to pray for the whole people of Albania, and to hope that the legacy of their recent past can soon be overcome so they may be free to construct the just, peaceful and tolerant society they need and deserve.

At this time of Lent, when together with the churches and Christians in Albania we commemorate and follow the way of Jesus Christ to his Cross and his rising from the dead, we affirm the power of God to call forth new life out of human confusion and despair.
Request to rescind court decision to sentence a bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Your Excellency:

We write to you on a matter of urgent and grave concern to us. It has been brought to our attention that the Third Police Court of Fatih district in Istanbul has sentenced a Bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Metropolitan Iakovos of Laodikeia (Haralambos Sofroniadis), to five months imprisonment (suspended sentence). The sentence was passed as a result of a private complaint filed by one Mr. Busidar Tsipov and Fr. Constantine Kostov, on the alleged ground that Metropolitan Iakovos officiating at the Easter Evensong Service, at St. Stephen's Bulgarian Orthodox Church, near Fener, was an attempt to “hellenise” the Bulgarian community living in Istanbul.

We wish to point out that the presence of Metropolitan Iakovos on the solemn occasion of Easter at St. Stephen's on 14 April, 1996, was at the invitation of the Vice President of the Parish Council, Mr. Kyriakos Iliaze. His presence was in keeping with the agreement between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Sofia. According to this agreement the Bulgarian parishes in Istanbul are under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as the Greek parishes in Bulgaria are under the Bulgarian Patriarchate. Therefore, the relations between the two Churches operate in adherence to the precepts of the Orthodox Canon law as well as the centuries-old ecclesial tradition and not governed by any national or political criteria.

The decision of the Third Police Court of Fatih district in Istanbul to take cognizance on a private complaint relating to the internal affairs of the church, pertaining to its pastoral, spiritual and worship life, is unwarranted and unlawful. The action of the Court constitutes a serious breach of the internationally accepted norms and principles of religious freedom, liberty, and belief and violates church-state relations.

We therefore request your Excellency to take immediately the necessary steps in view of rescinding the decision of the Court.

Respectfully yours,
Mary Ann Lundy
Deputy General Secretary

Request for information about alleged authorization to convert an Armenian church into a mosque

Your Excellency:

According to information received by the World Council of Churches, the Minister of Culture of Turkey has recently authorized the transformation of the Armenian church in Erzoum into a mosque. Though it apparently has not served as a place of worship in recent times, this church which dates from the 17th century is an edifice of considerable religious, cultural and historical importance, containing important frescos and paintings.
According to our information, transformation plans would erase these works of art and substantially alter the physical structure of the building, which is part of Turkey's rich cultural heritage.

We would be most grateful for any information you might be able to obtain about the transformation plans, and of course hope that the Ministry will take into consideration the concerns of the Armenian community and churches around the world that the integrity of this site be preserved.

Respectfully yours,
Dwain C. Epps
Coordinator, International Affairs

Communiqué of the Symposium on Religion and the Contemporary World
Issued in Teheran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 21-23 November 1996.

Representatives of Islam and Christianity, two religions which share the Abrahamic tradition of faith, found new points of commonality during a three-day, high level symposium of scholars and spiritual leaders in Teheran, and explored further areas of cooperation for peace and justice in a world which they described as being in severe socio-economic and spiritual crisis.

This jointly-sponsored Symposium, held on the invitation of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Communication, was a continuation of a dialogue between Iranian Muslims and Christians related to the World Council of Churches (WCC) which began nearly two years ago. Participants from the WCC included eleven Christian scholars from Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East. From Iran, participants included some twenty prominent scholars and religious leaders from Qum and Teheran. Representatives of WCC member churches in Iran also accompanied the dialogue.

The three-day symposium was opened in a televised formal public session presided over by Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Taskhiri, head of the Organization for Islamic Culture and Communication, and jointly chaired by the Rev. Dwain Epps, Coordinator for International Affairs of the WCC, Dr. Tarek Mitri, WCC Executive Secretary for Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Iranian Islamic scholar Allame Ja'afar, and Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammed Khamene'i, Head of the Committee of Scholars for Inter-religious Dialogue. In attendance were some 250 invited guests who included a range of Islamic scholars, Iranian Christian clergy and lay persons.

In the following days, the Symposium discussed papers presented by Christian and Islamic scholars on human rights, peace and peaceful coexistence between the followers of both religions, the role of religion in the modern world, religious anthropology, ecology and the threat to the ecosystem, moral welfare, the place of the family in society, education, economic and social justice, and the role of religion in international relations.

The discussions took place in an atmosphere of prayer and respect for each other's religious faith. They led to a deepening of personal relationships, and discovery of broad areas of commonality on some of the urgent issues of the day. Participants reported substantial progress in clarifying differences of perspective on some issues, and in identifying possibilities of interfaith cooperation in addressing a range of other topics.

The dialogue reached agreements in the following areas:
The contemporary world was described as one which suffers deeply from consequences of secularism, modernism and post-modernism, and from a profound spiritual crisis. Religion has a responsibility to help human beings suffering as a result of this, to offer positive alternatives, to meet spiritual needs and to guide people in their daily life.

It was a matter of deep concern to the Symposium that powers are involved in open conflicts in the name of religion. Christians and Muslims agreed that true religion is always opposed to war, and that religions must do all in their power to demonstrate their common commitment to overcoming conflict. This includes challenging powers when they misuse the name of either Christianity or Islam to justify war or the use of violence to resolve conflict.

Peace must be based on justice, and Christians and Muslims have a shared responsibility for achieving such a peace in international relations. Peace without justice can only lead to further atrocities, as has been seen recently in places like Bosnia, Rwanda and the Middle East.

Religions, as guardians of moral values and ethical standards for humankind, can play an important role in a time of proliferation of ethnic and national conflicts. They can also counter the process of globalization, which renders states powerless to defend huge parts of humanity against its onslaught. The Symposium has seen the role of religions as universal forces at the service of one humankind created by God. It called on religions to strengthen the capacity of nations and peoples to defend their economies, cultures and traditions.

Muslims and Christians agree that God created humankind with inherent value and dignity. The Symposium agreed to do further work together on human rights: to consider them from the perspective of religion, to deepen mutual understanding, and, while recognizing and respecting differences of approach, to develop cooperation in their implementation. In their discussions on human rights, Muslims and Christians were in accord that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was an achievement. They shared concern about the ways human rights – intended to further the cause of peace and justice – are misused by some states as a political weapon against others. The Symposium denounced the application of double standards in the field of human rights.

Muslim and Christian scholars agreed on the importance of women’s rights in society, and decided to pursue this question in greater depth by organizing a future consultation based on a religious perspective.

The family is understood by both Islam and Christianity to be the basis of society in the created order. In this time when the society is threatened by corruption and all forms of moral degradation, the family is especially at risk. Religion calls the world to respect the family and authentic family values essential to the well-being of the whole society. To this end, the Symposium agreed to pursue the development of education from a religious perspective on family life and values.

The Symposium condemned those forces operating in the contemporary world, which are driving ever greater numbers of human beings into absolute poverty. The causes of poverty today are certainly to be found in the proliferation of the uncontrolled free market economy. But the roots of the problem lie deeper in the moral weakness of society and of individual human beings, manifest in such things as corruption, consumerism, egotistical exploitation of the earth’s non-renewable resources, over-consumption, and loss of a sense of responsibility for the weak, deprived and vulnerable members of society. Here religion has a central role to play. Muslims and Christians agreed on the need for a deep spiritual renewal of human society. Secularist
politics or ideology cannot correct the situation. People of faith bear mutual responsibility before God for the welfare of humankind, and the Symposium agreed to work further on joint Christian-Muslim approaches to the global economic and social crisis.

The Symposium also condemned the rise of numbers of the uprooted and refugees in the world fleeing from conflict and economic misery, and called for joint Muslim-Christian efforts to meet the human need of these beloved of God.

Conclusions

The Symposium agreed that its conclusions and experience of dialogue should not be confined to the level of scholars and spiritual leaders, but should be brought into the everyday life of believing communities, wherever they may be. In order to pursue this goal, it was agreed:

◦ To publish the results of this Symposium in Farsi and English, in order that others could share its ideas.
◦ To cooperate in research and publication on culture and religion in each other's societies.
◦ To undertake joint research and publication projects, such as the preparation of a dictionary of terms, which will help Christians and Muslims in dialogues at all levels.
◦ To continue discussions in the field of human rights, and explore ways in which Muslims and Christians could collaborate in overcoming the current stalemate encountered in the United Nations with regard to international cooperation for the proper implementation of these rights.
◦ To cooperate in the resolution of conflicts everywhere, particularly in the Caucasus and in Africa, and to contribute to the building of understanding between Christians and Muslims to strengthen their efforts to find non-violent solutions to conflicts;
◦ To continue this dialogue begun nearly two years ago with a further meeting in mid-1997 (1376 on the Iranic calendar) whose agenda will be drawn up in a way to identify specific areas of future cooperation.

Appeal for protection of the premises of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul

Letter to His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaeos in Istanbul, 1 October 1996.

Your All Holiness,

It was with deep dismay that we learned yesterday evening of the bomb attack perpetrated on the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We thank God that there were apparently no injuries either to yourself or to the residents. We are deeply distraught, nevertheless, at the physical damage which has been done to the Patriarchal Cathedral and the residential quarters, and the renewed insecurity which this act of aggression implies.

I enclose a letter we have addressed today to the Prime Minister of Turkey, urging him to bring to justice those responsible for the attack, and calling upon him to ensure that it not be repeated.

You may be assured of our unfailing commitment to Your All Holiness and to the symbol and reality of the Ecumenical Patriarchate living in the continuous uncertainty of resurgent religious extremism. May God grant you peace, and continue to bless your ministry.

Yours in Christ,

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
Letter to H.E. Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, 1 October 1996.

Your Excellency:

We have received in the late afternoon of yesterday the disconcerting news of the bombing, which occurred the previous night on the premises of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. According to our information, though considerable damage was done to this important site of great historical importance to your country and to the Christian community worldwide, there was no loss of life or personal injury to its residents.

We have been informed that the Turkish authorities are actively investigating this incident, and seeking to identify the extremist group which they have indicated may be responsible for this tragic, violent attack.

We are grateful for the rapid response made by the authorities, and know that the Government of Turkey will do all in its power to bring to justice the criminals who have acted in contravention of the law of the nation and your own good intentions.

This letter is to register with you our concern for the physical integrity of the residence of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the offices of his historic See, which is guaranteed by international agreements. We share with you the desire of Turkey to give evidence of religious tolerance in your society. The existence and unhindered life and witness of the Patriarchate in this ancient city to which both Islam and Christianity are deeply attached is, we are convinced, a tribute to Turkey and a great asset to your society. We assure you, as we have done with your predecessors, our full cooperation in assuring the full respect due the Patriarchate and its protection in the future from any further act of intolerance and aggression.

Respectfully yours,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Here We Stand United in Action for Peace: The Position of the Sudanese Church on the Current Conflict in the Country

Adopted by representatives of the Sudan Council of Churches and the New Sudan Council of Churches at their joint meeting convened and facilitated by the WCC, Morges, Switzerland, 25 September 1996.

Preamble

The Gospel tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ came not for a part but for the whole of humanity. Thus the Churches must be an instrument of reconciliation in the midst of human struggles for peace and justice anywhere in the world.

“Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5: 9).

The churches’ calling demands that they condemn war and constantly engage in efforts to seek peace and pursue it. Peaceful resolution of conflict has always been a major task of the churches. In 1972, the fellowship of churches under the ecumenical umbrella was responsible for
the signing of the Addis Ababa Accord that brought to an end the conflict in South Sudan. Since then however, the fighting was resumed in 1983 and still continues to be a major source of concern for the Churches of Sudan.

It was in March 1993 that the joint meetings of the SCC and NSCC first took place to develop a common witness in relation to the worsening situation in Sudan and to ensure that the Churches of Sudan, both in the North as well as in the South, remain at the centre of all ecumenical endeavours for peace and reconciliation.

Since then these meetings have taken place regularly, sometimes in conjunction with other ecumenical events.

At such meetings the churches of Sudan have availed themselves of the opportunity to consider, interpret and assess the various peace initiatives that have been in the offering both at the intergovernmental as well as at the non-governmental levels- Abuja Peace, IGAD Declaration of Principles, Washington Declaration, Carter Peace initiative etc.

At the last such meeting in Oslo, Norway in February 1996 the absence of a Sudan Church position paper on peace and reconciliation was greatly felt. And it was in view of this feeling that the SCC and NSCC came out with a paper: “Here We Stand” that states the position of the Sudanese Church on the current conflict in the country.

Since the paper was developed, many events have taken place in relation to the efforts to resolve the conflict in Sudan. These include the UNESC0/UNDP-sponsored symposium on the humanitarian dimension of the conflict (May 1996); the Political Charter signed between SSIM and the Government of Sudan (April 1996); and the Declaration of Principles for the resolution of the Nuba Mountains Problem (July 1996). Most of the efforts made to resolve the conflict in Sudan have little or no participation of the churches in the country. Peacemaking however, remains a matter of faith for all Christians and an important mission of the Church. It is therefore imperative that the Churches in Sudan actively participate in peace-making efforts. The common position paper now titled Here we stand, United in Action for Peace will be the basis for churches’ ministry on peace and reconciliation in Sudan.

The Current Conflict.

Sudan has suffered 40 years of destructive internal conflict with only brief periods of peace and calm. There has been huge loss of life, displacement and the destruction of nearly all social, religious and civil institutions, especially in the South. Millions of our people are denied the basic essentials of life, basic human liberties and access to health care and education.

Therefore Sudanese church leaders from all parts of Sudan have met in Norway in February 1996 and in Switzerland- September 1996 to reflect on the war in our country; the appalling suffering of our people and the desperate need for peace.

We feel it is our responsibility to speak for all the people of Sudan and to suggest ways forward out of the present deadlock. Accordingly we have written this statement of our position, to which we are all committed, concerning our vision and hopes for the future of our country. In the search for a just and lasting peace we offer ourselves without reserve in the service of God and for our people.

The Church’s Calling
The Church is not a narrow social, ethnic or political grouping within Sudanese society. It is the free fellowship of all those who have been drawn together by the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. As those entrusted with the gospel of God’s love we wish to make the following affirmations.

i) The Church in Sudan exists for all the people.

ii) We believe ourselves called to share the gospel of God’s love freely with all the people of our land. We offer the gospel in a spirit of free and open invitation.

iii) Believing that all human beings are made in God’s image, we are concerned for the well-being and for justice for all the marginalized and oppressed people of Sudan. We will stand with all the suffering people in the Sudan and speak on their behalf.

iv) We believe that the problems of Sudan will not be solved by violence. The war must end and negotiations conducted in sincerity and integrity must begin. We commit ourselves to share in that process.

v) We believe that the gospel teaches us that repentance and forgiveness are necessary to the process of reconciliation. Following Christ and the way of the Cross, we are learning the path of costly sacrificial love which enables us to forgive our enemies.

Our Vision for Sudan’s Future

Whatever political solution is chosen by the people, we believe that peace and harmony will depend on the following principles being followed.

i) A recognition that all human beings are created by God and are precious and equal in his sight.

ii) Acceptance that cultural, linguistic and social diversity is a gift of God’s creation, and not to be suppressed. It is rather to be celebrated and recognised as a national richness and resource.

iii) Freedom of religious expression, worship and witness.

iv) A recognition that a lasting and true peace must be based on justice and full and equal rights for all citizens.

v) Participation in political, social and economic life should be open to all irrespective of racial, ethnic, social or religious background.

vi) A resolve to steadily widen the effective participation of all the people in political processes and decision-making.

vii) Political and social conflicts should be solved peacefully.

viii) An openness to trusting dialogue between alienated political, social and religious groups within society.

As leaders of the Sudanese Church we commit ourselves to defend and promote these principles and to work for reconciliation at all levels. We commit ourselves to pray for peace, for reconciliation, for those who suffer, for the oppressed and for the oppressor.

Practical Steps

It is not the role of the Church to prescribe particular political solutions or programmes. However, in faithfulness to the principles to which we have committed ourselves, and with deep concern for the well-being of all the people, we urge the following steps should be taken urgently.

i) The war must stop. It daily increases the suffering of the people and produces no hope of resolution.

ii) Closely following the cessation of hostilities a process of popular participation must be put in place to resolve urgent political problems. A referendum or similar process must be put in place to address the claim for self-determination by the marginalized areas of Sudan.

iii) Meanwhile relief, development and educational activities should continue in all war-affected areas and amongst the refugee communities.
iv) In particular, humanitarian agencies including Operation Lifeline Sudan should be given full access to all areas of the Nuba Mountains, and Ingessana Hills.

v) An adequate international monitoring procedure must be put in place to oversee:
   a) the cessation of hostilities;
   b) the consultation and referendum process;
   c) humanitarian assistance.

   The UN, IGAD and international religious agencies should be involved in the monitoring process.

The Sudanese Church sees its own role in this process to be the promotion of reconciliation amongst Sudan’s divided and embittered communities in North and South. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God and urges us to repentance and forgiveness so that we may be reconciled to our alienated brothers and sisters.

To this, whatever the cost, we commit ourselves, entrusting ourselves to the God who, in Christ, loves us and gave himself for us. May He grant us peace and true healing and reconciliation within our beloved but suffering country.

Rev. John Gatluok Rev. Sirisio Oromo
Vice Chairman Vice Chairman
Sudan Council of Churches New Sudan Council of Churches

Message of the CCIA Consultation on Church, Community and State in the Contemporary World
Consultation to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Seoul, Korea, 15-17 July 1996.

Almost sixty years ago the foundations of contemporary ecumenical social thought, and the bases for the churches’ engagement in international affairs, were laid by leaders of the Christian church confronted by a world in deepening crisis. The concerns and preoccupations of the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State have continued to reverberate across these several decades. The fiftieth anniversary of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs presents us with an opportunity to explore the continuities and discontinuities in the ecumenical understanding of the role of the church in the world.

We have chosen to use the theme of the Oxford Conference as the lens through which to examine the present situation of the churches and international affairs.

It was particularly appropriate for us to do this in Seoul, Korea, where less than ten years ago several of those present at this consultation were part of the Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Its affirmations provide a backdrop to our deliberations at this time.

Our discussions here in Korea have added potency, as we experience the realities of this country which continues to bear the visible marks of the Cold War era. A country in which the church has at times courageously and sacrificially defended the people against the excesses of a state committed to serving economic and military interests rather than human needs. A church

* Organized in 1937 by the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the churches.
which continues to give expression to the people’s desire for the unification of the nation as their unique contribution to regional and global peace and security.

Oxford had the benefit of the thinking of many of those who were seen at the time as being among the best theological minds in the world. Our understanding of who must participate in constructing meaning and discerning the movement of God in our history has undergone significant change, and the pool from which we can draw has broadened and deepened. As a result of this greater inclusiveness, fresh ideas have come and new expertise has been added. Our discussion has highlighted the importance of bringing all these minds together wherever they may be found as this can only enhance the quality of our analysis and strengthen the validity of our conclusions.

We acknowledge that our meeting over these several days is little more than a very preliminary attempt to reopen a chapter which has been unexplored for perhaps too long. Our hope is that the churches will use the record of these discussions as a contribution to their own process of debate and reflection, particularly as we prepare for the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

**The State**

The Oxford Conference was held at a time when the Western world was in chaos and falling apart. The rise of fascism in Germany was a palpable, frightening reality in 1937. It forcefully confronted the Church with the issue of its relationship to the State, and its attitude to nationalism. In other spheres, there were concerns that the State, especially in relation to its role in protecting the poor and vulnerable, was losing power, or abdicating its responsibilities. Secularism and totalitarianism seemed to be emergent on all sides. The question was: How could the Church be the Church in such a situation?

Today, the role and authority of the State is again under siege as global financial institutions usurp the function of shaping and defining our world. Indeed it has been suggested that one of the characteristics which distinguish the present period from the previous one, is the dominance of capital and the idealization of neo-liberal conceptualizations of the market. This factor should be added to the present-day discussion of the Oxford theme.

While the supporters of the process of globalization argue that it promotes social, political, cultural, and, in particular, economic integration (which should perhaps be called homogenization), it is noteworthy that it is characterized more by fragmentation and alienation. Communities suffer from internal division or are set one against the other, and people are drawn into creating scapegoats to rationalize their own exclusion.

The new World Trade Organization (WTO) is in a real sense the new guardian of a “re-engineered” global division of labor.Despite the potential of supra-state organizations such as the WTO to defend the economic interests of poor countries and smaller producers, the trend is already towards the elaboration of the kinds of terms for the production of goods and services, which result in discrimination in favor of the wealthy corporate sector.

The WTO joins other global economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as well as political institutions such as the UN Security Council, as a defender of powerful economic and political interests. Indeed the resurgent dominance of the Security Council belies the claim that a new era of peace is being ushered in.
There are no signs of any meaningful reduction in military expenditures in any of the world’s regions. Indeed there has been no abatement in the competition between nations to be armed. Armaments continue to flow, the globe continues to be wracked by war, and the priorities of States and lives of communities continue to be deformed by processes of militarization.

The social and economic impact is clear. It includes, among other things, the virtual elimination of public provision of essential human services for most members of many societies, a rapidly widening gap between the rich and the poor within and between nations and worsening tensions and a growing sense of personal and collective insecurity.

Since Oxford, the concept of “nation-State” became current. Deformations of this idea also emerged, and marked the post WW II period. One of these was the “national security State.”

The latter, heavily determined by military influence and control, is giving way now to new forms of democracy, however fragile. These new democracies have no strong support in the State as the organized expression of community. The State, not only, but especially in small territories, seems incapable of defending national sovereignty, and thus of defending cultures, traditions and common aspirations against the onslaught of the unregulated flow of speculative and exploitative capital.

The new visions of democracy and human freedom which have emerged in recent times are not without their own tensions and potential contradictions. Several states for example have yet to shape an appropriate response to the demands of indigenous peoples and other groups to have their rights acknowledged in the new dispensation.

While recognizing the possible value in reconceptualizing the term “nation-state,” it must be acknowledged that the ability of peoples to provide an organized response to their collective economic and social needs is being steadily undermined. Some participants in the consultation felt that there was a need for the State to be strengthened in order to assume its duty to defend the poor and vulnerable, and that the church might have a role in this regard.

In fact, there remains both a “community” which is often referred to in positive terms as nation and a state associated with it. The resulting combination often fails to meet the needs of the community. But what kind of State do we wish to see emerge? In addition, what kind of international institutions, or what reforms in present ones, are necessary in order to strengthen the positive roles of States and control the abuses of power of some States which are also manifest in the present day?

These were but some of the issues and developments which made us ask how the Church can build on its earlier work in the realm of international affairs and continue to forcefully address itself to the true centres of power in the contemporary world. What would it mean to remind individual nations and states, as well as the new global institutions of the need for repentance? The drafters of the message from the Oxford Conference reminded the Church of the need for it to repent its complicity with the world in order that it might credibly call others to repentance.

The Community

Oxford was preoccupied with the rise in Nazi Germany of a particular understanding of community as Volks: “a shared identity of blood, occupancy of the same territory, possession of
the same language, customs, history and culture.” The negative interpretation and practice of this conceptualization remains with us in some situations marked by narrow nationalism and ethnocentrism.

But our consultation pointed out that it is impossible to speak of a single form of community (koinonia) as the model to be pursued. Rather there are several different, and sometimes conflicting conceptions and manifestations of community. Indeed it was observed that the scriptures describe not just one form of community, but rather various forms (koinoniae). Nation, identity, common bonds, shared experiences, memories and history, are some ways of defining Community. The process of globalization already mentioned has contributed to the disintegration of community at international, national and local levels. It is the people themselves who define and organize their communities. This is a fundamental principle which is under attack today. But the heartfelt desire of these same persons for meaning and solidarity has not been quelled.

Associated with our exploration of the character of community, was the attention now being given to the role of “civil society”. This is perhaps one of the intersections of local, national and global. It is also one of the possible arenas in which the Church may act to strengthen people’s organizations so that they may successfully confront the ravages of capital.

But, as it was at the time of the Oxford Conference, we are alert to the danger of the Church becoming either a pawn of or synonymous with a Community in its more ethnocentric and xenophobic manifestation.

We can only reiterate the stance taken so many years ago at Oxford: “The deification of nation, race, or class, or of political or cultural ideals, is idolatry, and can only lead to increasing division and disaster”.

**The Church**

The Church of which Oxford spoke was the universal Church which is far more than the sum of its individual parts. There is, it said, no strictly “local” Church. The Church is the one Body of Christ. However we must acknowledge that the expressions of this Body in those countries outside of North America and Europe, which were represented at Oxford only by a limited number of missionaries and even fewer of their nationals, are growing more rapidly than in those countries so overwhelmingly present at that historic meeting. The composition of a conference held today, similar to that held in 1937, would be dramatically different. But the issue of how the churches understand and promote unity in this radically changed context, and whether they can transcend local loyalties remains a pressing one.

The themes of people and nation should not be taboo for the Church and the ecumenical movement. Representatives of almost all the sometimes conflicting parts of the human community are present in both. It would indeed be regrettable if they were not able to bear the tension between the claims of group identity and universal humanity.

The positions of the churches on violence and war were already divisive issues in Oxford. They remain so today. Then and now some churches have given costly witness and suffered martyrdom in opposing abuses of State power. Others have either remained silent or lent support to the State under similar circumstances. Regrettably there are, in several places, growing tensions between churches, faith communities, states and groups of states in the field of church-state and church-community relations.

Within the ecumenical fellowship itself, churches hold radically different positions on these matters. Thus, the debate on our mutual accountability and responsibility for one another in the ecumenical movement continues as the churches explore their common understanding and vision. It is a necessary part of the process of developing guidelines for making ethical judgments about international affairs.
The construction of unity among the churches is an important contribution to the construction of peace and reconciliation among peoples and nations. It is a costly process which requires thoughtful study, dialogue and the adoption of positions in favor of justice and peace. The Church must give leadership in society to define and address difficult political and social questions. This cannot, however, in today’s world be pursued by the Church alone. Increasingly it has become clear that it must work alongside other religious and social bodies.

There is a much greater conscience today of what it means to be a Church for and among the poor. In both quantitative and qualitative terms the absolute poor are a dominant presence in our world and among many of our communities.

While the Church is legitimately active in caring for the needs of the household of God, it must think carefully about its response to the call by the state to assume responsibility for many functions which the state itself used to perform: health care, education, the care of especially vulnerable groups. There are fundamental ethical questions here. The Church must be a competent actor in society, not just in the field of charity, but also in terms of determining where social responsibility should reside. In addition, the Church needs to ensure that it is in a position to set the terms of its engagement in the exercise of a welfare role in alliance with the State.

Among other things, this requires competence in the arena of international affairs which is where much of the new social policy is being formulated.

**The continuing challenge for the churches in international affairs**

In virtually every place around the globe today, individuals, groups, communities and nations encounter a world in deep turmoil. Increasingly there is agreement that although the situation manifests itself in social, economic and political terms, we are indeed confronting a severe moral and spiritual crisis. To be the church in these times is to face up to the continuing challenge of living and proclaiming a Gospel which is uncompromisingly prophetic, which speaks to immediate realities and locates them in their proper global and moral context.

It is in living out this proclamation that the churches can unite in resistance and witness, and bring renewed hope to the world. It will create local Christian communities capable of protecting the rights and responding to the needs of its most vulnerable members wherever they may be located. It will create space for dialogue and mutual learning. It will construct an effective response to the forces which seem to so dominate the globe at the present time.

The greatest danger that we face at the present time is to submit to despair, to the heresy that no alternatives exist. The concluding message of Oxford rings true for us today:

> Our hope is anchored in the living God.... In (Christ’s) name we set our hands, as the servants of God and in him of one another, to the task of proclaiming God’s message of redemption, of living as His children, and of combating injustice, cruelty and hate. The Church can be of good cheer; it hears its Lord saying, “I have overcome the world.”

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**Statement to the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Relevant Neighbouring States**

*Presented on behalf of Caritas Internationalis, the Conference of European Churches, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, the International Catholic Migration Commission, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and the World Young Women’s Christian Association, Geneva, 31 May, 1996*

Mr Chairman,
Humanitarian, pastoral and legal action taken by Christians and church-related organizations to attend to refugees, displaced persons and migrants – uprooted people – has often preceded action by governments and intergovernmental agencies.

Since the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, church-related organizations have been increasingly concerned with the population movements within and to the Republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States and neighbouring countries. For example, we note the recent positive experience of church-related responses to uprooted people in Central Europe.

We welcome the convening of the CIS Conference and the efforts to elaborate common principles, policy and an operational framework for the entire region.

We believe that this conference and its programme of action represent a milestone in elaborating principles and guidelines for international co-operation in dealing with a major concern of our time.

We wish to emphasise our support for the extensive references to international human rights standards and instruments as basic principles underlying the programme of action, especially paragraph 10. We also underline the importance of ensuring protection of the rights of migrants and to promote mutual respect, understanding and co-operation between them and the populations of host countries, as stated in paragraph 18.

We are particularly pleased to note in paragraph 19 that states fully recognise the freedom of association and that they aim to develop comprehensive co-operation with non-governmental organizations.

We further endorse the elaboration of detailed policy guidelines covering refugees and internally displaced persons (paragraphs 32 and 34). We emphatically urge that concrete measures be implemented to ensure international protection for those needing it.

We recognise that this conference addresses some of the main elements of the dilemma of international migration today. However, it is clear that further elaboration of an overall migration policy framework is required. Unfortunately, the only definition offered for a migrant category in the annex is of “illegal migrants.” Similarly, only this category and that of ecological migrants are addressed in the section on policy, although paragraphs 26 through 30 do speak of the need to formulate national migration policies. We believe that reference should also have been retained in paragraph 47, regarding relevant instruments, to the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

The experience in other regions is that international migration continues to have many positive aspects and benefits. The migration phenomenon is and must be identified as distinct from such issues as drugs, crime and terrorism; these exist and must be combated irrespective of migration.

We welcome the positive references to development of conditions, modalities, rights and obligations in national immigration legislation. We appreciate inclusion of reference to providing for protection of basic human rights and legal due process in the procedures and mechanisms of border control.

We strongly support the emphasis given to prevention of involuntary human displacement by inclusion of an entire section dedicated to concerns of early warning, protective measures and,
especially, conflict resolution. We urge that particular attention be given to the special needs of uprooted women and children in the implementation of the programme of action.

We welcome the inclusion of the section on co-operation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We appreciate recognition of the benefits of co-operation with NGOs, and support the particular recommendations calling for involvement of NGOs in policy and program activity, allocation of resources, capacity building and encouragement by governments of NGO involvement.

**Concluding Observation**

The international Christian organizations are committed to continuing support for uprooted people in the CIS region, through programs for training social workers, personnel exchanges, provision of material assistance and other activities, as recommended in paragraph 25. They also expect to continue to play a role in monitoring the rights and responsibilities of uprooted people, in connection with the Steering Group to monitor the follow-up process. In this we expect that the respective states and international organizations will also solicit involvement from representatives of other religions.

We believe that NGOs can continue to make a significant contribution to the solution of the problems created by population movements within and to the region.

**Ecumenical Delegation Visit**

Press release summarizing the findings of the WCC delegation visit to China at the invitation of the China Christian Council (CCC), 5-14 May 1996.

The 13-person delegation’s mandate was to observe the implementation of the 1994 State decrees on religion. Extensive visits were paid to Shenyang, Zhenjiang, and Henan Provinces and to Beijing. In each place meetings were held with local congregations and with provincial officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). In Beijing members of the delegation met also with the national leadership of the RAB to report on and discuss the findings of the provincial visits.

“We have encountered a vital, rapidly growing Christian church in all the provinces visited,” commented Rev. Dwain Epps, WCC International Affairs coordinator, upon his return to Geneva. “Church-State relations were positive, overall, but with important and troubling exceptions.”

The following were highlighted in the provisional report prepared by Clement John of the International Relations staff who organized the visit:

- Astonishing economic activity and construction underway in virtually every major urban centre;
- Explosive church growth throughout much of the country;
- Government officials generally cooperative in efforts to implement decrees welcomed by the CCC, but religion subject to strict regulation;
- Abuses of power in religious matters by local authorities observed in specific regions;
- Churches facing shortage of qualified pastors and lay leaders in a time of rapid transition and growth;
- Churches struggling to be “truly Chinese” and yet remain faithful to their prophetic tradition in the face of the State’s growing obsession to maintain social stability at a time of exceedingly rapid economic development;
- Foreign missionary activity officially prohibited, but clandestinely continuing in some areas, creating tensions in the churches and with state authorities.
Delegation members were
The Rt. Rev. Kwesi Dickson, Methodist Church, Ghana
Mr. Martijn Cornelius Doolard, graduate student, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
The Rev. Dwain C. Epps, Coordinator, International Affairs, WCC, Geneva
Mr. Victor Hsu, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, USA
Mr. Clement John, CCIA/WCC, Geneva
Dr. Kang, Moon-Kyu, Asian Institute of Civil Society Movement, Republic of Korea
The Rev. Hartmut Lucke, Swiss Protestant Federation, Switzerland
Evangelina Shirley Mabusela, Member of the Human Rights Commission of South Africa
Ms Claudia Oblau, Amity Foundation, Hong Kong
Canon Paul Oestreicher, Coventry Cathedral, England, UK
Mr. Seikku Paunounen, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Finland
Fr. Denis A. Pozdniaev, Russian Orthodox Church, Russia
Ms Metchild Paula Schroeder, Association of Protestant Churches and Mission, Germany
Ms Rhea Whitehead, United Church of Canada, Canada
Mr. Philip Wickeri, Amity Foundation, Hong Kong

Colloquium on the role of religions in the contemporary world
Press release issued at the conclusion of the colloquium in Geneva, 15-16 December 1995

The meeting, held in Farsi and English, involved twelve persons, including high-standing Iranian Muslim scholars and Christian counterparts from several countries engaged with the WCC inter-religious dialogue program. Presentations were made from both Christian and Muslim perspectives on social justice and world peace; the challenges of modernity and the problem of atheism; the sanctity of human life and the place and role of the family; and human dignity, rights and laws.

For the first time, a conference is to be organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Iranian Muslim scholars.

This decision follows a colloquium held 15-16 December in Geneva and attended by representatives of the WCC and the Secretariat for Interfaith Dialogue of the Iranian Centre for International Studies.

The forthcoming conference is planned for October 1996 in Teheran. The theme will be “Religion and the Contemporary World”. Representatives of Iranian churches will also attend.

Iranian officials first made contact with the WCC a year ago and sent a delegation to WCC headquarters in Geneva.

Subsequently, a WCC team visited Iran and met Muslim scholars and government officials as well as WCC member churches in Iran. It was agreed the next step should be a Christian-Muslim colloquium.

Now, both sides have stressed the frankness, honesty and cordiality present at this meeting.
The challenge of secularisation to people of faith provided the main topic for debate for the fourteen participants. Other subjects covered included law and human dignity, justice and peace, and religion, culture and international relations.

Dr. Mohammad Ali Shoaei, Director of the Iranian Centre for International Studies, said he had been surprised to discover how seriously the WCC took its involvement in world affairs. “We thought of Christianity as having accepted secularism and believed it did not wish to involve itself in politics, social issues or international affairs. We have found this is not true.”

He said Iran first made contact with the WCC because religious scholars in Iran felt, in the face of an increasingly secularised world, they must get in touch with religious people elsewhere with whom they believed they shared common understandings. “It is there. We found it in this meeting. We have found people who believe in holy things”, said Dr Shoaei after the colloquium.

Dr. Tarek Mitri, of the WCC’s Office on Inter-religious Relations, commented, “It is important to realise the two groups did not meet around a negotiating table. This was not two blocks facing each other but people with similar questions involved in discussions.”

Dr. Shoaei said next year’s Teheran conference had to find practical solutions to ways in which Christians and Muslims could work together and co-exist. Both he and Dr. Mitri confirmed there would be “no limits” on what could be discussed in Teheran. According to Dr. Mitri, “The forthcoming debate on religion and the world must wrestle with questions which should be dealt with by Muslims and Christians together rather than separately. In that respect, we are involved in a very important task.”

Statement on the Status of Jerusalem


In previous WCC statements on Jerusalem, quoted below, the World Council of Churches has affirmed that:

1. Jerusalem is a holy city for three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. (Central Committee, Berlin/West, 1974). It is therefore their responsibility to cooperate in the creation of conditions that will ensure that Jerusalem is a city open to the adherents of all three religions, where they can meet and live together. The tendency to minimize Jerusalem's importance for any of these three religions should be avoided. (V Assembly, Nairobi, 1975)

2. Christian Holy Places in Jerusalem and neighboring areas belong to the greatest extent to member churches of the World Council of Churches, specifically to the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches... Any proposed solution as to the future of the holy places in Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate rights of the churches most directly concerned. (Central Committee, 1974)

3. (The) question of Jerusalem is not only a matter of protection of the holy places, it is organically linked with living faiths and communities of people in the holy city. (It) is essential that the holy shrines should not become mere monuments of visitation, but should serve as living places of worship integrated and responsive to Christian communities who continue to maintain their life and roots within the holy city, and for those who, out of religious attachment, want to visit them. (V Assembly)

4. The special legislation regulating the relationship of the Christian communities and the authorities, guaranteed by international treaties (Paris 1856 and Berlin 1878) and the League of Nations and known as the status quo of the Holy Places must be fully safeguarded and confirmed in any agreement concerning Jerusalem. (V Assembly)
5. (The) settlement of the interreligious problems of the holy places should take place under an international aegis and guarantee which ought to be respected by the parties concerned as well as the ruling authorities; (and) should be worked out with the most directly concerned member churches, as well as with the Roman Catholic Church. These issues should also become subjects for dialogue with Jewish and Muslim counterparts. (V Assembly)

6. (The) future status of Jerusalem ... has to be determined within the general context of the settlement of the Middle East conflict in its totality. (V Assembly).

7. (Just) as the future status of Jerusalem has been considered part of the destiny of the Jewish people, so it cannot be considered in isolation from the destiny of the Palestinian people... (Central Committee, Geneva, 1980).

Against this background, and in the light of the deep religious, historical and emotional attachments of Christians, Jews and Muslims to Jerusalem and the turmoil to which this gives rise; and recognising the significance of Jerusalem to the continuing Middle East peace process, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, 14-22 September 1995,

Welcomes the visit to Jerusalem by the General Secretary (15-21 May 1995), during which he met with the heads of Churches and Christian Communities in Jerusalem, with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, the President of the Palestinian National Authority, and others; Welcomes especially the joint Memorandum of the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem on the Significance of Jerusalem for Christians, in which they call on all parties “to go beyond exclusivist visions or actions, and without discrimination, to consider the religious and national aspirations of others, in order to give back to Jerusalem its true universal character and to make of the city a holy place of reconciliation for humankind”;

Notes with appreciation their appeal for full respect of the rights of believers to freedom of access to holy places, of movement within the Holy City, and to carry out pilgrimages in the spirit of authentic tradition; the rights of local Christian Communities to freedom of worship and of conscience, both as individuals and as religious communities, to carry out their religious, educational, medical and other duties of charity, and to have their own institutions and their own personnel to run them;

Endorses their affirmation that, in claiming these rights for themselves, Christians recognize and respect similar and parallel rights of Jewish and Muslim believers and their communities, and declare themselves disposed to search with Jews and Muslims for a mutually respectful application of these rights and for a harmonious coexistence in the perspective of the universal spiritual vocation of Jerusalem;

Endorses their call
◦ “for a special judicial and political statute for Jerusalem which reflects the universal importance and significance of the city;
◦ “that, in order to satisfy the national aspirations of all its inhabitants, and in order that Jews, Christians and Muslims can be 'at home' in Jerusalem and at peace with one another, representatives from the three monotheistic religions, in addition to local political powers, ought to be associated in the elaboration and application of such a special statute;
◦ “that, because of the universal significance of Jerusalem, the international community ought to be engaged in the stability and permanence of this statute and provide the necessary guarantees in order that Jerusalem not be dependent solely on municipal or national political authorities, whoever they may be, that Jerusalem not be victimized by laws imposed as a result of hostilities or wars, but be an open city which transcends local, regional or world political troubles.”

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Reiterates its statement of August 1980 opposing the Israeli unilateral action of annexing East Jerusalem and uniting the city as its “eternal capital” under its exclusive sovereignty in contradiction of pertinent United Nations resolutions;

Expresses profound concern about the policies of the State of Israel which have created a situation of political and economic insecurity for the indigenous Christian population of Jerusalem which has contributed to a process of emigration which continuously diminishes the Christian presence in Jerusalem;

Appeals once again to the State of Israel to desist from its continuing, systematic policies of confiscation of buildings and land, destruction of buildings, establishment of new Jewish settlements in and around East Jerusalem, discrimination in the granting of building permits, constraints on the freedom of movement for Arab Christians and Muslims, as well as for indigenous Christians within and access to Jerusalem and the Holy Places, and from all attempts to alter the demographic status quo of the Holy City prior to the conclusion of agreements with regard to its future status;

Calls upon the Government of Israel and on the Palestinian National Authority to take up soon the question of the future status of Jerusalem in their negotiations, given its centrality to the ultimate success of efforts to implement the Accords and to promote peace in and beyond the Middle East region; and

Appeals to member churches to be constant in prayer and in acts of solidarity with the Christian communities in Jerusalem in order to ensure a continuing, vital Christian presence in the Holy City and to strengthen the historic role of these communities and their leaders in promoting open communication, dialogue and cooperation among all communities in the Holy City.

Message on the conflict in the Former Yugoslavia
Adopted by the Central Committee meeting in Geneva, 14-22 September 1995.

The World Council of Churches has issued repeated appeals to the parties to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and to external powers involved, urging them to renounce the use of armed force as a means of achieving political goals.

It has called upon all parties to pursue a cease-fire and an ultimate settlement of the conflict through negotiations. It has underscored the centrality of the UN and European negotiators operating in the context of the Conference on the Former Yugoslavia under the authority of the UN Security Council, and urged members of the Contact Group to maintain a common approach in support of these negotiations.

The WCC, working closely together with the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), has both challenged and sought to accompany the churches caught up in the conflict, through regular contact, frequent visits, the convening of meetings which brought their leaders together for dialogue -- sometimes with their Muslim counterparts in Bosnia -- and provided opportunities for face-to-face dialogue between them and churches outside.

Meanwhile, the intransigence of political leaders and military commanders on the ground, the employment of new, ever more destructive weapons, and the unabated flow of sophisticated heavy arms into the zone of conflict; massive military invasions, the shelling of cities, and bombings by foreign air and missile forces have contributed to a reprehensible escalation of the cycle of violence which inflicts terrible suffering on civilian populations throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. Christians must condemn this escalating violence in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace.
The current negotiations undertaken by the United States of America, in consultation with other members of the Contact Group, have achieved significant agreements among the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - also representing the Bosnian Serbs - and with respect to the differences between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Basic Principles recently given consensual agreement by the foreign ministers of the first three have momentarily broken an impasse in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and are welcome.

We hope that they will lead to a peace established on the basis of certain fundamental principles: Every eventual state or “entity” must provide constitutional guarantees for minorities, both individuals and communities, living within its borders. Multi-cultural and multi-ethnic formations must be encouraged and respected within every society. All must develop a pluralist vision of the future both within their own borders and with their neighbours.

The churches and other religious communities of the world continue to bear a major responsibility for the promotion of such a peace. Yet we confess that our own lack of faithfulness, clarity and unity have impaired our ability to work for peace.

The churches of the former Yugoslavia cannot control the military powers, but some do have influence in their respective societies. The narrowly nationalistic tone and content of positions taken by some church leaders, however, have increased tensions between the communities and given rise to controversy in the wider ecumenical fellowship. This fact, and the impact of the seemingly uncontrollable, rising spiral of human suffering on the conscience of churches outside the immediate conflict have contributed to a widening gap between differing Christian attitudes to war and peace, the use of sanctions, and whether violence can be justified as a last resort in pursuit of peace.

Fundamental ecumenical concerns are at stake. What does mutual accountability require in such a situation? What balance is to be struck between the duty of churches to challenge one another with regard to what the Gospel requires and our mutual responsibility for one another in the ecumenical fellowship? What is the role of confession, repentance and forgiveness in ecumenical relations? What is the proper relationship between church, state, nation and people? Can differing perceptions of history be reconciled? How can churches give witness to the power of the reconciling act of Christ on the Cross by helping one another to escape the bonds of history?

There is a clear need for continued, broadened and deepened dialogue among the churches on all these difficult theological, ecclesiological and ecumenical issues, both through the ecumenical bodies and in bi-lateral conversations between member churches for the sake of the credibility of the churches' witness for peace. Wherever possible, this dialogue should extend to other churches and Muslim counterparts in order to continue to build bridges of understanding.

The witness of the churches in this tragic situation is not limited to the official positions taken by church leaders. It is also to be found in the efforts of local ecumenical, interfaith, and often multi-ethnic groups who keep alive hope for peace and reconciliation throughout the area of conflict and beyond. It is imperative for the wider ecumenical fellowship to recognize the authenticity, courage and value of that witness; to support actively such groups and to provide information about their work to an anxious world.

There is a role for all churches to play in promoting peace in the former Yugoslavia. All together must denounce unequivocally the inhuman practice of "ethnic cleansing" and the use of
armed force and acts of violence by every side. Each church should be particularly vigilant about injustice and violence caused by political, military and economic forces in its own society. Churches in countries outside the area of conflict must engage actively in efforts to stem the flourishing private and government-sponsored commerce in and transfer of arms to the warring parties; to offer solidarity through the continuing provision of humanitarian assistance and support for the charitable work of churches ministering to the victims; and to promote a broad international commitment to help reconstruct ravaged cities, towns and rural areas once peace has been achieved.

Regrettably, the major international media have not always conveyed the complexity of the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, while failures and alleged acts of complicity with the forces of war are widely reported, the stories of sacrificial and bold Christian and Muslim witness to reconciliation and peace, which also abound, are not reported and remain largely unknown. We remain convinced that, through dialogue, and especially through encouragement of Christians and others caught in this tragedy, and by God’s grace, an end to suffering and new vision for the future are within reach.

To this end, in God’s name, we appeal again insistently and with a sense of great urgency to the leaders of the churches and of other religions in the former Yugoslavia, and to all political and military parties to the conflict, to spare no effort to stop the fighting, to bring an end to this war, and to work together for reconciliation, to heal the deep wounds of history and of this present conflict, and to transform the climate of hatred and violence.

We commit ourselves to assist them, to the best of our abilities, as they assume the challenge of rebuilding new, just societies capable of living together in peace and mutual respect.

**Minute on Religious Rights in Romania**

*Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 14-22 September 1995.*

The Unit III Committee received with deep concern a report on the effects of the new law on schools of minority populations and churches in Romania. According to the report, this law discriminates against linguistic minorities by severely limiting instruction in schools, vocational colleges and universities in their native languages and up to now forbids the Protestant churches to organize their own schools. Concern was also expressed with respect to Protestant ownership of church properties which still remain – in this post-Communist period – in the hands of the state.

With regard to the specific reference to the return of properties owned by Protestant churches, Ms Rei pointed out that the Orthodox Church had also not yet received back many of its properties that had been taken over by the state, so was in the same situation as the Protestant churches. She did not feel it would help ecumenism in Romania if reference were made to one group of churches only. The Central Committee voted to delete the phrase in question by 44 votes to 25 against and 6 abstentions.

The Central Committee agreed to the following recommendation, as amended:

> that the General Secretary be requested to attend to these questions, in dialogue with the member churches in Romania, and in discussion with state authorities.

**Minute on Albania**

*Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 14-22 September 1995.*
The Central Committee took note with concern about the new legislation on schools which continued to prohibit religious minorities from setting up their own schools; it requested the General Secretary to give attention to this question in consultation with the state authorities in Albania with a view to obtaining full recognition of the rights of minorities in the context of human rights.

**Minute on Indonesia**
*Adopted by the Unit III Committee of the Central Committee, meeting in Geneva, 14-22 September 1995.*

The East Timor issue has been on the ecumenical agenda for two decades since 1975, when the Indonesian forces occupied the territory. The World Council of Churches has from time to time issued statements and taken other actions to address the situation in East Timor.

In April 1992 a Joint WCC/CCA ecumenical team visited East Timor at the invitation of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). On the recommendation of the team, a joint WCC/CCA Task Group was set up to address the situation in the territory in relation to:

- finding a just and peaceful resolution;
- addressing the human rights situation.

In pursuance of the above objectives, an ecumenical consultation was convened in December 1994 in Hong Kong by the Joint Task Group. Prior to the consultation an ecumenical delegation was to visit East Timor. However, in view of the refusal of the Indonesian authorities to grant permission, the visit did not materialize.

In view of more recent developments, the situation in East Timor has deteriorated. There have been attacks by the East Timorese youth on places of worship belonging to the Muslim and Protestant communities. It is said that this is due to the large influx of immigrants (transmigrants) into the territory that has caused resentment in the local population. Bishop Belo, the Apostolic administrator of Dili Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, has apologized to the two communities.

These developments are part of the larger issue facing the people of East Timor in their struggle for justice and peace and should not be viewed merely as inter-religious conflict among the people of East Timor.

Under the circumstances, the Unit III Committee has urged the WCC/CCA Task Group to address the East Timor issue with a renewed sense of urgency, in close cooperation with PGI and Gereja Kristen di Timor Timur (GKTT). Efforts should be intensified to make contact with the Roman Catholic Church in the territory to initiate dialogue to pave the way for inter-religious cooperation in the larger interest of the struggle of the East Timor people.

**Statement on Uprooted People**
*Adopted by the Central Committee, Geneva, 14-22 September 1995.*

**A Moment to Choose: Risking to be with Uprooted People**

On every continent, people are being torn from their homes by violence and despair. Millions of people have been displaced and wait for a chance to go home. As wars drag on,
economies deteriorate and environments become more fragile, solutions for the uprooted are becoming more elusive. Governments in every region are closing their borders. Too many churches are also turning away from the strangers arriving on their doorsteps.

Behind the massive global dimensions of today's uprooting are individual stories of pain, of families being torn apart, of despair and suffering. More than one in every fifty human beings is now a refugee or international migrant. Most are women, youth, and children. The vast majority leaves countries in the South and remains in the South.

People leave their communities for many reasons and are called by different names – refugees, internally displaced, asylum-seekers, economic migrants. As churches, we lift up all those who are compelled by severe political, economic and social conditions to leave their land and their culture -- regardless of the labels they are given by others. Uprooted people are those forced to leave their communities: those who flee because of persecution and war, those who are forcibly displaced because of environmental devastation and those who are compelled to seek sustenance in a city or abroad because they cannot survive at home. The focus of this statement is on the uprooted, acknowledging that many others remain in extraordinarily difficult situations.

Although it has accelerated in recent years, the movement of people has been a permanent feature of human history. The reality is that we all live in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual societies -- though sometimes we don't see the strangers as Christ among us. When churches close themselves to the strangers in their midst, when they no longer strive for an inclusive community as a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom to come, they lose their reason to be.

We challenge the churches worldwide to rediscover their identity, their integrity and their vocation as the church of the stranger. Service to uprooted people has always been recognized as diaconia -- although it has been peripheral to the life of many churches. But we affirm that it is also an ecclesial matter. *We are a church of the Stranger - the Church of Jesus Christ the Stranger.*

(Matthew 25:31-46)

**3. Creating community with the uprooted**

*We call on churches to accompany uprooted people, by providing diaconal services, support and solidarity without discrimination.*

A. Accompanying uprooted people in decisions to remain, leave and return

- Maintain an active presence with people who choose to remain in or leave their homeland.
- Advocate and monitor the safety of return and reintegration in sustainable communities, including accompanying uprooted people back to their homelands and reporting on that process.

B. Providing services to respond to material, social and spiritual needs.

- Ensure the full participation of uprooted people in planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services and ecumenical initiatives.
- Provide pastoral care and crisis intervention services to individuals and families.
- Promote the availability of programs meeting the specific needs of uprooted women, and empower their participation in community.
- Advocate that children separated from their families remain in family-like situations.
- Encourage the availability of programs essential for the spiritual, emotional, physical and educational development of uprooted children.
Advocate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and other international organizations for adequate provisions of material assistance and promotion of human dignity of uprooted people.

C. Supporting initiatives of uprooted people.
- Provide community development opportunities to enable uprooted people to become self-reliant.
- Empower individuals and organizations of uprooted people to define and respond to their own needs and issues.
- Support uprooted people from different faiths to practice their religious beliefs.
- Build uprooted people from different faiths.

D. Being church together with uprooted Christians
- Take the necessary steps to welcome and encourage uprooted Christians to participate fully in the life of the church - from the congregational level to national leadership.
- Embrace the diversity of Christian traditions.
- Facilitate uprooted Christian communities to re-establish their congregations.
- Work with other churches in developing initiatives with uprooted people.
- Receive the spiritual gifts of uprooted people.

E. Engaging in living in diversity
- Convene and participate in encounters between host and uprooted people to break down prejudices, fears and myths.
- Organize campaigns to counter and prevent racism, xenophobia and hostility towards uprooted people.
- Promote international exchanges of church personnel with and between regions.

F. Restoring public solidarity
- Promote establishment of “Refugee Day/week” and/or “Migrant week” in churches, communities and countries.
- Hold inter-faith dialogue and where possible, services and prayers.
- Develop educational and awareness-building activities on uprooted people for the whole life of the church.

Some Signs of Hope

Even as many in our societies turn away or ignore the strangers in their midst, some Christians and some churches are choosing to be on the side of uprooted people. Some churches have identified themselves with strangers and exiles for centuries.

Signs of hope are emerging in community and church initiatives around the world to create new ministries, new vehicles of ecumenical cooperation, and new ways of upholding human dignity and creating sustainable community:

- In numerous risky situations, Christians and churches are taking stands to be on the side of the uprooted. Some have opened their church buildings and their homes to uprooted people.
- A number of Christians and churches have assumed great risks by acting in civil disobedience to protect the uprooted.
- Many churches and community groups are seeking to aid and protect those whose lives and safety are at risk because of forced repatriation or abuse.
- Some churches are daring to confront the racism and xenophobia among their own membership.
- Survival strategies of uprooted women and men point to their ability to resist assaults to their dignity and to mobilize themselves to address their concerns.
North and the South, religious institutions, grassroots organizations, neighborhood groups and families are struggling to create alternate ways of living based on life-giving values.

We affirm that the churches’ place is on the side of the uprooted. We call on member churches through witness and service at all levels of the life of the churches to rediscover their identity as the Church of the Stranger...

Statement presented to the press by the moderator of the CCIA as leader of the WCC delegation on behalf of church and ecumenical organizations, \(^{64}\) Beijing, 4 September 1995.

The WCC facilitated the presence of some 50 women from around the world at the NGO Forum related to the UN World Conference, and sent an official five-member delegation to the World Conference itself. The ecumenical presence was facilitated by the Women’s Commission of the China Christian Council. This statement was intended for delivery at the Conference itself, but disallowed due to scheduling difficulties.

Madam President,

The World Council of Churches is joined in this statement by other global ecumenical organizations as well as a number of religious bodies present at the fourth World Conference on Women, all of which are listed at the end of the document.

The World Council of Churches is grateful to the members of the Preparatory Committee and the Secretary General for having ensured that this important gathering is being held and that it provides a comprehensive global agenda on issues relating to the life and livelihood of the women of the world. With 325 member churches of the Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Christian traditions, located in every region of the world, the World Council of Churches is aware that these questions are urgent and complex. Only an approach that will link the empowerment of women with ensuring the quality of life for all citizens can offer hope to the millions of women in our world who are struggling for survival and dignity.

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\(^{64}\) This statement was endorsed by the following churches and organizations convened at an Ecumenical Gathering called by the WCC during the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing:

- All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kirchlicher Entwicklungsdienst (AG KED)
- Centre of Concern
- Council of Churches in the Netherlands
- Church of Scotland Woman’s Guild
- Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
- Mujeres para el dialogo México
- National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales
- National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Church World Service
- Network of Ecumenical Women in Scotland (NEWS)
- Presbyterian Church USA, National Ministers Division
- Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac, USA
- Sisters of the Mercy of the Americas, Silver Spring, USA
- Sisters of the Holy Cross, Notre Dame, USA
- United Church of Christ USA, Board for World Ministries, Coordinating Centre for Women, Office for Church in Society
- United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
- World Conference on Religion and Peace
- World Federation of Methodist Women
In 1988 the World Council of Churches launched a Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, as a follow-up of the UN Decade for Women. This program has brought the WCC in close contact with the everyday lives of women and we have documented evidence of the various forms of violence women experience and the extent of this violence. It has been painful for us to acknowledge that institutions which should stand in solidarity with women, including governments and the churches, have not often responded with resolute action. We encounter, through our contact with women at the periphery of all our societies, the struggle for dignity and livelihood that women engage in every day.

One cause for the increase in incidents of violence against women is the global economic insecurity in which our families and societies exist. We believe that empowerment is not possible as long as women live in contexts of violence, often exacerbated by cultural and religious traditions. At Vienna it was acknowledged that women’s rights are human rights - we urge the immediate introduction of legal and institutional instruments to protect the human rights of women. Our particular concern is focused on the rights of migrant and refugee women, of women living under the yoke of racism and on the situation of Indigenous women who are often the targets of vicious violence.

The World Council of Churches comes to this World Conference to lift up the voices of those women who are often ignored. We believe that economic, political and social justice are prerequisites for the empowerment of women. Contrary to the widely held development ideology which emphasises that economic growth alone and by itself can improve the quality of life, we support and wish to raise here the views emphasised at the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, according to which people should be at the centre of development. We also endorse the position taken in Copenhagen that empowering people, particularly women, to strengthen their own capacities is the main objective of development, and its principal resource.

Many in the member churches of the WCC will testify that the effects of foreign debts and structural adjustment programmes erode the traditional occupations and livelihood of women and result in increasing poverty and marginalisation of women both in rural and urban settings. Echoing again the World Summit on Social Development, we emphasise that structural adjustment programmes should be restructured to include social development goals, that they should include gender-sensitive social impact assessments. It should also be ensured that women do not have to bear a disproportionate share of the burden of the transition costs. We would add that in order to promote equality in all societies, it is important that steps are taken to recognise, count and value unwaged work - still typically women’s labour, in the home and in the community.

Of equal concern is the fact that women seem increasingly to be at the centre of the AIDS epidemic and more and more women are infected with the virus. The spread of HIV/AIDS is as much related to poverty and the subordinate status of women, as it is to the virus itself. We urge that more attention and resources be devoted to the care of people living with HIV/AIDS and its prevention, particularly in the context of the in-built gender discrimination in health care programmes. Governments should also ensure that women do not carry the entire burden for care of people living with HIV/AIDS.

We draw to the attention of the world community the liberating power of religions and we affirm the positive and supportive role that the churches and other religious institutions can play in standing in solidarity with those women who have to make ethical choices and decisions.
regarding their sexual and reproductive rights. But of equal concern to the World Council of Churches is the increasing religious extremism in all faiths and the deleterious consequences this has on women’s legal, political and social rights.

We remind our governments of all previous commitments made which are still far from implementation and are not even ratified by some governments. International instruments are sometimes not implemented because they do not respond to specific cultural and developmental needs. We therefore urge for more regional and national commitments and strategies that can be more realistically implemented.

We urge that special funding instruments be set up at the local, national and international levels so as to ensure enough resources to implement decisions made at this gathering for the empowerment of women.

As the World Council of Churches, through our member churches, we commit ourselves to monitoring the implementation of commitments made here in Beijing, to the women of the world. Thank you.

**Appeal for protection of threatened church leaders**


Esteemed Mr. President,

It is with gravest concern that we have this morning received a copy of the death threat addressed to the Reverend Vitalino Similox, his wife, Ms Margarita de Similox and Pastor Lucio Martínez Pic, all members of the Presbyterian Church, living in Chimaltenango. This threat gave the persons named 48 hours in which to leave the country.

In a letter addressed to you on 12 July of this year by the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Ms Mary Ann Lundy, we expressed our indignation at the torture and killing of Pastor Manuel Saquic Vásquez on 23 June, and requested that you instigate a full investigation into the incident.

We now write again to request you urgently to take all necessary steps to protect the above-named persons, who are in their turn threatened by the criminals responsible for the killing of Pastor Saquic Vásquez.

Reiterating our gratitude and appreciation, we greet you in the name of Christ, the Lord of life.

Dwain C. Epps
Director
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs

**Message of concern after police raids on the offices of the National Christian Council**


Your Excellency,

It is with concern we have heard the news of the police raid on the offices of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka in Colombo on 21 July 1995 and the subsequent arrest of Mr.
Kenneth Mulder who was on an internship programme with the Council. Consequent to the arrest, the electronic and the print media in Sri Lanka have carried on a campaign of vilification against the National Christian Council and the Christian community in general.

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka has a history of providing humanitarian assistance to the victims and those displaced by the conflict in the country. The Council is committed to work for peace and reconciliation in the country. In this connection the leadership of the Council has played a significant role in search of a negotiated settlement to the on-going war in the North.

It is therefore regrettable that the Sri Lankan authorities should have taken recourse to police action against the Council and arrested a young intern who was carrying out his responsibilities with the full knowledge of the authorities concerned. This is evident by the fact that he was deported from the country without any formal charges being filed or the due process of law being allowed to take its course.

We accordingly urge the government of Sri Lanka through Your Excellency that in view of Mr. Mulder’s innocence, he be granted a visa to return to Sri Lanka to complete the remainder of his internship and that the present unwarranted campaign being carried out in the Sri Lankan press and news media be brought to an end.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dwain C. Epps
Director, Commission of the Churches
on International Affairs

Appeal for respect of the sanctity of church buildings

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is concerned by the recent developments of escalation of the fighting between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE in Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka. This has resulted in tremendous loss of lives and properties including the bombing of St. Peter’s Church in which women and children were also killed.

The World Council of Churches is also disturbed by reports received from Vaddukoddai of the occupation of properties belonging to the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India by the military authorities. These amongst others include the Bishop’s office, Jaffna College and Technical Institute. The premises house church archives and rare books of great value.

In the early eighties, as a result of an attack on Jaffna library, a number of invaluable books were burnt or destroyed. We are concerned with the occupation of the above premises by the Sri Lankan armed forces, the church archives, books and the Jaffna College Library may become a casualty of the war.

The World Council of Churches therefore appeals to Your Excellency to ensure the safety and sanctity of this religious heritage and order that the premises presently under occupation of the Sri Lankan armed forces be vacated and the property restored to the Bishop of Jaffna.

Sincerely yours,
Consultation with church leaders from the Former Yugoslavia

Communiqué from the consultation held in Pécs, Hungary, 10-11 July 1995.

Six leaders from the Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist Churches in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia met with six leaders from the Roman Catholic, Baptist and Pentecostal Churches in Croatia, from 10 to 11 July, 1995, in Pécs, Hungary. They were invited by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) to join together with Cardinal Danneels of Brussels, Metropolitan Michael Staikos of Vienna and Bishop Henrik Svenungsson of Stockholm, who visited Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a CEC and CCEE delegation in October, 1994. The communiqué the delegation issued on that occasion was reviewed and welcomed by those who had hosted the delegation; these included a Jewish professor from Osijek. The newly appointed General Secretary of CCEE, Dr. Aldo Giordano, attended the meeting, as did staff of the Conference of European Churches, the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

Participants acknowledged that the political situation in the former Yugoslavia has deteriorated to a point where politicians, religious communities and domestic and international public opinion have all become increasingly pessimistic that swift, just and enduring solutions can be found for the continuing conflicts. The religious leaders affirmed the basic principles of the earlier communiqué of the visiting delegation: respect for all neighbours, refusal of all violence, and promotion of dialogue. They saw these principles as fundamental to seeking and accepting reconciliation, without which peace and justice are impossible. They agreed that love had to be preached and put into practice even in a climate of hatred and bitterness. As varied but convergent views were exchanged in a spirit of candour and sincerity, it was affirmed that “Love must cross frontiers” and that “Once we have recognised frontiers, we may learn to live without them”. To questions as to how far “self-determination could be offered to every local minority”, it was answered that “The protection of minorities is fundamental in any democratic society” and that “Nothing can justify ethnic cleansing”.

While accepting that the influence of religious leaders upon politicians in both the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Croatia is often limited or neglected, it was urged that religious communities should advocate and practise non-violent methods of struggle and should work for negotiated settlement of all conflicts. Even if force is being used in self-defence or in defence of others, it may often lead to still greater loss of life and may provoke further violence rather than bringing a swift and lasting solution. While some participants in the meeting described themselves as pacifists, others said that it could appear hypocritical to advocate non-violence at a time when some or even all parties were already using force. “Neutrality” in mediation should not be carried to the point of evading all condemnation of violations; but one-sided condemnations and lack of self-criticism were seen to be wrong. Minimising or exaggerating past or present evils were also criticised. Religion could be part of the solution, both in its preaching and exemplifying of moral and spiritual values and in its upholding of international laws and conventions.

In order to build a culture of dialogue and co-operation in place of a culture of violence and hatred, certain deliberate steps should be taken:

1. Humanitarian aid should never be obstructed.
2. People should be helped to help themselves and their neighbours.
3. Propaganda should be counteracted by a fair and constructive media.
4. Education should promote tolerance and truthfulness, providing not only an understanding of the past and the present but also a capacity to envision and plan for a common future.

By protecting and helping each other, and by building up mutual respect and understanding through dialogue, confidence and security can be enhanced. The participants further agreed that, in this process, the seeking and accepting of reconciliation are both seen as being of vital importance. They welcomed the theme chosen by CEC and CCEE for the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, to be held in Graz in June 1997, “Reconciliation: Gift of God and Source of New Life”. Churches in the FRY, Croatia and elsewhere were encouraged to address this theme in its spiritual, pastoral and social dimensions and in local and global perspectives. It was hoped that preparations for the Assembly could include ecumenical theological reflection, shared humanitarian projects, youth encounters across political and cultural frontiers, and common advocacy for just and peaceful conflict resolution - and all these particularly in the context of the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Where possible, such activities should be undertaken in partnership with neighbours of other faiths. Participants were convinced that pessimism and despair can be challenged, if reconciliation is shown and proved to be both necessary and possible.

**The Promise and Power of Faith: Religions’ role in promoting peace and tolerance**
*Presentation by the Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, WCC General Secretary, in a panel to mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Charter and the UN Year for Tolerance, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 3 July 1995.*

*The other speakers were H.E. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and H.H. Alexy II, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.*

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

It is a distinct honor, on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the adoption of the Charter and during this United Nations Year for Tolerance, to be given this opportunity to speak on the role of people of faith in promoting peace and tolerance. It is a particular privilege to share this platform with you, Mr. Secretary-General, and to complement your own important reflections on this important and timely topic.

I come before you today in my capacity as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, whose headquarters were established more than fifty years ago here in Geneva, a city long identified with the pursuit of peace. In this Council are joined some 325 Christian churches of Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox confessions, located in nearly all the member states of the United Nations. I am grateful that the spiritual head of one of our member churches, His Holiness Alexy II, honors us with his presence here in connection with his visit to the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches.

As a spokesperson for a Christian world body, I do not pretend to speak on behalf of all Christians, many of whom belong to churches that are not members of the Council, nor for people of other living faiths. However, my reflections are informed by the active dialogue the World Council of Churches maintains with a wide range of Christian churches beyond our
membership and with people of other faiths. I believe that many of them will share the perspectives which I bring to you today.

From time immemorial, religion has been a defining feature of human society and of the self-understanding of individual human beings. Cultures have given religions their language, and religions, in turn, have provided cultures with ultimate meaning. Religions have been among the principal bearers and protectors of peoples’ languages, traditions, cultural identity and social cohesion through the ages.

Most major world religions are rooted in a commitment to universality and tolerance. Participants representing a wide spectrum of faiths issued an important joint declaration at the conclusion of a recent UNESCO Conference on “The Contribution by Religions to the Culture of Peace” (Barcelona, December 1994), which reaffirms this. They declared:

We are aware of the world’s cultural and religious diversity. Each culture represents a universe in itself and yet is not closed... Unless we recognize pluralism and diversity, no peace is possible. We strive for the harmony which is at the very core of peace...neither the meaning of peace nor of religion can be reduced to a single and rigid concept, just as the range of human experience cannot be conveyed by a single language.

Not all societies have taken such a positive view of religion in society. During this century, Communism sought to eliminate religion and religious institutions through severe social and political constraints and periodic waves of systematic persecution. In the West, the process of secularization and the rise of secularist ideology led many either to disregard religion, or to privatize or deny its contribution to society.

Today, there is a world-wide reawakening of religion, in part, as a reaction to the recent past. Because this resurgence of religious feeling has sometimes taken radical, even aggressive forms, it has engendered fears in many quarters. But we must not lose sight of the fact that the widespread return to religion is also an affirmation that spirituality is essential to human existence. It would be a serious mistake to equate this reawakening with intolerance, for within it is the latent promise of a common search for peace and life together in global community.

At the same time, new religious fervor is often combined with peoples’ deep desire to recover and reassert their ethnic and national identity and freedom in a world besieged by globalizing trends. Some religious movements lend theological and ideological justification for an exclusivist, defensive and at times aggressively nationalistic understanding of human community.

This is not a new phenomenon in human history. As the interfaith declaration issued at the UNESCO conference stated,

Religions have contributed to the peace of the world, but they have also led to division, hatred and war.

The declaration went on to say,

We feel obliged to call for sincere acts of repentance and mutual forgiveness, both personally and collectively, to one another, to humanity in general, and to Earth and all living beings. Religious people have too often betrayed the high ideals they themselves have preached.

...We must be at peace with ourselves to achieve inner peace through personal reflection and spiritual growth, and to cultivate a spirituality which manifests itself in action.

The reality of new religious movements is an undeniable fact. The challenge to all religions today is to infuse these movements with the fundamental values of humility, repentance, mutual forgiveness, tolerance, and a common commitment to peace based on universal values. We all
recognize that this is a daunting task, but there are those in all world religions deeply committed
to the task.
This is not, however, something which can be left to religions alone. Political leaders, policy
makers, social scientists and leaders of international institutions have a major responsibility for
creating a climate which will foster the positive values of tolerance, peace and universalism which
reside in religious communities. History shows that those who exercise political and military
power, and those who shape public opinion often seek to use religious sentiment to undergird
narrow national, political, and even imperial interests. At the same time, the role of religions as
the conscience of society is both feared and despised by many governments who regard religion
as a threat, or as an impediment to the realization of their hegemonic aims.
An example of this is to be found in our own recent history. In the late 1970s and through the
1980s churches and other religious groups were at the centre of mass popular protests against
the modernization and proliferation of nuclear weapons. These protests challenged the logic and
spirit of nuclear deterrence. Similar movements demanded respect for human rights and
democracy. Many governments attacked such groups frontally, and engaged in both overt and
covert efforts to destabilize and divide religions engaged for justice, peace, tolerance and
international understanding.
We have put the Cold War behind us. But the narrow, simplistic mindset which marked that
period persists. Many policy makers and political leaders continue to see the world as divided
into warring camps, into good and bad, righteous and evil. Regrettably, many now would divide
the world along religious lines, and follow policies which militate against intercultural and
interfaith understanding. This must end. The logic of the Cold War must now be buried forever.
Religion is not the enemy. Nor are religions as such enemies one of another, as we are told by
those who see the future in terms of the confrontation of cultures. Fanaticism, intolerance, and
the blind pursuit of power are what threatens human community and the creation of which we
are a part. No religion worthy of its calling can ever be an unconditional supporter of worldly
power. Faithful to its people, but more faithful still to God and the highest principles of good,
religion has a vocation to challenge power when leaders depart from that which promotes peace,
tolerance and well-being for all without distinction.
The promise, and the power of faith is there. Now, perhaps more than ever before in history, we
need to discover how religions and the state, as well as religions and international institutions,
can interact in order to create tolerance and peace.
Tolerance alone, however, is not enough to enable religions to make their full contribution.
Tolerance can be limited to condescending acceptance, and fall short of full recognition of
legitimate otherness and of the right to be equal, though different. Religious and cultural
pluralism is not only a historical reality. It is a source of enrichment for society. Plurality, most
religions believe, is part of God’s design for the world. It can only flourish in democratic
societies which respect the rule of law and guarantee equal rights and privileges to all individuals
and communities who accept shared responsibility for the well-being of all together.
Representatives of five major world religions gathered in a dialogue meeting sponsored by the
World Council of Churches in Colombo, Sri Lanka affirmed this in their joint statement, in
which they said,

We (have together) acknowledged real common links, based on a sense of the universal
interdependence and responsibility of each and every person with and for all other persons;
we together recognized the fundamental unity of human beings as one family and committed
ourselves to strive, and, if necessary, to be ready to pay a price to realize the equality and
dignity of all human beings.
Such signs of good will are essential, but tolerance, peace, and harmony among peoples of deep
religions convictions, also requires that states assure full respect for the right to religious
freedom. As the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief has reaffirmed, everyone must have “the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” a right which includes “freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his or her choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private to manifest that religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”

These words were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 at the urging of the World Council of Churches. We have consistently affirmed that the right to religious freedom is not an exclusive right to be claimed as a privilege for any single religion. Rather it is essential for all if religion is to play its full, constructive role in building a world community characterized by tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, peace and justice.

If religion fails to do this then faith will have lost all of its promise and all of its power. But all the major world religions, I am convinced, are aware of the challenge to faithfulness and this was given voice in the appeal issued by those who joined in the UNESCO Conference from which I quoted earlier. They said, and with this I conclude:

Grounded in our faith, we will build a culture of peace based on non-violence, tolerance, dialogue, mutual understanding, and justice. We call upon the institutions of civil society, the United Nations System, governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations, corporations, and the mass media to strengthen their commitments to peace and to listen to the cries of the victims and the dispossessed. We call upon the different religious and cultural traditions to join hands together in this effort, and to cooperate with us in spreading the message of peace.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

Report on Jerusalem visit

Press release issued upon return of Dr. Konrad Raiser to Geneva after his first official visit as General Secretary to member churches in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, 15-21 May 1995.

Upon his return to WCC headquarters in Geneva, Dr Raiser said, “The possibilities of a second round of negotiations in the current peace process seem slim. In my discussions with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, both noted concern about the narrow majority they now have in the Knesset which made them cautious about taking further dramatic initiatives ahead of the 1996 elections. Both emphasized security concerns which seemed to override their commitment to furthering the peace process.”

“President Arafat spoke of a complete impasse in the peace process, due to Israeli intransigence, and a sense of abandonment by the international community. We heard warnings from many on the Palestinian side that, unless the peace process is brought back on track, a general uprising and possibly uncontrollable violence will be the result”.

Dr Raiser and his delegation made their visit against a history of concern for the region by the WCC, which dates back to its foundation in 1948. The WCC has repeatedly affirmed its conviction that the mutual recognition of the Israeli and Palestinian people on the basis of equality is the only guarantee for peace and security in the region. It has further affirmed that the rights to self-determination of the Israeli and Palestinian people are mutually interdependent. This policy was repeated last by the WCC Central Committee in March 1990 in the context of a Call to Prayer for Peace in the Holy Land.
Through its member churches, for well over forty years, the WCC has ministered to the needs of the people of the region, especially the displaced and the uprooted, seeking justice and promoting reconciliation.

In September 1993 the WCC Executive Committee “warmly” welcomed the signing of an accord by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization although, at the same time, it cautioned that the “breakthrough” did not yet ensure peace nor guarantee justice. Full, speedy implementation of those accords, it said, was indispensable.

The aim of Dr Raiser’s visit was to visit member churches and hear assessments by religious and political leaders of the current situation. As a result, Dr Raiser and his delegation make the following observations:

1. **Memorandum of Their Beatitudes, the Patriarchs and of the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem.** This historic joint statement, signed 14 November 1994 and concerning the status of Jerusalem, should be affirmed and supported. The statement said, “(Jerusalem) cannot belong exclusively to one people or to only one religion”. It added that Jerusalem requires a “special judicial and political statute which reflects the universal importance and significance of the city”. The statement concluded that experience showed any status for Jerusalem as an “open city” would need international guarantees.

   The team heard of a number of plans by churches and other religious organizations in the region to hold discussions on the special character of Jerusalem.

2. **Land Confiscations and Building Rights.** The delegation heard numerous complaints from Palestinians and Israeli human rights advocates about the Israeli policy of land confiscations. This was seen to be altering the situation on the ground ahead of negotiations, particularly in the case of Jerusalem where it was changing the city's unique demographic character and balance.

   Other strong complaints centred on the refusal of the Israeli authorities to grant building permits to churches and others on Arab-owned land. The team heard stories of refusals being justified on the grounds of areas having been designated “green belt”. However, examples were given that following confiscations and once in Israeli hands the same areas were reclassified and building was allowed.

3. **Closures.** The delegation heard repeated stories of the difficulties and vast economic cost caused by the many closures made by the Israeli authorities of the crossing points into Jerusalem, the West Bank and especially Gaza. The denial of access to Jerusalem during Holy Week earlier this year was cited as one example of the humiliation and suffering caused by the closures. Equally important, the closures also make it impossible for many people to reach their places of work, clinics, schools and other social institutions.

4. **The Concept of Peace.** The team heard growing cynicism on all sides about the peace process. The delegation believes there is a danger now that a real understanding of what peace implies will be lost. The delegation is clear that peace should not be allowed to become an empty political slogan.

   For the Israeli authorities, peace was equated with national security achieved, where necessary, through military means.
The delegation believes there is a need to reclaim the concept of peace from narrow definitions and to persuade those concerned that genuine security can only be based on the establishment of justice for all.

From the Palestinian side, many affirmations were made that “This is no peace!”

5. International Dimension. Many Palestinians were deeply disappointed at what they saw as the international community's failure to meet political and economic promises, made after the Oslo Accords, to support the peace process.

The delegation’s visit coincided with the use by the USA, for the first time in five years, of its veto in the UN Security Council, on this occasion over the issue of land confiscations by Israel. Palestinians said they felt abandoned and betrayed by this action although this was somewhat tempered by a feeling of encouragement that the other fourteen members of the Security Council had voted in favour of the resolution which had been critical of Israel.

Some of those most hopeful at the time of the signing of the Oslo Accords displayed serious disillusionment and even despair about the current situation.

Some senior and respected Palestinian figures considered that the negotiations had failed and the time had come for the Palestinian side to withdraw their negotiating team from Cairo and to challenge the international community to resume its responsibility to break the impasse.

6. Role of Christian Community. The delegation believes that the Christian witness around the world to those things which make for true peace in this particular region continues to be essential.

The Christian community in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza is unique in the historical role it has played in keeping lines of communication open between all communities. This must continue and, obviously, requires a continuing Christian presence in Jerusalem and the region. However, local Christian communities see themselves under both political and demographic threat.

During the last 30 years, the Christian population of the region has continuously declined in numbers. Today, Christians have been reduced to 2.3% of the population of the West Bank and Gaza. The percentage for Israel is 2.5%. Numbers have dwindled mainly through the emigration of those who find the current political and social situation unbearable.

Many of those Palestinian Christians who remain fear the day may arrive when the only Christians in Jerusalem are visiting pilgrims who will see just dead stones and museums; the “living stones” who worship, work and serve in the region will be no more.

Despite all the obstacles, the delegation nevertheless encountered those on all sides still deeply committed to the pursuit of a just peace. The delegation was encouraged to hear from Jewish religious leaders engaged in inter-faith dialogue. It was clear that on the Palestinian side, too, there was also a willingness for dialogue as well as an awareness that Israeli political rhetoric is not the whole picture.

In a further comment in Geneva, Dr Raiser said, “During my visit to Gaza, where I was impressed by the social programmes organised by the Middle East Council of Churches, I confirmed that the WCC’s long support of the legitimate hopes of the Palestinian people would continue through prayer, advocacy and humanitarian aid. I am also aware that Israelis have invested considerable hopes in the peace process and, in this, they should be supported and
nourished. But, for a legitimate peace process to continue, it is essential that the Palestinian people, who are unequal partners, be supported and encouraged not to give up hope for peace.”

**New Openings for Muslim-Christian Dialogue**

*Press release on a staff visit to Iran, 19-22 April 1995.*

Two WCC staff members recently visited Iran in response to the invitation extended by representatives of the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance at a meeting earlier this year with WCC General Secretary, Dr Konrad Raiser.

WCC member churches in Iran were consulted about plans for the visit by the Rev. Dwain Epps, WCC International Affairs Coordinator and Dr. Tarek Mitri, WCC Executive Secretary for Christian-Muslim Relations.

This was the first official WCC visit to Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

During the visit agreement was reached on a framework for dialogue with Muslim scholars in Iran. A further meeting will be held in Geneva later this year to work out details.

During their four-day stay in Iran, Dr. Mitri and Mr. Epps renewed direct contacts with member churches who constitute a sizeable portion of the Christian community in that country. The WCC delegation met senior church leaders and visited institutions of the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Synod of Evangelical Churches in both Teheran and Isfahan.

At a meeting with senior church leaders the delegation expressed condolences to the churches for the losses they and other Christians had suffered in Iran in recent years. The two WCC staff members assured Iranian Christians that they continue to be very much in the prayers of the ecumenical community around the world.

The delegation also met with officials of the Iranian Ministry responsible for minority affairs and inter-religious dialogue; and the Director and staff of the Centre for International Cultural Studies where they discussed theological approaches to justice and peace and explored possibilities for continuing dialogue.

During conversations with the leader of the Iranian Association of Inter-Religious Dialogue, Sheikh Shabasteri, professor at the University of Teheran and former Director of the University of Hamburg’s Islamic Centre, agreement was reached on a framework and possible topics for future discussions.

The delegation also met Ms Fatima Hashemi, President of the Iranian Women’s Solidarity Association, who had visited WCC headquarters with a women’s delegation some weeks earlier.

**Letter from the Acting General Secretary to the Ambassador of Albania in Geneva, 20 October 1994**

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

As you will certainly recall, the World Council of Churches was one of the first major international organizations to have visited Albania after the revolution. We have felt especially
close to the Albanian nation since that visit, and have also been actively engaged in programs of humanitarian assistance to Albania in solidarity with the people and Government in their difficult task of reconstructing the social, economic and political fabric of the nation. It is against this background that we ask you to communicate to your Government our concern about certain provisions affecting church-state relations contained in the draft Constitution which will soon be submitted for approval by a referendum.

Article 7 of the draft Constitution, on "The Lay Character of the Albanian State," provides for religion to be separated from the State, and guarantees freedom of religious beliefs. However, paragraph 4 of the same Article states that: "The heads of the large religious communities must be Albanian citizens, born in Albania, with permanent residence therein during the last 20 years." Our member church in the Republic of Albania, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, would suffer severe, and, we believe, discrimination should such a provision come into force of law at this time.

The General Ecclesiastical Council of that Church has submitted a commentary on these provisions of the draft Constitution on 11 October to the President of the Democracy and other distinguished leaders of the Government. We wish to offer our strong support for the position they have taken with respect to this provision.

The Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania, His Beatitude Anastasios, has been given by the Church the onerous task of leading the Orthodox faithful out of the dark days of repression under the former regime, which sought by all means to erase even the memory of religion. As a good shepherd, he has looked after the faithful remnant of this Church with which a part of the Albanian nation has a deep historic bond. By the application of this provision, His Beatitude would be set aside by the law, in violation of the will of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, and of the very principle of religious freedom and separation of church and state for which the draft Constitution would provide. This would be a tragic loss not only for this Church, but for the Albanian nation as a whole.

It would be impossible for this, and virtually any other church in Albania to comply with the terms of this restrictive provision, in the light of the decades-long reign of repressive atheistic rule. Thus, the import of the application of such a law would be to leave the Church without spiritual leadership.

It is also noteworthy that this provision would place even greater restrictions on this religious community than are placed on candidates for the presidency of the Republic, or for election to the Parliament.

We deeply respect the desire of the Government of the Republic of Albania to provide for the nation a constitution which reflects well-established international norms and standards, including those of religious freedom and the protection of all citizens from any form of discrimination based on religion or belief. It would be regrettable if this effort were discredited in the eyes of the international community by a provision which contradicts both the letter and the spirit of such constitutional protections. We therefore urge the Government of the Republic of Albania to withdraw these discriminatory provisions nor seek to apply such in subsequent legislation or administrative practice.

The World Council of Churches firmly believes that the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, with its leadership chosen according to its ancient ecclesiastical norms and procedures, is a great asset to the newly established democratic and multi-religious Albanian
State. We sincerely hope that the leadership will not squander this resource, but rather cherish and nurture it along with other expressions of religious faith, belief or non-religious convictions.

Yours respectfully,

Wesley Ariarajah
Acting General Secretary

Letter from CCIA Executive Secretary to the Ambassador of Iran in Bern, Switzerland, 30 September 1994

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you about an urgent matter which has just been brought to our attention, and regarding which we are anxious to have accurate information.

We understand from correspondents that two Iranian citizens, Mr. Kourosh Doulat-Sara'i and Mr. Mehrdad Rostami, recently deported to Iran from Turkey following the expiry of their visas, were last heard of in prison in Tehran. According to unconfirmed reports, these two men have now been executed, after receiving 110 lashes each.

We understand that these two men had converted from Islam to Christianity. Without in any way wishing to comment on this action, we are, nevertheless, deeply disturbed by reports of the punishment meted out to them. If the information we have received is not accurate, we would be glad to know the whereabouts of these two men and what is their present status.

We would be grateful for your early reply.

I am, your Excellency,
Yours respectfully,
Elizabeth Salter
Executive Secretary, International Affairs

Letter from the Acting General Secretary to Mr. Alex Kanyarengwe, Chairman of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, Brussels, 10 June 1994

The World Council of Churches received yesterday morning with deep sadness and profound shock the news of the murders of the thirteen Rwandan Roman Catholic bishops and priests at Kabgayi.

We have taken note of the acknowledgment by the leadership of the Rwandan Patriotic Army that members of their forces were responsible for these senseless killings.

No death of a Rwandan citizen since the beginning of this terrible crisis has failed to move the hearts of Christians around the world. Yet these have struck a particularly heavy blow to the Rwandan people. Bishop Thaddee Nsengiyunva, president of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of Rwanda had distinguished himself, as you know well, as a leader of the ecumenical contact group established in 1991 to mediate between the political parties, to work with disaffected youth, and to guide the nation through transition to participatory democracy.
The other bishops and priests killed now had worked diligently to build bridges of peace and understanding between Rwandan communities.

We note that one of the soldiers identified as responsible for these murders has been killed by forces under the authority of the RPF, and the others are being sought. We plead with you now to honor these martyrs, followers of Christ, the Prince of Peace, by putting others suspected of direct responsibility in detention until such time as a fair trial may be held to judge them. Such an act would be a symbol of the intention of the RPF to break the cycle of uncontrolled violence in your country, to foster and respect the rule of law, and to move in the direction of national healing and reconciliation.

We look forward to assurances from you that you are doing all in your power to prevent any further excesses of this sort, and of your willingness to renounce the notion that peace can be achieved through war and killing. We urge you, for the sake of all Rwandans, to cooperate fully with mediators who seek an immediate cease-fire and prompt negotiated settlement.

Mercy Oduyoye
Acting General Secretary

Letter from the Acting General Secretary to Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 10 June 1994

The World Council of Churches received yesterday morning with deep sadness the news of the tragic, senseless killings of our brothers in Christ, Archbishop Vincent Nsengiyunva, Bishop Thaddee Nsengiyunva, Bishop Joseph Ruzindana and ten priests of the Rwandan Roman Catholic Church. We wish to convey to you, your church, and the Rwandan Bishops Conference our most sincere condolences.

Each passing day, news of thousands more victims of the tragic events in Rwanda moves the hearts of Christians around the world. The murder of these church leaders and pastors touches us especially deeply, for they had distinguished themselves particularly through participation in ecumenical efforts to mediate between the political parties of Rwanda, work with disaffected youth, and efforts to build bridges between communities. Bishop Thaddee Nsengiyunva, president of the Bishops’ Conference had given strong, faithful, unflinching leadership to the interdenominational contact group established in 1991 to seek a peaceful solution to the tensions growing in Rwanda and to guide the nation through its transition to participatory democracy.

The Rwandan nation, the world community, and especially the churches are impoverished by this loss.

Please be assured of our prayers in this hour, and of our continuing commitment to stand together with your church in ecumenical efforts to bring succor to the surviving victims and a prompt end to the Rwandan tragedy. Indeed, the blood of the martyrs is the most compelling reminder of the imperative of Christian unity for the sake of the whole people of God. May God strengthen us in this hour to follow the compassionate lead of these, his beloved children.

In the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace,

Mercy Oduyoye
Acting General Secretary
Building peace with justice is a Christian calling for both individuals and churches. Yet, throughout history, churches across the world responded in a variety of ways to situations and structures of injustice and violence. For example, some took sides in conflicts for partisan reasons. Some helped to create or were complicit in maintaining conditions of oppression and war. Some witnessed the religious loyalties of Christians, Jews, Muslims and other religious groups mobilized and manipulated by religious extremists. Some found themselves enmeshed in complex circumstances of injustice and violence without clear direction. Some churches chose to side with victims of oppression as an act of faith in God who opts for the poor and the suffering. Some steadfastly witnessed to the power of pacifism and active non-violent methods of engagement for peace and justice.

Christians need to face all these situations and others with discernment and humility, confessing that too frequently we fail to heed Christ's call to witness to, and help lay the foundations for, justice and peace. In the World Council of Churches, we renew our commitment both to this call and to a process of challenging ourselves and our churches to mutual accountability in work together to overcome violence, to be agents of reconciliation, and to build peace grounded in communities of justice. We hold fast to the hope that God will be faithful to God's promise of peace and wellbeing for all.

Economic, political, social and cultural structures that promote or acquiesce in violence can be transformed and reconstructed to be systems that promote peace with justice. People who perpetuate and participate in violence, or whose lifestyles contribute to the violence others experience, can be converted to become peacemakers. Those victimized by violence can find healing and wholeness. These understandings are grounded first in our faith in the Resurrection, the Christian experience of life in the midst of death. These understandings also arise from a conviction and analysis that the survival of humanity sustained in creation depends on such transformations. Peace is practical. Peace is possible. Peace is a Gospel vision and a Christian imperative.

Conflict is a normal aspect of life in human community, a reality experienced by most people.

Yet conflict does not necessarily lead to violence and war. Individuals, families, churches, societies and the international community need to focus on living creatively with conflict, learning to manage some conflicts and finding the means to resolve, reconcile or transform others. Christians and churches need to foster local and global cultures that value dialogue and respect the richness of diversity. These are not easy options but ones that often involve tough struggle.

Violence originates in part from systems and structures that rob people of the opportunity for humane living conditions which help sustain their lives. One such system is globalization, the transnationalization of capital and production based on a single, world-wide logic of exchange.

Globalization increasingly centralizes control and power, removing decisions about fundamental matters of economic, social and political life from the local and national level to the global level. This system also imposes on individuals and societies world-wide norms of
economic growth, consumerism, privatization, individualism, and the presumption of winners and losers. These norms, accompanied by such remote control, accentuate and accelerate human fragmentation, isolation, and exclusion for the profit of the few, contributing significantly to violence among individuals, groups, and nations.

A second system from which violence originates is military rivalry among nation-states. The destructive capacity of both small- and large-scale weapons has increased dramatically in this century, leading many analysts to conclude that such devastating power renders any previous ethical justifications for war obsolete and makes military preparedness incapable of providing national or global security. Many of the old industrial economies in both the West and East harbour deeply entrenched weapons and war-related production complexes, most of which are largely disconnected from widely-shared, realistic assessments about requirements for these nations’ security. Many newly industrialized economies employ weapons production and arms trade primarily as a strategy for economic growth rather than meeting defense needs.

Manufacturing and trade in armaments and weaponry for profit contributes to war within and between nations. Military stockpiles and arms races drain societies of resources necessary to meet human needs. Military research and development divert precious skills and technology from addressing pressing social problems. Militarism pervades many societies, resulting in human degradation, isolation and exclusion. Pervasive armaments, together with the concept that military might leads to national security, fosters violence within and between countries.

Violence also originates in human hearts and minds. Human sin divides community – people from people, people from God. Individuals and groups often impose stereotypes and labels on each other and, at times, tend to demonize adversaries or, more simply, those who are different.

Families world-wide often employ whipping and beating as a presumed means of discipline - parents against children and husbands against wives. Yet the short term injuries and the longterm psychological and social damage of such practices, especially as children grow up learning to model the behaviour of their parents, outweigh any benefits gained.

Overcoming violence requires addressing causes and symptoms like these and more, at structural, individual, and intermediate levels. Such holistic approaches are essential for credibility, integrity and building trust.

Churches and other religious communities possess a powerful and unique resource for creating cultures of peace with justice: the possibility of fostering a spirituality for life. Religious communities can help cultivate the inner resources and strength people need to face the challenge of violence, offering opportunities for confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation to individuals and groups. Christian understandings of grace, love, and redemption undergird the possibility of the church’s witness to peace with justice.

Cultures of peace with justice restore fractured communities, grounding themselves in trusting and caring personal relationships; protect the most vulnerable (the old, differently abled, children) and help them to partake in the fullness of life; overcome barriers, cross borders, build bridges of collaborative and cooperative relations as well as inclusive communities; fulfil material and spiritual needs as well as those of identity within community; provide a space for everyone who agrees to join in an alliance against the rising tide of violence in their societies and in the world; and teach children as well as adults respect and appreciation of diversity.
Violent conflicts and wars are best resolved by those within the situation, at times assisted by others who have the confidence of the conflicting parties and who are well acquainted with the context, culture, and history of the situation. Local, national and international mechanisms to enhance negotiation, mediation and the peaceful settlement of disputes need to be created or, where existing, enhanced.

Advocacy for justice is integral to building a lasting foundation for peace. All people have the right to resist oppression in their search for justice, peace, and a sustainable environment.

Everyone has the right to be included, to participate in making decisions about issues that affect their lives, whether in economic, political, social, cultural, or family matters. People also have the right to live in secure homes, communities and nations, free of the threat of violence. In the modern world where systems of technology, communication and transportation are global, security for particular individuals, groups and nations ultimately depends on the commitment to security for all.

Tension exists between people's right, on the one hand, to self defense and to resist oppression and, on the other hand, their right to freedom from violence. These tensions are not easily resolved. Yet, churches, societies, movements for social justice, and individual Christians largely fail to explore fully various institutions and processes for nonviolent approaches to personal, community and national security, too easily capitulating to a mentality that violence is a normal and effective means for defense or systematic change. Exploration and implementation of short and long term nonviolent strategies at all levels of human organization can only be developed with commitment, conviction, creativity, determination and perseverance.

**Working Principles**
The programme to overcome violence seeks:
- to contribute to the promotion of peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in global political, social and economic structures;
- to move toward the de-legitimization of war and violence; to strive to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence; to aim for the elimination of any ecclesial or theological justification for the use of violence;
- to encourage churches to place a priority on addressing violence in their own societies, as well as the violence their cultures and nations impose on others, focusing on structures and root causes, as well as particular situations;
- to begin from the concrete experience and needs of churches as they face situations and structures of violence and injustice;
- to bring out and encourage the desires, capacities and traditional means already present in people, communities and churches for healing and reconciliation;
- to ensure that all involved in churches (clergy and laity; congregations, official voices, ecumenical networks, and social movements; women and men; children, youth and adults) participate in the process;
- to initiate new efforts as well as to encourage and strengthen on-going work for peace with justice through creating networks of mutual support and challenge among churches, Christian groups and others with whom they work;
- to interact with many existing structures and institutions in order to build alliances for the common good across social movements, business, community and other groups, even when some new partners and patterns of alliance must be among unequals;
- to make full use of technology and systems of communication, including interaction with television, radio and print media, the internet, audio visuals, advertising, story-telling,
preaching, etc.;
- to support those who seek to develop police and national defense systems based on the application of active nonviolence rather than reliance on armed force;
- to make full use of educational institutions and other educational processes to help children as well as adults learn to live creatively with conflict, finding mechanisms to manage some conflicts and providing the means to resolve, reconcile or transform others;
- to manifest common commitment through visible, dramatic public action;
- to equip the churches better for resolving violent conflicts and for managing and mediating disputes that threaten to become violent, by providing opportunity for and access to training in these skills;
- to assist or facilitate analysis and mediation by the WCC or other appropriate organizations when churches face severe crises, impending violence, or war.

Letter from the General Secretaries of the WCC and the CEC to Dr. Mustafa Ceric, Reis ul ulema, Supreme Head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 21 April 1994

Your Excellency,

We receive daily reports of the sufferings of the people of Gorazde and the destruction of this and other cities in Bosnia Herzegovina. Against this background, your message informing us of the massacre of twelve citizens of Gorazde has now reached us.

As Christian leaders, we wish to express to you, the Supreme Head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia Herzegovina, our heartfelt sorrow at the news of these tragic deaths, and sympathy and prayers for the families of these and all other victims of this cruel onslaught. We can only deplore this and all acts of aggression which ignore basic humanitarian principles.

It is intolerable that such actions take place in a city which has been designated for special protection as a "safe area" by United Nations authorities, and which has, in fact, proved to be nothing of the sort.

We reiterate our conviction that this terrible conflict can only be brought to an end when all sides are ready to lay down their arms and seek a just peace through negotiation rather than through brutal armed confrontation. We are actively engaged in seeking ways of contributing to the peaceful resolution of this conflict, and in supporting all efforts to turn away from violence and to build bridges between communities.

In this spirit we also repeat our desire to remain in contact with you, and to reject all attempts to define the hostilities in Bosnia Herzegovina as a religious conflict. We are ready to continue to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between the religious leaders from the various parts of former Yugoslavia, in a spirit of fraternal concern for all those who are caught up in this brutal struggle.

We greet you in the name of God, the all-powerful Giver of Life,

Yours respectfully,

Konrad Raiser
Secretary General
World Council of Churches
Jean Fischer
General Secretary
Letter from the General Secretary to President Sardar Farooq Legari, 12 April 1994

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned at the increase of religious intolerance in Pakistan. It strongly condemns the attack on the April 5, 1994 on three Christians charged under the "Blasphemy Law". As a result of the attack, Manzur Masih died on the spot, Rehmet Masih and Salamat Masih, a minor, were admitted to the hospital in serious condition with bullet wounds. This is the second in the series of such attacks. Earlier, Naemat Ahmer, a Christian school teacher, also charged under the "Blasphemy Law", lost his life at the hands of a young religious zealot before the courts could decide the case.

These brutal killings indicate the lack of respect a section of society has for the due process of law, in Pakistan. Christians in Pakistan are accordingly concerned at these grave developments.

The World Council of Churches appeals to Your Excellency to take immediate and effective steps to provide safety and security to the Christian minority in the country. We also urge Your Excellency to consider the repeal of the "Blasphemy Law" as it has become a tool for personal vendetta in the hands of religious zealots to oppress and victimize the religious minorities in the country.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Statement by the General Secretary on Events in the Middle East, 2 March 1994

As Christians around the world prepare to unite their spirits in the World Day of Prayer (4 March), our hearts are burdened by the terrible tragedies which have occurred in recent days in the Middle East. The unconscionable mass slaughter, in Hebron, of Muslim believers at prayer before the ancient tomb of Abraham during the holy days of Ramadan profaned a site regarded as holy by Muslims, Jews and Christians. Days later, the appalling bombing of the Maronite cathedral in Junieh claimed lives of Christians gathered to worship God.

All those responsible must be identified and made accountable. Justice, however, requires more than this. It demands that the thirst for vengeance, the hatred, and the refusal to honor the sacred, God-given humanity of the other must be purged from the souls of these nations and peoples and of all of us who through complicity or silence have condoned the decades of injustice which have made of the Holy Land a killing field.

The world must not allow those who hate justice and abhor peace to set aside the will of God.

We must rise up as one to claim the right to live together, to manifest our common humanity, and our rightful inheritance as children of the loving God.
The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches welcomed, last September, the accords between Israel and the PLO, which offered the promise of a new day for the peoples of the Middle East. At the same time the Committee also reminded the churches that "Important as it is, this agreement does not yet ensure peace, nor does it guarantee justice... Implementation is the key." The Committee called for the complete withdrawal of all Israeli forces from all the Occupied Territories, the resettlement of refugees and the restoration of the full rights of the Palestinian people. The WCC has previously called for the removal of illegal Israeli settlements as a key to a just solution.

As Christians join now in the World Day of Prayer, we appeal to them all to raise their voices in unison, praying fervently to God to remove from every heart that which stands in the way of peace grounded in justice for all. Let us pray that we may all be invested with the will and the means to achieve this, and thus to honor those whose deaths we mourn.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Message from the Central Committee to the Churches in the Countries of Former Yugoslavia, Johannesburg, South Africa, January 1994

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, 20-28 January 1994, expresses continuing deep concern for the tragic conflict which continues to claim so many lives and to wreak such destruction in many areas of the former Yugoslavia.

Our chief desire is not to seek to apportion blame in an increasingly complex struggle. We are aware that much of the reporting of the conflict lacks objectivity, and that violence and brutality are being committed on every side, Serb, Croat and Muslim. We know, too, that the sanctions applied only against Serbia and Montenegro, with the consequent desperate shortage of food and medical supplies, have caused widespread suffering to the civilian populations, whilst the flow of arms through the region continues unabated.

Rather than raising our voice in accusation, we make an urgent call for an end to the fighting, through peaceful negotiation. Even though the efforts of international negotiators have so far been largely fruitless, and there have been calls for armed intervention from several quarters, we do not believe that increasing military action is the way to true and lasting peace. The situation is too complex, and the aggressors too numerous, for simple solutions to be sought bringing military force to bear on one or another side.

What is vital is a universal desire for peace in the countries of former Yugoslavia, and in all countries involved in seeking solutions to the conflict. Every effort must be deployed, with imagination, determination and patience, for that peace to be attained and kept.

To this end we affirm the Statement from the Round Table of representatives of religious communities from the countries of former Yugoslavia, meeting in Pécs, Hungary, in December 1993, convened by the Conference of European Churches, in cooperation with the WCC. The Pécs statement calls for the members of the churches and religious communities to promote reconciliation, cessation of hostilities and the healing of all hatred and revenge. We also condemn the manipulation of religious symbols and religious feelings for war aims, and call for the
protection of the human rights of all, especially of religious, national and other minorities, and for the ending of all "ethnic cleansing".

We exhort our member churches and all Christians in the former Yugoslavia to remain faithful, in the name of Christ, to this call, and especially to resist every attempt to use religious sentiment and loyalty in the service of aggressive nationalism. We assure them of our continuing efforts, through humanitarian relief, moral and spiritual support and dialogue with the political negotiators, to bring succour to the suffering, strength to those under intolerable pressures, and an end to the war. Especially, we assure them of our prayers at all times, that the conflicting parties may lay down their arms, that the peoples of the countries of former Yugoslavia may be reconciled, and that all may know peace with justice.

Statement on new diplomatic arrangements between the Vatican and the State of Israel, 10 January 1994

The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches welcomed the signing of the peace accords between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993, calling upon all parties directly or indirectly involved to offer their cooperation for the successful fulfillment of the aims of the accords. Recent developments in relations between the Vatican State and the State of Israel could be regarded as further progress in the Middle East peace process.

While it is not the general practice of the WCC to comment on the activities of the Vatican as a state which maintains diplomatic relations with sovereign nations, it is appropriate to respond to inquiries on this agreement given its potential implications for ecumenical and interfaith relations.

It is our understanding that the question of the future status of Jerusalem will be a subject of continuing discussions between the Vatican and the State of Israel. The World Council of Churches and its member churches, especially those living and witnessing in the region, will be following these discussions with considerable interest.

The long-standing position of the ecumenical movement with regard to the status of Jerusalem is that this city's importance for the three great monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, cannot be overestimated. Each has Holy Places there to which pilgrims have come for centuries, and which are symbols of their peoples' deep attachments to this "City of Peace."

Jewish, Muslim and Christian participants in a colloquium on the "Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem," convened jointly last May by the WCC, the Lutheran World Federation, the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue underscored this point, affirming "that this Holy City holds universal spiritual significance to all for whom the ultimate truth is the God of Abraham.

The WCC position was restated by the Central Committee in its "Statement on Jerusalem," adopted in August 1974:

"Christian Holy Places in Jerusalem and neighboring areas belong to the greatest extent to member churches of the WCC, specifically the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, and are also of concern to other Christians.
"But the question of Jerusalem is not only a matter of the protection of the Holy Places, it is organically linked with living faiths and communities of people in the Holy City. Any proposed solution as to the future of the Holy Places in Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate rights of the churches most directly concerned, (including) the rights and needs of the indigenous peoples of the Holy City."

All future agreements on Jerusalem must be approached as part of the comprehensive Middle East peace process, since they will affect directly the lives of religious communities not only in Jerusalem, Israel and the Occupied Territories, but also those elsewhere in the region and beyond. In the present historical context and in a geographical area like the Middle East, religious and political dimensions of questions like the status of Jerusalem are virtually inseparable. Rightly approached, in consultation with all those involved, these agreements could make of this city a living symbol of the potential of religious communities to live together in harmony. But decisions taken in unilateral ways or according to narrow national or religious interests would have potentially serious political implications for the success of an overall peace settlement.

The status of Jerusalem has been, and will continue to be a subject of discussion in bilateral dialogues between WCC member churches and the Roman Catholic Church and in the formal dialogues between the WCC and that church. How the State of Israel approaches the issue will also determine for many groups in and beyond the region the degree to which it truly seeks to build a solid base for peace. The WCC hopes that both parties will respect the full range of rights of faith communities and peoples directly affected as they move to the formalization of their relations.

Letter from the General Secretary to Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, 4 November 1993

Your Excellency,

In recent weeks, I have received letters from groups in several parts of the world who are concerned about restrictions of certain fundamental rights of the Greek minority in Turkey.

Some of those communications speak of limitations on the activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and are based on either outdated or incorrect information. I shall be providing those who have written with facts which I hope will dispel some of their fears in this regard.

Nevertheless, aware of your and your Government's interest in removing any doubts about full respect for international norms and standards for the protection of minorities in Turkey, I would like to share several of their well-founded concerns with you.

There is evidence of growing animosity directed against the Greek minority in Turkey, reflected in public behaviour and statements published in part of the Turkish press. There is widespread dismay about the inadequacy, and in some places the unavailability, of education in "minority schools." According to our information, this fact has led more members of the dwindling Greek minority community to leave their Turkish homeland.

While the World Council of Churches is concerned about the protection of the rights of all minorities, we have a particular historical attachment to the Greek community through the Ecumenical Patriarchate to which its members look for spiritual nurture and belonging. It was the Ecumenical Patriarchate which, some seventy years ago, first issued the call for the creation of an ecumenical body to promote Christian unity in the world. In response to that call, the
WCC was eventually formed in 1948. It was the Patriarchate's intention at that time, and it remains ours today, that the unity of Christian churches be pursued in a way which would not threaten other religious communities, but rather open the way to cooperation among peoples of faith for the peace and well-being of the whole world.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, which churches throughout the world regard as providing a living link with the earliest Christian Church, has an international role which cannot be underestimated. Both as a symbol and an active promoter of the ecumenical pursuit of peace, justice and harmonious relations among peoples of all origins and faiths, it is widely regarded as a particularly important presence in your part of the world, where East and West meet, and which is torn today by terrible fratricidal ethnic conflicts. I am sure that you will agree that the unrestricted life and witness of this Patriarchate, dedicated to such principles, is a great asset to the Turkish nation as a whole, and enhances its status as a respected member of the community of nations.

In every age, but especially today, it is important for governments to create conditions which allow the continued presence of living religious communities in their places of origin. In the case of the Greek minority in Turkey, this must include protection against religious intolerance, the guaranteed right to one's own culture and language, the assurance that the community will not be used in any way as a pawn in international disputes between states, and the provision of equal opportunity for education.

An important gesture now would be for your Government to authorize the reopening of the Theological School of Heybeliada, which has been closed since July of 1971. This School, which will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding in August, 1994, is of great importance to the life of the Orthodox Church in Turkey and internationally. Official permission for it to continue its venerable work of theological education well ahead of that anniversary would be widely appreciated and would do credit to Turkey.

Madame Prime Minister, we are aware of recent gestures which have provided official, public recognition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of other Christian churches with historical roots in present-day Turkey. We welcome this as a sign of your desire to show to public opinion in general the constructive role these communities are playing in national life. We are also aware of your Government's efforts to identify and charge the perpetrators of acts of desecration against Christian churches and religious monuments in recent times. These acts are deeply troubling to the Greek minority, as you know, and the continuation of intensive efforts to bring those responsible to justice will contribute greatly to restoring trust and a sense of well-being in this community.

With appreciation for your kind attention to these concerns, I remain,
Respectfully yours,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Executive Committee Statement on the Middle East, Sigtuna, Sweden, September 1993

The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Sigtuna, Sweden, 14-20 September 1993, warmly welcomes the exchange of letters of mutual recognition between the leaders of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the subsequent signing in

These unprecedented actions constitute a significant step in the direction for which the WCC has hoped and prayed ever since it was formed 45 years ago.

For over four decades, the WCC has repeatedly issued calls for good-faith dialogue leading to a peaceful settlement. The V. Assembly (Nairobi, 1975) put it in these words:

Although the parties have not trusted one another sufficiently until now to engage in dialogue, full mutual recognition by the parties must be seen not as a precondition to, but rather as a product of the negotiation. We call upon all parties to take those steps essential to negotiations with hope for success. Among these steps, we emphasize the cessation of all military activity, both regular and irregular, including terrorism.

For the breakthrough achieved in the present negotiations, and for the wisdom and patience of the mediators, we give thanks to God.

Important as it is, however, this agreement does not yet ensure peace, nor does it guarantee justice. On both sides, serious, even potentially violent divisions remain as a result of the concessions that have been necessary to reach an accord.

Implementation is the key. The "Declaration of Principles" subscribed by the leaders of the PLO and the State of Israel does constitute a commitment to continue negotiations whose goal is the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, which by international consensus lay out the fundamental conditions for security, lasting peace and justice for Israel, the Palestinian people and the Arab States.

Many significant issues remain to be resolved, among them: the complete withdrawal of all Israeli forces from all the occupied territories, the future of Israeli settlements, the resettlement of refugees, and the restoration of the full rights of the Palestinian people. The future status of Jerusalem is also subject to further negotiation, and the principle long advocated by the WCC that the destiny of the holy city must be defined through a genuine partnership between followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam has yet to be affirmed.

Implementation of this agreement, and further negotiations within this auspicious new framework can succeed and achieve the goals of justice and security for all the peoples of the region only through the exercise of extraordinary political will and imagination, not only by the immediate parties to the continuing talks, but by major powers beyond the region.

We reiterate our commitment to the churches and to the peoples in the Middle East, and assure Jews and Muslims who have labored sacrificially for peace of the WCC’s continuing solidarity in this hopeful, yet trying time.

We renew the WCC’s call to churches all over the world to remain constant in prayer, and urge them:

- to support vigorously the continuation of this process,
- to redouble efforts to assist the Palestinian people in the reconstruction of their ruined homes and economies, and
to engage in continuing dialogue with Jews and Muslims as a means of participating in the process of building and discovering how to live together harmoniously in mutually supportive communities.

We pray, with the psalmist, that justice and peace might soon embrace throughout the Middle East, in order that the ancient promise of the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled, that "they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain." (Ps. 85, Is. 11:9)

Letter from the General Secretary to His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania, 2 July 1993

Your Beatitude,

The World Council of Churches is following with deep concern recent developments in Albania affecting the life and witness of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. We received and considered carefully the Appeal issued by Your Beatitude following the arrest and expulsion of Archimandrite Chrysostomos Maidonis, as well as the Statement issued on subsequent crisis between Albania and Greece which distressed thousand of victims.

We are grateful that in face of such grave events Your Beatitude pleads for truth and peace, calls for meaningful dialogue among all the parties concerned, affirms the need for an unperturbed coexistence with all and commits himself to work towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

We wish to affirm that the World Council of Churches fully supports the work undertaken by Your Beatitude with a view to revive, and indeed resurrect, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania after many decades of trials and tribulations. We deeply appreciate your efforts to enable the Church to become an agent of reconciliation, an important component in the building up of a prosperous society and a link of communion with the international community.

The World Council of Churches strongly supports the right of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania to exercise, in full freedom her pastoral, spiritual, social and diaconal ministry in accordance with the principles of universally accepted human rights, without obstacles nor interferences from within or from outside the country.

While assisting You materially in your reconstruction and rehabilitation work, we also pledge to Your Beatitude the moral support of the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical family as a whole, praying God to strengthen You in your God-pleasing ministry and to grant his abundant grace the Albanian people.

With fraternal greetings in the Lord,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary


In preparation for the second UN World Conference on Human Rights, the World Council of Churches arranged for ecumenical participation in regional preparatory committee meetings in Costa Rica, Tunisia and
Thailand, and sent a twelve-member delegation representative of all the regions of the world to the Vienna Conference in June 1993. The WCC urged the Secretary-General to include the question of violence against women on the agenda (see page 47). Representatives of church-related bodies in attendance were brought together for consultation and several of them joined the CCLA in presenting the following statement to the plenary.

We are honored to have the opportunity of addressing the World Conference on Human Rights in representation of nine international church and global ecumenical organizations. The membership of this wide constituency of many Christian traditions lives and bears witness to the challenges of peace and justice in all the regions of the world.

In approaching these issues the churches have acknowledged their historic complicity at various times and places, in conquest and discriminatory practices like racism and sexism affecting the dignity of the human person and community.

Long before the drafting of the Universal Declaration, human rights occupied a high priority in ecumenical witness and service. These deep concerns grow out of fidelity to Christ and the vast experience and advocacy of the churches in their struggle against the effects and root causes of hunger, poverty and other human rights violations, such as torture and summary executions. Churches have actively pursued peace with justice as a primary concern to promote human rights. An important part of the churches’ work has been to address the pain and suffering of victims and to express moral and material solidarity with them. Despite despair and death, peoples of faith cherish a vision of a just, reconciled and healed society.

Today our societies are torn apart by conflict and violence. They cry out for a just peace. Churches have strongly committed themselves to the integrity of society and of creation, based on the equitable participation of all members of society, including youth and the disabled.

However this puts heavy obligations on all God’s people to live in mutual respect. We appreciate the Secretary-General’s opening statement when he called for ethical standards and the need to focus on values as an urgent requirement in the respect for human rights. The setting of international human rights standards is not simply a legal concept but a fundamentally ethical one. The contradictions reflected in our societies need to be resolved. This can be done by deepening our understanding of the plurality and diversity that exists in our midst. The global community must strengthen humanitarian values by drawing upon the richness of the world’s diverse religions, histories and cultures, including those of indigenous peoples. Equally, there is an urgent need to address the international inequalities that impact on the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to development. Human dignity cannot be subordinated to economic and political interests.

The World Conference faces a formidable challenge. It has to set in motion a series of steps that will defuse the present state of polarization and confrontation, symbolized by the difficulties surrounding the adoption of the final Conference document. It has to develop a new approach to human rights based on a deep respect for human dignity that steadfastly proclaims and promotes the universality of all human rights. This approach must reflect the historical and traditional values of the world’s many peoples. It is only this new view of human rights that adequately overcomes the obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights, particularly the rights of development and economic justice.

Of urgent concern to the ecumenical community are the issues of violence against refugees and displaced people, of the dignity of women, and of religious freedom.
The structural and societal violence being perpetrated against asylum-seekers, migrants, refugees, and minorities requires immediate attention. The increase of xenophobic hostility, racist attacks, and ethnic violence in many countries is a major threat to civil society. Crosscultural respect and tolerance, based on an ethic of the dignity of the human person must be articulated and promoted. New approaches are required to overcome socio-economic barriers in a world where most states are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith.

The exercise of religious freedom and tolerance is inseparable from other fundamental human rights. No religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect and reverence for the faith and basic human rights of others. Attempts to manipulate religious symbols and idioms to exploit and oppress people should be resisted. Encounter and dialogue among the faith communities will help discover, through their respective heritages, a common ethical ground for a new society, where the basic rights of all are enhanced.

This year marks the mid-point of the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women. Following the United Nations Decade of Women, the churches have acknowledged that the contributions and rights of women are not sufficiently recognized. Arguments of culture, tradition, heritage and religion have often been evoked to deny women a life of dignity. Women suffer the most in situations where they experience the brokenness of life and community.

During this Conference we have heard of systematic violence practiced against women. We have also been challenged by the strength that lies beyond grief and powerlessness, and the demand to recognize women’s perspective on history and culture as being a rich contribution to the understanding of human rights.

As we engage in reassessing human rights policies and practices, the international community must give a new direction to the United Nations system, based on equity of participation. Any new understanding of human rights must be based on an awareness of the deep meaning of human community. Human dignity must lead to human solidarity which cuts across all divisions.

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches
Conference of European Churches
Franciscans International
Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers)
International Federation Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture
Lutheran World Federation
Pax Christi International
World Alliance of Reformed Churches
World Federation of Methodist Women

Letter from the General Secretary to President Jorge Serrano Elias, 26 May 1993

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I should like to express our deepest concern over the declaration of a State of Emergency and the suspension of constitutional guarantees in Guatemala. The Council believes that these measures seriously hamper the democratic process and respect for human rights as well as the attempts to find negotiated solutions to your country's problems.
We urge you to do the utmost to guarantee full observance of the human rights of everyone, including the different civil and religious entities that have been participating in the quest for peace and reconciliation.

We also hope that the actions taken by your Government do not affect the process of repatriation of refugees nor jeopardize the security of those who have returned to the country. We join other governments and international organizations in calling upon the Government of Guatemala to restore constitutional democracy as soon as possible.

We are praying for the people of Guatemala and for you, that God may guide you in the task of relaunching the process of political negotiations and reconciliation to bring about a durable peace in your country.

Yours respectfully,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Statement by Participants in the Consultation on "The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims" convened jointly by the WCC, LWF, the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Glion, Switzerland 2-6 May 1993)

We come together in dialogue, as Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as men and women of faith committed to our respective traditions:

We agree that religion should foster rather than hamper efforts to achieve peace. The Abrahamic tradition to which we are the heirs reminds us of our distinctive identities as well as our shared heritage. The shared heritage and belief in One God which sees human beings as God's most noble creation summon all believers to be peace-makers. We affirm the holiness of the city of Jerusalem for all three faiths and recognize the rights of all to worship in their own ways. We affirm that the claims we make in the names of our traditions must not be mutually exclusive.

We are prepared to confront the responsibility for the past and the future life of the city but without overlooking the alarming prevailing conditions in Jerusalem. We wish to move beyond dialogue and move towards a just and enduring peace in the city, a peace which recognizes the Palestinian and Israeli dimensions of the issue. We pray that all Jerusalem's inhabitants may enjoy peace, justice and respect for their human and national rights.

We commit ourselves to work to guarantee the sanctity of the city. In so doing we commit ourselves to continue to listen to one another, acknowledging each other's voice, honoring the respective attachments in order to maintain Jerusalem's uniqueness.

In the efforts to preserve the sacred character of the city, maintaining the delicate historical, architectural and demographic balance, the hopes, fears and aspirations of the local communities must be seriously taken into account.

We affirm the sanctity of every individual's life, integrity and property and we condemn all violence and violations of human and national rights.
As Jerusalem is the City of Peace, this peace must be based on justice and not be maintained by any military force. A just peace will encompass economic, educational and social development for all as well as a common struggle to preserve the environment which is one of the many blessings of God.

As the peace process continues we ask the negotiators to give serious consideration to the contents of this statement.

We pray that Jerusalem will always be a place of justice, reconciliation, and dialogue for the two nations, Palestinian and Israeli, and the three monotheistic faiths, in order that its unique character may contribute, nurture, and sustain this justice, peace, love, and reconciliation and coexistence and thus become a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Telefax from the General Secretary to President Levon Ter-Petrossian, 20 April 1993

Mr. President,

The recent escalation of the conflict in and around the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabagh causes grave alarm to the World Council of Churches, which, as you know, has for several years been active in seeking to help the religious bodies in the region to make a positive contribution to the search for peace and a just solution to the conflict.

Only two months ago in Montreux, Switzerland, His Holiness Vasken I and His Eminence Sheikh-ul-Islam Pasha-Zadeh meeting at the invitation of the WCC signed a joint communiqué calling upon the warring parties "to cease the bloodshed and to solve all problems peacefully, with justice, through political means, in accordance with universally recognised international norms".

The latest developments in the conflict, whereby a large region of Azerbaijan in the Fizuli region has been overrun by Armenian troops, thereby causing widespread death and destruction, and forcing many thousands of inhabitants to flee from their homes, are a grave setback to the process of peace which has been undertaken under the auspices of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and to which all parties are committed.

We have received from the heads of the religious communities in Azerbaijan an urgent appeal, calling upon heads of governments and religious leaders to do everything possible to stop the bloodshed and to ensure that differences are settled peaceably.

Military solutions can never be the final word. In the end it is only negotiated settlements, enabling neighboring peoples to continue to live together as they have done for centuries which ensure peace with justice. The peoples of Nagorno-Karabagh, of Armenia and of Azerbaijan, are tired of war, bloodshed and destruction. We urge you to continue to seek peace through the international bodies which have been established for this purpose, and which seek to serve your nations through negotiation.

Yours respectfully,
Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to President, Commander-In-Chief General Ibrahim Babangida, 10 March 1993
Your Excellency,

We are deeply troubled by the verdict of the Okadigbo Tribunal that has sentenced to death General Zamani Lekwot, James Atomic Kude, Yanana Karau Kibori, Markus Mamman, Yahaya Duniya, Iliya Maza, Bakawi Samiala, Sha'aibu Ali Dan Hassan and Audu Baban Yau.

The trial of the above persons on charges of rioting, unlawful assembly and disturbance of peace was a result of political, communal and religious violence between the Kataf and Hausa communities in the state of Kaduna in February and May 1992.

According to reports received, the proceedings of the Special Tribunal were not only controversial but were also not carried out in accordance with the due process of law. The filing of fresh charges by the prosecution after dropping earlier identical ones coupled with the withdrawal of the Defence Council, Ajayi, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, appearing for General Zamani Lekwot, on the grounds that the "Tribunal has become a law unto itself" makes a serious case for review of the proceedings.

In view of the controversy surrounding the trial, we urge Your Excellency to prevent miscarriage of justice by setting aside the decision of the special tribunal.

The gravity of the punishment envisaged demands that the defendants be brought to trial before the normal courts through due process of law. We believe Your Excellency is in a position to call for a re-trial.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary

Joint Communiqué from the Meeting of His Holiness Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians and His Eminence Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, Chairman of the Board of Caucasian Muslims, 9 February 1993

We, the religious leaders of our two peoples, concerned for the fate of our spiritual children and about the cruelty, evil and hatred which is driving them to actions against the will of God, met in Montreux, Switzerland from 6-8 February 1993, through the grace of God and thanks to the initiative of the World Council of Churches, in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches. The General Secretary of the International Islamic Council for Daw'a and Relief attended as an observer.

Having discussed the problems which threaten our nations and us, we deem it essential first to emphasize that, despite some attempts to characterise the conflict which has resulted in the shedding of innocent blood as a Christian-Muslim confrontation, this is not a religious conflict.

Armenian Christians and Azerbaijani Muslims have lived and will live in peace, with respect and good neighbourliness.

We heartily pray to the Most High for the repose of the souls of the victims who have fallen in the course of tragic events. For the sake of their memory, and for the sake of the future of both our nations, we call upon our spiritual children to cease the bloodshed and to solve all problems peacefully, with justice, through political means, in accordance with universally recognised international norms.
We call upon both sides for the unconditional release of their hostages, amongst whom are many women and children, and, in the spirit of the Geneva Convention, to treat their prisoners of war in a humane manner.

We express our satisfaction at international efforts toward peaceful resolution of the conflict, undertaken by representatives of the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international bodies, and by all people of good will who strive honestly for as speedy an end to the bloodshed as possible.

We call upon the Presidents of both Republics to render the maximum assistance to these peaceful initiatives.

Expressing compassion for the victims and for the members of their families, as well as for the peaceful inhabitants who suffer severe hardships and deprivation in the zones of conflict, we agreed to establish a United International Humanitarian Fund, and request the World Council of Churches and the International Islamic Council for Daw'a and Relief to provide their auspices for this Fund to render assistance without distinction of nationality or faith to all those who suffer. We call upon all people of good will and upon international organizations to assist in every way this work which is pleasing to God. We will appoint our representatives to this Fund and we will exert every effort to make its activities effective.

We express our sincere gratitude to the leadership of the World Council of Churches for organising this meeting and for the hospitality they showed us, and also to the Conference of European Churches and to the International Islamic Council for Daw'a and Relief for their participation in this meeting. We agreed to continue to maintain contact and to organise further meetings in order to strengthen the spirit of good neighbourliness between our peoples.

May the All Merciful Lord hear our prayers, and may He spread his peacemaking Spirit over our peoples and over all the world, that all might find the true way to justice and peace.

Amen
Vasken I
Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of all Armenians
Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pasha-zadeh
Chairman of the Board of Caucasian Muslims

Letter from the General Secretary to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 10 December 1992

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

On the occasion of the Forty-fourth anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the World Council of Churches wishes to congratulate the General Assembly of the United Nations for its resolution 46/128, declaring the year 1993 as being the International Year for the World’s Indigenous Peoples.

The World Council of Churches has been historically committed to the indigenous peoples’ struggles for international recognition of their sovereignties, self-determination, traditional religious practices and land rights. International ecumenical delegations have visited lands and indigenous communities among the Aboriginals in Australia, the Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Xucurú in Brazil, and in many other places throughout this past decade. Out of these critical experiences and programmatic involvement with the indigenous peoples,
the World Council of Churches called, at its Seventh Assembly, in 1991, for churches, governments and international bodies to actively seek the goal of justice through sovereignty and self-determination of indigenous peoples, to oppose the exploitation of indigenous peoples’ lands and mineral resources, and to protect the freedom of indigenous peoples to practice their traditional religions.

The World Council of Churches reaffirms its continuous and firm support to the struggles and rights of the indigenous peoples throughout the world. The World Council of Churches assures its continuous support to the United Nations as it gives high priority to the goals of the International Year of the World’s Indigenous People on the agenda of the United Nations in 1993 and beyond.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Statement by the Officers of the WCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 9 December 1992

The Officers of the World Council of Churches, deeply moved by the emergence of religiously motivated conflicts in many areas of the world, raise their voice and their prayers to call all churches and religious organizations of the world to concentrate on the achievement of peace and reconciliation and on the affirmation of the values of coexistence, dialogue and promotion of the common human good. In particular, we are saddened by the events in India which have consequences for inter-religious relations all over the world. We are also profoundly concerned about the misuse of religious sentiments in the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

With all our strength, we reject all attempts to use religious prejudices to advance political or ethnic causes. Christians and Muslims have lived together side by side for centuries in peaceful coexistence. We affirm that that is possible and will continue to be a reality not only in these areas, but all over the world. We ask all the churches to pray and work for peace in India and in former Yugoslavia, to multiply their efforts to help the suffering victims of all faiths, and above all, to work and pray for the harmonious living together of all people of faith.

Rev. Emilio Castro
Archbishop Aram Keshishian
Dr. Soritua Nababan
Pastora Nélida Ritchie

Joint Statement on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its repercussions by the Officers of the WCC, meeting in Geneva 7-9 December 1992, and the Provisional Executive Committee of the Conference of European Churches, meeting in Geneva 11-12 December 1992

Background

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is still far from over and, indeed, threatens to escalate further and extend to the Sanjak and Kosovo. It has aggravated tensions between communities and nations throughout the Balkans. Its consequences, particularly its effects on relations between Christians and Muslims in many parts of the world, have become a matter of grave concern.
The territorial, historical and religious complexities of the former Yugoslavia, and of Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular, tempt many to an over-simplified portrayal of the war as a result of hatred between communities identified on ethnic and religious basis. The latter identification is most exemplified by the reference to Bosnians of Islamic faith as Muslims (as has been the case since 1971 when the communist rulers chose this designation to be an equivalent of nationality). Such a reductionist approach to the present conflict is detrimental to the search for a just and durable solution.

The problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the whole of the former Yugoslavia must also be seen against the background of political transition from an authoritarian one-party system in a situation characterized by a centrifugal dynamics of religious and national plurality. In this transition, ultra-nationalist policies and disinformation campaigns have mobilized significant sectors of the population in a way that imposed these policies on its majority. Those who refuse to subscribe to these policies or to dissociate themselves from their objectives and practices have run the risk of intolerance and suspicion within their own community, often being depicted as traitors to supreme national interests.

These ultra-nationalist policies claim to address fears which are projected from historical memories on to an uncertain future. At the same time, they accelerate a process of bringing about what is feared: massive killing, mass rape of women, widespread suffering and torture and large-scale displacement of the population. Passions are manipulated to excuse or even justify atrocities. But instead of exorcising fear, this perpetuates its destructive grip on people.

To the extent that religious symbols and sentiments shape national-cultural identity, they are combined with other factors of ethnic self-assertion to polarize people into mutually antagonized communities. Thus religion becomes instrumental in reviving a complex history which has often been marked by mass executions, attempted genocide, war, distrust and rivalries, but which has also - and this is forgotten or deliberately ignored - been characterized by constructive living together. It is a striking feature of historical consciousness that the memory of conflicts overshadows the memory of peaceful experiences.

The people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the whole of former Yugoslavia, are victims of violent intolerance that is essentially linked with ultra-nationalism. The more it appears that a region cannot be divided ethnically, the more it is subjected to ferocious "ethnic cleansing", a sort of collective punishment inflicted on people whose misfortune is to live - no matter for how long - in a territory to which, because of their "nationality" or religion, they are not supposed to belong.

The ecumenical community in Europe and throughout the world has repeatedly expressed deep concern about the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and solidarity with all those who are suffering because of the war. The urgency of the present situation prompts us to reiterate some basic convictions:

We join the religious leaders of the Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim communities in the former Yugoslavia in declaring with vigor that "crime in the name of religion is the greatest crime against religion". (Appeal for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Zurich, 26 November 1992).

We cannot tolerate that the present conflict continues to divide people along confessional lines both within and outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. We are alarmed by its repercussions, real and potential, on inter-communal relations in the whole region and elsewhere. We are committed not to allow the conflict to suggest in any way a confrontation between "Christendom" and the "Islamic" Ummah (community). This war is not on behalf of "Christian Europe" against Islam.
We remain determined in opposing fanaticism and the manipulation of passions and historical memories.

We reaffirm the determination expressed by the WCC’s Seventh Assembly about the Gulf War:

"we refuse to be separated from our brothers and sisters of other faiths as a result of this war".

We repeat the statement of the Tenth Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (Prague, September 1992) that "we can never accept that a religiously based nationalism expresses itself in dominance over or violence towards other ethnic groups". We welcome the unanimity with which Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim leaders from the former Yugoslavia have denounced the war and demanded its end and their establishment of a mechanism for continued unified action in the interests of peace.

We reject the idea that enforcing separation or accentuating antagonisms can solve the tensions and problems that may characterize pluralist societies in periods of crisis and transition.

We affirm that the dignity and inalienable human rights of persons and of communities are inseparable. The rights of communities cannot be implemented at the expense of the rights of individual human beings.

We cannot surrender to a cynical political realism which considers what has happened thus far as irreversible. We believe that the links of co-existence between people of different communities could still be saved, provided a fair and equitable structure of power-sharing is agreed upon.

As we call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, we urge that negotiations be pursued without preconditions as to the future solution. New models of governance should be sought which foster a balance between individual and community human rights and liberate religion from sectional interests. A viable and credible model of society is the one that builds a human community which guarantees in law and practice the equality of all, safeguards religious liberties and respects differences and particularities.

While recognizing that the complexity of the situation in the former Yugoslavia is a major obstacle to the search for effective action by the international community to restore peace, we insist that this cannot justify disengagement from what is happening or resignation about the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people. We urge the international community, through the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Community to redouble their efforts to bring the fighting to an end; and we call on our member churches to intercede with their governments to that end. Until peace is restored, we reiterate the appeals of the general secretaries of the WCC and CEC for the provision of immediate refuge, at least on a temporary basis, for detainees and other victims of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

We commit ourselves to be peace-makers and agents of reconciliation, in close cooperation with our partners of other faiths and all persons of goodwill. We pledge ourselves to seek enhanced inter-religious cooperation in various areas, including humanitarian assistance and the active search for a peaceful and lasting solution.

We support the initiative of religious leaders from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to call for common prayer on 23 December 1992, demonstrating solidarity with all individuals.
and peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina and other afflicted people in the former Yugoslavia. We commend this call for prayer to all our member churches.

**Central Committee Statement on the Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia, Geneva, Switzerland, August 1992**

The conflict in the former Yugoslavia is a tragic illustration of the inability and apparent unwillingness of the major powers to act as peacemakers in an even-handed and disinterested way. The European nations especially have been unable so far to deal effectively with the first major violent crisis on European soil since the end of the Cold War. Yet the conflict could easily escalate further and repeat itself elsewhere in the region where similar tensions exist.

This lack of political determination has left the way open to those currently in power in the former Yugoslavia and to extremist forces on all sides to pursue their goals of territorial claims and ethnic cleansing by any means, with all the horrors of war, detention camps and people forced into exile.

The churches engaged in the ecumenical movement also, which have pledged themselves on many occasions to work for a new international order based on peace with justice, have painfully experienced their weakness and shortcomings in relation to this conflict.

There is widespread ignorance of the causes of the conflict, which are deeply rooted in history and particularly in the political developments in the region since the beginning of this century, often imposed by outside powers in their own self-interest. The media and public opinion tend to reinforce superficial and one-sided analyses and judgments. Yet no lasting solution will prevail without serious consideration of the aspirations of the peoples of former Yugoslavia and their understanding of their own histories.

The conflict is fuelled by the international arms trade in the sole interest of groups which operate behind the scenes and whose activities are intertwined with the economies of the nations, including those involved in seeking a political solution.

The consequences of political non-action could lead to the military intervention now being advocated by some. Yet military intervention is not the solution. Nor is the present one-sided embargo which is insufficiently enforced. What is needed is the political will of the international community to oblige all parties to accept a non-violent settlement, accompanied by an effective ban on arms supplies enforced by political and economic coercive measures applied equally to all parties.

The escalation of violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina where there is a sizeable Muslim population gives rise to the concern of a potential confrontation along Islamic and Christian lines, which could have repercussions for religious communities in many parts of the world. It is essential that all efforts to resolve this conflict through negotiation take account of the perspectives and the suffering of all the communities.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva on 21-28 August 1992, calls on the governments involved in seeking a solution to the conflict in former Yugoslavia through the institutions of the European Community, the Conference on European Security and
Cooperation and the United Nations, and currently participating in the international peace conference in London to bring to bear on all parties the necessary political pressure to bring them immediately to the negotiating table, and to establish and enforce an immediate embargo on all arms supplies to all parties; 

welcomes the decision of the UN Human Rights Commission to conduct a full and independent investigation of the detention camps and the abuse of human rights and pledges its full support and assistance; 

welcomes the efforts made so far by the Conference of European Churches, the Council of Bishops Conferences in Europe and the WCC to bring the Churches and the other religious communities in former Yugoslavia together so that they might speak and act jointly in favor of an end to violence and for reconciliation, and hopes that these efforts which, sadly, have yet to produce fruits, will soon be realized; 

calls on the Churches of Europe as they will gather in Prague for the CEC Assembly on September 1-11 to intensify their efforts and to assist the churches in former Yugoslavia in every possible way, and pledges the full support of the WCC in this endeavour; 

expresses the hope that all churches and ecumenical organizations will be guided by a common spirit of commitment in their peacemaking ministry; 

is heartened by the instances of cooperation between Christians of different churches in former Yugoslavia, and between Christians and Muslims, which are signs of hope in this dark hour; 

calls upon the WCC member churches and all other churches in former Yugoslavia to be agents of peace and reconciliation, and urges them to resist the use of religion for political purposes and to speak out against all violent separation of peoples on the ground of their ethnic identities, and whenever possible to act together and jointly with other religious communities; 

expresses its full support for the humanitarian aid work already being undertaken and encourages the WCC, sister ecumenical organizations and the churches to increase their efforts, and to assist the churches in former Yugoslavia in their diaconal ministry to the victims of the conflict; and 

calls upon all Christians and their churches to remain constant in their prayers for all the victims of this conflict.

Oral intervention by the WCC General Secretary at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Special Session on Yugoslavia, 13 August 1992

As General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, whose member churches represent hundreds of millions of Christians of the Orthodox, Reformed and Anglican traditions throughout the world, and speaking, too, on behalf of our sister ecumenical body, the Conference of European Churches, I wish to share with you in the search for a solution to a situation which weighs heavily on all our hearts. It continues unabated even as I speak, causing untold suffering and misery to countless innocent victims.

The bitter battle raging now in Bosnia-Herzegovina is extremely complex and brutal. Rival claims to the territory escalate the violence: a Serbian call for "ethnic cleansing", a Croatian call for an autonomous state within Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Muslim desire that Bosnia-Herzegovina should remain independent.

Large numbers of people are being forced to flee their homes with little hope of secure passage to a safe haven. According to reports we have been receiving from various church sources, well-armed Serbian operations, aimed at "ethnic cleansing", are accompanied by the establishment of many camps - for instance in Sanski Most, Banja Luka and Omarska near Prijedor. There, Croat and Muslim victims are humiliated, tortured and murdered daily. It is impossible to assess the number of those imprisoned or dead, since, as far as we know, no
systematic investigation of the camps has been carried out. According to such reports, those who have been able to escape, or leave in the exchange of prisoners, tell of prisoners being kept in huge cages with no food or water, of systematic beatings, of sadistic torture and the shooting or slitting the throats of victims, as well as the rape of women and young girls, some only children.

Tragically, we have received similar reports from Serbian church sources of equally brutal treatment of Serbian prisoners by Muslims and Croats, in detention camps and torture chambers in Sarajevo itself, in the Kosevo stadium, Zetra Hall and the Central Prison, as well as in Zenica, Konjic, Tuzla, Pazaric, Hrasnica, Posanski and many other sites. It is estimated that between 35,000-40,000 Serbs are detained in these camps - chiefly women, children and old people. In addition Serbian women and young girls are being forced into prostitution in brothels at Konzic, Celebici and Sarajevo.

These are urgent issues to be addressed. There is an alarming lack of concern expressed for the basic human rights of the desperate peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the part of many of the protagonists who do not even fight a conventional war. The adversary is reduced to a mere factor to be removed, an obstacle to ideological pretensions, and the cold blooded perpetration of the brutalities I have described is allowed. In addition, the world community and its relevant institutions - including the churches - have thus far been unable or unwilling to address the issue with any effectiveness. Negotiations about reaching a peaceful settlement must continue unabated. At the same time, we must not neglect the fate of those hundreds of thousands of people caught up in a war which they neither sought nor desired, but which is now threatening their very existence. Their communities and their homes, property and livelihood are being taken away from them. As individual human beings, they are systematically being assassinated or being forced into exile.

We refer so glibly to our commitment to human solidarity, spelt out in the Charter of the United Nations, and so urgently awaited by our sisters and brothers in former Yugoslavia. The priorities of the United Nations - and in particular of its Human Rights Commission - in this area must be the protection of human rights, not an escalation of the conflict. It will be a calamity if, because of our inability to act, military action is presented as the only alternative.

It is clear that in this situation, as in so many others, the failure to speak out in time and to take decisive action to safeguard the rights of individuals and communities is reaping disastrous consequences.

We are deeply concerned that this Commission, and the United Nations Security Council, have not yet taken decisive action. Why was information apparently suppressed? Is it not the consequence of our inaction up to now that military intervention is easier to justify as a means of responding to this human drama?

Mr. Chairperson, as churches we address a strong appeal to all those involved to respect basic human rights and internationally recognised humanitarian standards. We call urgently on this Commission to conduct and enable a full, systematic and impartial investigation of the camps where many people are held in inhuman and degrading conditions. Action must be taken, in accordance with international law, which will seek, not only to correct the flagrant violation of human rights occurring at this very moment, but above all to promote a political solution to this conflict by peaceful means.

We ourselves in the World Council of Churches and its sister ecumenical organizations stand ready and willing to give every assistance to the Commission in the pursuance of this aim.
We continue to seek to bring together all religious bodies in the region, to remove religious passion from the conflict, and to encourage and maintain, in full cooperation with the churches in the area, meaningful, symbolic action in relief operations and in the upholding of human rights of the members of all the communities. We urge that these established contacts should be used and strengthened in the pursuit of that peaceful resolution of the conflict which we all so ardently desire.

Letter from the General Secretary to President Daniel T. Arap Moi, 24 June 1992

Your Excellency,

Our attention has been drawn to a threatening comment you made on June 20, 1992 about the National Council of Churches of Kenya, calling it to "show cause" why it should not be deregistered because it was allegedly working with the opposition party.

Our understanding of NCCK's participation in the process of democratization was at the level of civic education programmes, and to ensure that peace, justice and reconciliation are achieved.

In the near past NCCK has called for all political parties, including the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) and religious leaders of other faiths to meet and chart a common programme of civic education.

NCCK has never at any point called itself a political party nor has it advocated formation of a Christian or any religiously based party. It is therefore a mistake to compare NCCK with the Islamic Party of Kenya. For this reason we feel that the threat posed on NCCK seems to be aimed at crippling the valuable civic education that NCCK and others are currently undertaking; and the courageous bearings of witness to social injustices in Kenyan society at large. This, too, would be very unfortunate.

Your Excellency, we do know that you are a wise statesman and will not act on unsound reasoning. Rather we believe that you will be able to encourage KANU to participate in the NCCK civic education programmes so that the expected general elections will really produce the kind of leaders that Kenyans want.

We do not cease to pray for the Kenyan people who have sacrificed so much to care for refugees from neighboring countries, and whose land is also affected by the current drought in Southern and Eastern Africa.

We hope that Kenya will continue to evolve politically in a way that justice, peace and reconciliation are experienced by every citizen.

Yours sincerely,
Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the Acting General Secretary to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, 3 December 1991

Your Excellency,
The World Council of Churches views with dismay the news that Israeli security forces recently raided the Islamic courthouse in Jerusalem, damaging the property and seizing documents forming part of the archives of the courthouse.

Such violent action, which must be seen as an obstacle to the goal of improved relationships between the different communities in Jerusalem, can only be deeply deplored, particularly in the light of the efforts which are currently being made by all parties in the region to resolve disputes and conflicts by peaceful negotiation.

Bringing this concern to your attention, we urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to take immediate action to put in motion an impartial and public investigation regarding this regrettable incident.

We appeal to you to respect the independence of the Islamic court, and the right to religious freedom of all.

Respectfully,
Todor Sabev
Acting General Secretary

Letter from the Acting General Secretary to His Holiness Patriarch Pavle, 31 October 1991

Your Holiness,

We continue receiving in the headquarters of the WCC sad news from your Church and country. They fill our hearts with great concerns and suffering.

On behalf of the General Secretary, Emilio Castro, I write to express our dismay, shock and sympathy concerning the abduction of Bishop Lukijan of Slavonia and of some Serbian Orthodox priests to an unknown place in Croatia. We have alerted our partners in the area of human rights and religious liberty as well as our competent colleagues to deal with this tragic issue. May I kindly request that the Holy Synod provide us with the latest data on this problem and on other matters which require an urgent action.

Asking for your patriarchal prayer and blessing, I send Dr. Castro's cordial greetings and our assurance of affection and solidarity in Jesus Christ's name.

Respectfully yours,
Todor Sabev
Acting General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to President Ibrahim Babangida, 9 August 1991

Your Excellency,

I always remember with gratitude my visit to Nigeria in March 1989 and very especially our encounter. I detected that we share a common commitment to harmonious conviviality between Christians and Muslims. Today I write to express our appreciation and support of your timely endeavors to seek a negotiated peace agreement on the Sudan.
You may be aware that the World Council of Churches has a longstanding commitment to Sudan's unity and national reconciliation. In God's mercy we were allowed to play a facilitating role in the peace agreements of 1972. We are concerned for the welfare of all the Sudanese people and for a harmonious Christian-Muslim coexistence in mutual respect, freedom and equality.

Recently, and in response to an invitation extended by President Omar Hassan El Basheer, we sent a delegation to Khartoum to explore the most appropriate steps that may be conducive to peace negotiations and discuss how best we can contribute towards their achievement. We were informed of your initiative and would like therefore to assure you that we are prepared to undertake any facilitating role that you may deem appropriate in the course of your endeavors.

We shall, on our part, continue to pursue the search for peace through dialogue and sincerely hope that your present efforts bear fruits in the near future.

We also pray for you and for the success of your noble mission. May God Almighty bless the people of Sudan and Nigeria.

Sincerely,
Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Telegram from the General Secretary to Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, 7 August 1991

Your Excellency,

We have been informed about the blockade, by a group of people, of the Headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Fener, Istanbul, subsequent to the election of Muslim religious leaders in Greece.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is a founding member of the World Council of Churches. It is widely known and deeply respected for its leading role in efforts for unity, peace and justice. The Ecumenical Patriarchate serves the Turkish people in furthering understanding among religions and cultures. Any hindrance to their work is of serious concern to the entire ecumenical family. We request Your Excellency to take necessary steps to lift the blockade and to enable the Ecumenical Patriarchate to fulfil its spiritual and conciliatory ministry so vital in today's world. May God's blessing be with you.

Yours respectfully,
Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretaries of the WCC and the CEC to USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev, 22 July 1991

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches have received information from His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church, about the attack on the Monastery of Gantrasar in Nagorno-Karabagh by Azerbaijani forces on 6 July.
The World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches are deeply concerned about this act of violence against one of the holy places of the Armenian Apostolic Church. A high level team sent by our two organizations which visited Armenia last month has reported on the harassment of the Armenian population and the violation of human rights in Nagorno-Karabagh and the border area. The Monastery of Gantrasar is presently the only centre of the life and service of the church in the entire region. The World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches are asking you to do everything that is in your power to assure the integrity of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Nagorno-Karabagh and to protect the life, rights and well-being of the Armenian people in Nagorno-Karabagh and in the border area between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Respectfully yours,
Emilio Castro  Jean Fischer
General Secretary  General Secretary
World Council of Churches  Conference of European Churches

Letter from the General Secretary to the Leaders of the Religious Communities of Lebanon, 10 July 1991

Venerable spiritual leaders, dear Brothers,

Greetings of peace. It is with satisfaction and gratitude to God that we recognize the great progress achieved in the process of peace-making and national reconciliation taking place in Lebanon. Many barriers between communities and regions, material and psychological, have been lifted, and the authority of the Government of Lebanon over large parts of the country has been restored.

We wish to reaffirm the commitment to the preservation of a democratic and pluralist Lebanon where Christian-Muslim coexistence is based on equality and freedom.

We are aware that the political agreement reached at Taef, and which led to reforms adopted in the Lebanese parliament, does constitute the basis of a new national consensus. The implementation of this agreement in its entirety is a major step towards the consolidation of national unity and the restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty.

As representatives of the international ecumenical family, we recall that Lebanon's independence, and national integrity cannot be fully recovered unless the UN Security Council Resolution 425 is implemented and that the Lebanese state exercises full sovereignty over the totality of the national territory.

We appreciate your sustained efforts in the humanitarian field and call upon the worldwide ecumenical family to continue its support to all efforts of reconstruction of the country and the return of displaced persons to their homes. We appeal to all our member churches to urge their governments to cooperate in this important effort.

You may be assured that continuously we will uphold you in our prayers of intercession.

May God Almighty bless your efforts.
Emilio Castro
General Secretary
Statement of the Ecumenical Team which visited Albania, 10 July 1991

The Executive Committee, meeting in Geneva 10 July 1991, received the following report and recommendations of the ecumenical team just returned from Albania:

An ecumenical team, representing the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches, visited Albania from 1-8 July 1991. They witnessed the joy of the Albanian people at the ending of over 40 years of oppression and isolation, and at the fact that they may now take their place amongst the nations of Europe in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with its attendant concern for human rights. They especially give thanks to God that Albanian Christians are once again at liberty to practice their faith, and to organize their church life.

During the visit, the team met and worshipped with Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and visited churches in different parts of the country which are gradually being restored to their communities. Many church buildings have been destroyed; those which still stand have either been turned into museums, or have been systematically stripped and pillaged, and stand in need of extensive repair and total refurbishment.

In addition, the team held extensive talks with government officials and with members of recently formed voluntary humanitarian organizations. The team was everywhere informed about the grave economic situation and social instability in Albania, and the consequent vulnerability of the very old, the very young and the sick.

In standing alongside the churches of Albania, the ecumenical team recommends that the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches:

Call upon member churches to manifest their concern, both in prayer and in practical ways, for Albanian Christians, as they seek to re-establish their church life, to build community and to act as bearers of hope and reconciliation in their society.
Request their member churches to help the people of Albania with humanitarian aid at this time of economic crisis, and to support them as they seek to restore justice and the full exercise of human rights in Albania.
Welcome the willingness of the government of Albania, expressed in the Provisional Constitution, to respect religious freedom and to create the conditions for its practice, thus encouraging the religious communities to play a positive role in their country's future; and furthermore urge the government of Albania to take all necessary steps to ensure that such legal provisions are fully implemented, by such moves as the restoration of all property seized by the previous regime, and assistance in the reconstruction of such property.

Message from the General Secretary and the Moderator of the Central Committee to member churches in Ethiopia, 10 July 1991

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During long years the Ethiopian people and your churches have been longing for peace and reconciliation. Now we have followed with great interest and anticipation the recent events in Ethiopia, culminating in the peace talks now coming to a conclusion in Addis Ababa. This meeting, the first of its kind, represents a truly historic event, marking the end of over thirty years of internal war.
The churches and the people of Ethiopia may seize now the opportunity to build a lasting peace based on justice, reconciliation and respect for the rights of all, irrespective of ethnic, national, or religious affiliation. As members of the worldwide ecumenical family we are particularly aware of the challenges involved in building just and tolerant societies. At the same time we are convinced of the important role of religious communities in encouraging the development of such societies.

We wish to reassure you of the full support of the international ecumenical community at this time of opportunity. With you, we pray for a lasting peace and a time of hope within which long-standing issues may be addressed in an atmosphere of trust and reconciliation. The family of churches of the World Council of Churches has accompanied in prayer and solidarity your suffering and your hope.

Yours in Christ.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to President Hosni Mubarak, 20 June 1991

Your Excellency,

I have the honor to address to you, on behalf of the World Council of Churches, an appeal on behalf of three Egyptian Protestant Christians, Mustafa Mohammed Said al Sharkawi, Hussen Sallam and Hassan Mohammed Ismail. We understand that these men were originally arrested in September 1990, and that the two first named have twice been re-arrested. Although we do not have precise details of the fate of these young men, who are members of the Qasr al-Dubara Presbyterian Church in Cairo, we have been troubled by reports that they appear to have suffered from ill-treatment in prison from beatings and electric shocks. I am convinced that, if these reports prove to be true, they will in no way correspond to what is clearly your vision for your country.

The progress, economic development and social reform which are taking place in Egypt under your leadership encourage us to believe that respect for basic human rights is an essential factor in your programme. We fully recognize that peace between different religions is a fundamental value in your country. Nevertheless, we would submit to you that repeated jail sentences and severe ill-treatment of prisoners do not match the humane standards you seek to uphold and belie the image of Egypt as an open, moderate country, and in the final analysis, will not help to ensure interreligious understanding.

In an age of increasing desire for inter-faith dialogue, and mindful of the standards set for us all by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, I respectfully appeal to you on behalf of these young men, to ensure that their cases be assessed with justice and humanity.

Yours sincerely,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary
As we gather in the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, a war of terrible proportions is being waged in the Gulf. Kuwait was already ravaged by Iraqi invading forces. Now, both Kuwait and Iraq are being destroyed by bombardment of unprecedented intensity.

Hour by hour this war claims a mounting toll of victims on all sides, combatants and noncombatants alike, our own sisters and brothers. As we met, news was received of the horrible bombing of a shelter in Baghdad killing hundreds of people who sought refuge there, many of them children and women. At this very moment, preparations are being made for a ground battle which is certain to cause greater destruction and loss of life. It is a war of ominous dimensions which threatens the destruction of the land and the people it seeks to liberate. Day by day the war escalates, drawing in more and more nations of the Gulf, the Middle East, and other parts of the world. It squanders the resources of rich and poor countries alike, and no end is in sight.

Intensive efforts were made around the world to prevent this war and avoid its escalation. Urgent appeals were made by leaders of nations not to abandon non-violent efforts to cause Iraq to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait and resolve its differences with its neighbor through negotiations. The churches pleaded with the leaders of their nations not to aggravate further the long-standing conflict in the Middle East which time and again has brought war and violence to the region; created a climate of fear and mistrust between Israel and the Arab nations; led to the suffering of Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, and to the continuing occupation of Palestinian territories and parts of Lebanon and to the invasion and partial occupation of Cyprus; inflicted suffering upon the Palestinian people who have been deprived of their rights to self determination, statehood and national dignity, and exacerbated conflicts within the countries of the region, delaying justice for national minorities like the Kurdish people.

War promises no lasting solution for the festering wounds of the Middle East, no just, peaceful and durable regional or world order, but rather continued insecurity, pain and conflict.

It is never too soon nor too late to seek peace and a comprehensive settlement. So once again, together, our hearts cry out to the leaders of the nations, especially to those of the coalition forces led by the United States of America and of Iraq: Cease the bombing! Still the missiles!

Stop the fighting! Restrain your armies! Negotiate! Trust in the promise of peace!

The World Council of Churches has repeatedly advocated respect for international law and a peaceful resolution of this conflict. It has:

- **strongly** opposed Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait;
welcomed the Security Council's demand that Iraq withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Kuwait and its appeal to Iraq and Kuwait to initiate intensive negotiations for the resolution of their differences;

supported the application of strict sanctions banning all commercial dealings and trade with Iraq, with the exception of medical supplies and foodstuffs in humanitarian circumstances;

called upon the Security Council to enforce with equal vigor its earlier resolutions on the territorial integrity of Lebanon, the division and occupation of Cyprus, Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967, and the right of every State in the area, including Israel, to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

appealed for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the region and the exploration of all avenues for negotiations to defuse the crisis and obtain a peaceful settlement;

declared as morally unacceptable the holding of foreign nationals in Iraq and Kuwait,

appealed to the Iraqi government to facilitate the departure of all foreign nationals desiring to do so, and appealed for strict application of international norms for the protection of refugees.

Around the world, member churches and regional ecumenical bodies took the lead in pressing for peace along these same lines:

The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) sought a regional solution to the conflict, at the same time expressing hope for a comprehensive, just resolution for all the conflicts and occupations in the region in order to bring harmony and peace among Muslims, Christians and Jews in the region. It contributed significantly to assisting the refugees and other victims of the conflict.

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA appealed repeatedly to the U.S. Administration and Congress not to abandon sanctions as a means to obtain an end to the occupation of Kuwait, warning against the rapidly escalating military response of the U.S. government to the crisis and the apparently open-ended nature of U.S. military involvement in the region. A delegation of U.S. church leaders traveled to Iraq and other states of the region in an expression of ecumenical concern and solidarity.

The Canadian Council of Churches issued similar appeals to its own government and also sent a delegation to the region, meeting with leaders of churches and of other religious faith communities.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) and national councils of churches in Europe warned against acceptance of the inevitability of war, recalling the conviction of the European churches, expressed at the European Ecumenical Assembly (Basel, 1989) that war is against the will of God and that everything should be done to further peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The Latin America Council of Churches (CLAI) urged the UN to redouble efforts for a peaceful solution, and churches in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific drew attention to the grave effects of the crisis on their nations and cautioned governments against military or economic support for efforts to achieve a military solution.

The impact of racism and intolerance

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The war in the Gulf reveals the tragic impact of racism on both the international and
domestic policies of nations from which indigenous peoples are often the first to suffer.

Internationally, there is a shocking rise in discrimination against persons of Arab
nationality, background or appearance. In the name of "national security" and "prevention of
terrorism", many are subjected to systematic humiliation, harassment, preventive detention, and
open threat of physical harm by both state authorities and private groups in many nations
around the world.

Anti-Muslim intolerance is on the increase in many Western countries, fed by the portrayal
of Islam as an inherently menacing religion. As a result, many Muslims feel humiliated and angry,
and the future of Christian-Muslim relations - so crucial to peace and harmony in many parts of
the world - risks being gravely affected. At a time when there are manifestations of anti-Semitism
in a number of countries, many Jews feel great anguish.

A disproportionate burden is being imposed on racial and ethnic minorities in this war.

According to United States Department of Defense estimates, for example, 25% of U.S.
troops deployed in the Gulf (and 29% of ground forces and 55% of women in uniform) are
Black. Yet African-Americans comprise only slightly more than 11% of the civilian population
over the age of 16. Corresponding figures for other racial or ethnic minority groups are not
readily available, but it is safe to assume that Native Americans and persons of Hispanic
background are similarly over-represented in the fighting forces. Concern rises for a generation
of Black, Hispanic and Native American youth endangered by intense, endemic poverty,
inadequate health care, the ever-rising incidence of AIDS, and the impact of drugs and drug-
related crime.

Now, many of those who joined the military in search of education, stable employment
and a way out of these dangers, are at peril in the Gulf.

To peoples of other faiths:

In the presence of the representatives of other faiths who have been our guests during this
Assembly, we commit ourselves to refuse to be separated from brothers and sisters of other
faiths as a result of this war, and to reject especially any effort to divide Christians, Muslims and
Jews whose faiths originated in the Middle East, and to join with them in prayers and common
endeavors for peace in anticipation of the day when all may live together in peace and mutual
respect.

Central Committee Appeal on El Salvador, Canberra, Australia, February 1991

The churches in El Salvador have repeatedly and urgently called the attention of the
worldwide ecumenical community to the suffering of the Salvadorean people under the ravages
of ten years of civil war. Religious communities have bound up wounds, visited the prisoners and
cried out for peace, while they themselves have been persecuted, attacked, and even suffered
martyrdom for their faithful witness to the truth. The World Council of Churches has on
numerous occasions expressed solidarity with our Salvadorean sisters and brothers, intervening
with the authorities on their behalf, advocating their cause, paying pastoral visits, and urging the
churches, governments and the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations to
attend to their plight.
Through its member churches in El Salvador, the WCC follows with great hope the efforts being made by the Government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) to negotiate terms for a cessation of armed conflict and to engage in a political process which could lead to lasting peace in the nation. Despite the agreements reached thus far on respect for human rights, fundamental guarantees of individual liberty and the integrity of the human person continue to be violated.

Conscious of the deep rooted social and economic inequalities which lie behind the conflict, but also of the vast wellspring of human resources working for justice among Salvadorean civic and non-governmental organizations, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Canberra immediately after the Seventh Assembly, commends and encourages the churches of El Salvador in their continuing efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and pastoral care, to defend and promote basic human rights, and to mobilize their nation's civil and social forces in the quest for lasting peace; it expresses unwavering support to the churches which persevere in their courageous witness for justice in spite of continuous persecution; calls urgently upon all parties to the armed conflict to end the war; offers its full support for the negotiations now being conducted under United Nations auspices; appeals insistently to the Government of El Salvador, the Armed Forces and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) to respect the agreed conditions for holding free and fair elections in March 1991, and to intensify their efforts to reach further agreements which reflect the profound hopes for justice expressed by Salvadorean civil and grassroots communities particularly those expressed by the Permanent Committee of the National Debate for Peace; invites all governments, especially that of the United States of America, to support the prompt and effective demilitarization of the Central American region, and particularly of El Salvador, in accordance with the Esquipulas II Agreement, by stopping the supply of arms and military aid which is inimical to the process of democratization; reiterates the appeals of the churches to the government of El Salvador to establish a system of justice capable of protecting the human rights of all citizens, and to show its good faith by completing full investigations of the murders of Archbishop Romero and many other religious and lay leaders, and by bringing all those responsible on trial; reaffirms its strong support for the churches and social movements in El Salvador as they work to build peace among the poorest of the poor, witnessing to the creative power of the Spirit to bring unity, love, reconciliation and dignity for all.

Central Committee Statement on Internal Conflicts, Canberra, Australia, February 1991

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting immediately after the Seventh Assembly (Canberra, February 1991), notes with deep concern the proliferation and intensification of conflicts taking place within the borders of a large number of sovereign states.

Most of the violent conflicts today are intra-state conflicts, often intensified by external forces.
Many of them have escalated to such a degree that they pose threats to the integrity of states and to regional and international stability. Yet, the international community has - until now - not found adequate ways of dealing with these types of internal conflicts.

Sources and Effects of Internal Conflicts

The sources of internal conflicts are complex. Many reflect genuine struggles for justice.

Central to these conflicts is the sense of oppression experienced by groups of people who have a common ethnic, cultural, linguistic, national or religious identity. These groups seek to escape domination by the state or other groups, or to evolve new forms of relationships within or outside existing state structures whereby they are able to safeguard and manifest their own identity.

Religious identity can be a source of conflict between groups in society. The misuse of religion for domination and for protection of special interests has a profoundly destructive effect on particular groups and society as a whole.

In many societies, prevailing social and economic policies lead to the alienation of peoples from their ancestral lands, or competition between different groups for an increasingly small share of public resources, jobs, etc. Individuals and groups who find no response to, or even access to a public forum for their needs and aspirations often turn to violence, thus increasing both the militarization of societies and the polarization of political discourse within them. The effects of these conflicts include the escalation of human rights abuses, violence, massive internal displacements of people, and a large increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers. Such conflicts often have an impact on neighboring states, especially as refugees move across borders.

Many internal conflicts are made more destructive by the intervention of other states which supply arms and financial support to the state or to one party in the conflict. Provocation and manipulation by external powers result in escalation of violence and internal repression, especially of the poor and marginalized.

The Role of Churches and Religious Communities

Churches and other religious communities can play an important positive role in contributing to the resolution of internal conflicts, even if they themselves are victims of the situation. Where peoples or groups experience oppression, religious communities can become the bearers of national, ethnic or cultural identity and the guardians of the hopes and aspirations of people for peace and justice. We acknowledge, however, that churches and religious communities in some places have themselves become contributors to internal conflicts, and that religious symbols and values have been misused.

The churches have a special responsibility to seek resolution of inter-confessional and interreligious conflicts. Inter-faith and inter-confessional dialogues thus become important tools in the resolution of internal conflicts. Churches must also guard against the kind of relationships with the state that protect the social and economic privileges of an elite while others, invariably the poor, are abandoned. Churches need to be able to provide early warning about potential conflicts and to assist in seeking solutions which safeguard the legitimate rights and identities of all groups.

International Response

The solving of internal conflicts has so far been seen as the responsibility of the affected nation state. The United Nations has been inhibited from being an effective instrument for
resolving internal conflicts or even for providing humanitarian assistance for the internally displaced, because member states wish to protect their sovereignty. The result is that internal conflicts are dealt with through the use of force, other forms of oppression, or even attempts to destroy or annihilate groups which the state identifies as a threat or a problem.

In some instances, the United Nations has been able to assist in the resolution of conflicts and has helped to safeguard the rights of minorities and other groups within states through the use of international human rights mechanisms. Nevertheless, the increased number of people caught in oppressive and violent situations of conflict urgently demands the development of new instruments for resolving internal conflicts.

Recommendations

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches:

*calls upon member churches*

to make serious efforts to be peace-makers in situations of internal conflict through such means as prayer, education on peaceful resolution of conflicts and the promotion of inter-confessional and inter-faith dialogue;

to intensify their work for the protection of human rights with particular attention to collective rights and the rights of minority groups who are victims;

to intensify their advocacy work and humanitarian assistance to the victims of internal conflicts such as refugees and internally displaced persons;

to monitor situations carefully and to provide early warning about potential conflicts;

to undertake self-examination of their role in internal conflicts in order to identify where they have been helpful in resolving them, and where they have directly or indirectly impeded resolution of conflicts or even encouraged them;

to assist, wherever possible, in processes at the national level leading to comprehensive and lasting peace;

*calls upon the United Nations and other inter-governmental bodies*

to give urgent attention to developing mechanisms within the United Nations framework for resolving internal conflicts;

to intensify its work on the draft Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minority Groups, and to promote efforts for the protection of minority rights;

to monitor and limit the supply or sale of arms, as well as financial and other assistance by outside powers to warring parties in internal conflicts.

Call for Prayer by the General Secretary, 8 January 1991

We urgently call on the WCC’s 311 member churches around the world to continue their special prayers for peace in the days and weeks ahead in view of the growing fears of imminent war in the Gulf region.
We are confident that people of all religious persuasions will join in this spiritual endeavour and in so doing will contribute to the creation of a climate of reconciliation and cooperation which will prevent a surrender to the dynamics of a military solution with catastrophic consequences. Prayerful support should be offered for UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuellar, encouraging him in his efforts in the search for a peaceful resolution of the Gulf crisis.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the General Secretary to the Member Churches in Europe, 8 August 1990

Dear friends,

In the midst of many tumultuous events taking place in the world there is also alarming evidence in Europe of dangerous expressions of xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Various manifestations of racism are no longer isolated or marginal phenomena but are present and manifest in many European societies. Desecration of Jewish cemeteries in France and threats to Jewish communities in the Soviet Union leave frightening imprints. Five decades after the Shoah (Holocaust), anti-Semitism is apparent once again on the fringes of political life.

We are deeply concerned about this new wave of intolerance towards minorities and incitement to racial hatred. Racism denies our common humanity in creation and our belief that we are all made in God's image.

The WCC has in different ways and on many occasions condemned racism and anti-Semitism. The World Council of Churches already at its first Assembly in Amsterdam, 1948, declared: "We call upon the churches we represent to denounce anti-Semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-Semitism is sin against God and man". This appeal has been reiterated many times.

In spite of a renewed and mutually beneficial relationship between Jews and Christians, one cannot disregard the fact that there is a special obligation for Christians to make sure that anti-Semitism is combatted wherever it appears. The persecution of Jews has a long and persistent history, especially in countries where Jews constitute a minority among Christians. The Christian churches are still committed to look into their own traditions, where teachings of contempt for Jews and Judaism proved a spawning ground for the evils of anti-Semitism. This is why I appeal to Christians in countries where the spectre of anti-Semitism again haunts the Jewish people, not to fail in their resolve to take action against these acts of racism and to be available in human solidarity.

Yours in His Service, Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Central Committee Statement on Issues Arising out of Developments In Central and Eastern Europe, Geneva, Switzerland, March 1990

The Central Committee of the WCC meeting in Geneva, March 1990, welcomes the developments in Central and Eastern Europe which are bringing in new liberties and processes towards participatory democracy to many countries including the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia.
We pay tribute to the special role that youth have played within some of these countries to bring about change. We rejoice with the churches in these new developments and in the subsequent possibilities for renewal and diaconal service. At the same time however we deplore the fact that people of Albania are still deprived of any religious freedom and of their most elementary human rights.

We share also the pain of these times with our brothers and sisters in Central and Eastern Europe. As we stated in the final message of the European Ecumenical Assembly on Peace with Justice organized by the Conference of European Churches and the (Roman Catholic) Council of European Bishops' Conference in Basel, Switzerland in May 1989:

"This time of hope and expectation also brings new dangers. The new space means old problems can come to the surface again and the process of transformation itself as with all processes of such kind, is bound to invite its own conflicts as well ... It is a painful process ... We plead that this process of transformation be also a process of reconciliation ... Let there be openness to the claims and rights of the other side:'

We pay tribute to the churches in these countries which, under difficult circumstances, witnessed to the faith and to those who suffered for their faithfulness. In the last forty years of the ecumenical movement, the member churches of the WCC and CEC have sought to help these churches to survive and to be faithful. An important mechanism for this support was provided through active participation in the Churches' Human Rights Programme for the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act.

However, the actions of the WCC and CEC have not always been adequate or fully understood. With the advice of church leaders the ecumenical community has sought to fully support the efforts of the churches to maintain the right to exist; to be a Christian presence; and by letters of protest and quiet intervention to advocate on behalf of individuals and communities who were persecuted. These approaches brought with them both results and tensions, and required the ecumenical movement to discern the right way for the right moment. The time to speak and the time to be silent were not always obvious. The time has now come to share that history openly.

As we look forward, we acknowledge disturbing trends resulting from recent developments not only for Europe but also for the whole world. Amongst these are: the triumphalist claims being made by some about the capitalist system in response to the changes in socialism; the conflicts emerging from the demands of ethnic minorities and nationalities for self-determination; the resurgence of racial and religious tensions; the attempts to revitalize the Union of Brest of 1956; rising Eurocentrism wherein the struggles of the people of the two-thirds world may be neglected as governments, churches and agencies redirect their policies and aid programmes to Europe; and claims by some that "there were no churches in Central and Eastern Europe before the developments of the last six months".

In response to these trends, the churches are challenged to search for new values, new economic models, and a new vocabulary that responds to the changing political climate; speak out for justice and basic human rights; act in solidarity with the South; affirm that the churches in Central and Eastern Europe have, under very difficult circumstances, witnessed to the Gospel, and that it was the privilege of the ecumenical movement to be with them in fellowship and to encourage them in their task.
In light of the above, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches calls upon the member churches to:

enter into dialogue with the churches in Europe in the search for new models of social and political justice, ensuring widest possible participation in decision-making structures;

invite and challenge the churches in Europe to share their understanding of the sources of and solutions to current and potential conflicts and the role that the churches might play in resisting any attempts to resolve conflict through military means;

contribute towards efforts to ensure the individual and collective rights of national, religious and cultural minorities in Central and Eastern Europe;

ensure that governments', churches' and agencies' responses to changes in Central and Eastern Europe do not further marginalize the two-thirds world, and our collective commitment to global justice;

ask the churches to include in their prayers and concerns the thousands of voiceless believers in Albania who continue to be oppressed and deprived constitutionally of religious freedom.

The Central Committee commends the initiative by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) for calling a special meeting of church leaders in April 1990 on the new situation in Europe and requests the CEC to share with the church leaders the concerns of this statement and to support the actions recommended.

**Statement on Romania by the General Secretaries of the WCG LWF, CEC and WARG 20 December 1989**

It is with shock and deep sorrow that we have learned of the tragedy in Timisoara where violent repression by the armed forces has taken the lives of many civilian people.

Our organizations are greatly concerned for the dignity of life of all peoples in Romania as in all parts of the world, irrespective of their religious conviction and ethnic origin.

We strongly condemn the use of violence in response to peoples' expression of their aspirations and of their longing for justice. The responsible authorities have thus revealed the true nature and ruthlessness of their rule.

We call on all churches to include the Romanian situation in their prayers of intercession, and particularly the families of the victims of the massacre.

We accompany the churches in Romania in their efforts to serve people.

We also urge them to continue to live out their prophetic witness and to pursue a process of ensuring basic human rights and a just social order.

Emilio Castro        Gunnar Staalsset        Jean Fischer        Milan Opecensky  
General Secretary    General Secretary       General Secretary       General Secretary  
WCC                   LWF                      CEC                      WARC

**Telex from CCIA Director to the Minister of Defense, 17 November 1989**

We have been informed that twelve (12) foreign church workers were arrested at 5 pm on November 16 in San Salvador. They are:
We are deeply concerned for the lives and safety of these individuals. They are trusted members of the family of Christian churches, working only out of their faith to assist and bring relief to the poor of El Salvador.

We call on you to ensure their immediate release. Ninan Koshy
Director, International Affairs

Message from the General Secretary to President Alfredo Cristiani, 17 November 1989
The lethal bullets which pierced the body, but not the spirit of Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, have now struck down six priests of the Jesuit Community and two Salvadorian women.

We repudiate and condemn these cowardly acts perpetrated against these respected and loved persons deeply committed to justice, to the high standards of academic excellence, and above all to the people of God, especially the poor.

Today - at this very moment - thousands of the Salvadorean civil population are being killed and maimed by modern weapons used indiscriminately from air and land attacks. This genocide is as unacceptable as the stealthy night murder of priests and lay people.

We call insistently upon your government to bring those responsible for these murders to justice. We also call on your government, and the FMLN, to cease the hostilities and to facilitate the work of the Red Cross and that of the churches and other humanitarian groups in rendering vital assistance to the population.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Statement by the General Secretary on the Attack on Temples and Mosque, 25 October 1989
The WCC condemns the attacks on three temples and a mosque in Lautoka in Fiji. The churches have a special responsibility to respect the sanctity of all places of worship and should deplore such acts. The Council hopes that the churches in Fiji will take initiatives for communal harmony and multiracial cooperation.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary
Telex from the General Secretary 10 President Virgilio Barco, 26 January 1989

The World Council of Churches is a worldwide organization composed of over 300 churches of the Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Evangelical traditions in over 100 countries. It has learned with deep concern of threats which have been made against the lives of six pastors of the Iglesia Presbiteriana Colombiana during the last months of last year. Their names are Revds. David Illidge, William Murdoch, Milciades Pua, Alonso Oviedo and the Rev. Uriel Ramirez.

We are cognizant of the efforts made by your government to work for peace, both in the Central American region and in order to initiate steps leading to dialogue and a cessation of violence in Colombia. We therefore urgently request that you accelerate your efforts to investigate the origin of the threats being made against these respected leaders of a church known and esteemed by many churches across the world, and to bring an effective cessation to these acts of intimidation.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Letter from the Acting General Secretary to Bishop Medardo Gomez, 6 January 1989

Dear Brother in Christ,

We were greatly concerned and angered to hear of the bomb placed by unknown persons in the Lutheran church "la Resurrección" on 28 December last. We have likewise heard of the threats you have received against your life.

The ecumenical family was encouraged and strengthened by your visit to the Ecumenical Centre last year and by the sharing of fraternal contacts with you and other members of the Salvadorean churches during the last Assembly of the CLAI at Indaiatuba.

Now we wish to confirm our solidarity and strengthen our support for you and the faithful members of your congregation in these difficult testing and challenging times for the whole Salvadorean Christian community.

Members of the Christian community throughout the world are also suffering with you for witnessing to faith in Jesus Christ and feel comforted and encouraged by the words of the author of Hebrews when he says:

Remember how it was with you in the past. In those days, after God's light had shone on you, you suffered many things, yet were not defeated by the struggle. You were at times publicly insulted and ill-treated, and at other times you were ready to join those who were being treated in this way. You shared the sufferings of prisoners, and when all your belongings were seized you endured your loss gladly, because you know that you still possessed something much better, which would last forever. Do not lose your courage, then, because it brings with it a great reward. You need to be patient, in order to do the will of God and receive what he promises. For, as the scripture says,

"Just a little while longer
and he who is coming will come;
he will not delay."
My righteous people, however, will believe and live; but if any of them turns back, I will not be pleased with him.'

We are not people who turn back and are lost. Instead we have faith and are saved. Hebrews 10:32-39, Good News version (United Bible Societies)

We want this to be our message to you at this time. We pray for you and for the Salvadorean people and I send you our fraternal greetings in Jesus Christ.

Patrick Coïdan
Acting General Secretary

Telex from the Acting General Secretary to President J.N. Duarte, 6 January 1989

It is with deep concern that the World Council of Churches learned of the bomb attack on the Lutheran Church in El Salvador.

The WCC is a worldwide fellowship of Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox churches, representing over 400 million people in more than 100 countries.

The bomb attack of December 28, 1988, following threats made on the life of the Bishop Medardo Gómez are striking evidence of the very difficult conditions under which the church struggles to bear witness, in El Salvador, to the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We affirm the mission of the churches in El Salvador to minister to all who are in need, and we call on the government of El Salvador to undertake a full investigation of the attack on the Lutheran Church and bring to justice those responsible.

Respectfully, Patrick Coïdan
Acting General Secretary

THEMATIC PRESENTATIONS

a. Freedom of Religion

Throughout 1987-1990 the CCI A closely monitored UN human Rights Commission and Sub-Commission deliberations on "the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief". The following excerpt shows how the CCIA presented the Council's concerns regarding the inseparability of right to freedom of religion from other rights and comments on the proposed UN Convention on religious liberty.

1988 At its Assembly in New Delhi in 1962, the World Council of Churches asserted that religious liberty includes the freedom to practise religion or belief by performance of acts of mercy, or by expression in word or deed of the implications of belief in social, economic and political matters, both domestic and international. The World Council of Churches is keenly aware of the diversity of opinions regarding definitions of religious liberty and the range of actions undertaken in the name of religious belief or commitment. We are also aware of the conflicts which result between church and state and between religious minorities and
majorities, which have as their basis disagreements over the nature and scope of religious belief.

Religious belief finds expression in many different social and political forms. Moreover, we believe that it is the purview of religious communities to evolve their own ways of expressing their faith within societies. Conflicts between groups within societies, or between religious organizations and governments over the parameters around the expression of religious belief, might most usefully be explored through dialogue and consultation. Given these situations it is important to examine closely what kinds of structures, both domestic and international, must evolve to allow for the free expression of religious commitment, while at the same time preventing any adverse effects on other communities. In the light of this, the World Council of Churches is fully committed to the strengthening of the implementation mechanisms of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Human Rights Advisory Group of the World Council of Churches, meeting in June 1987 to consider issues around religious liberty, asserted that "although there are some gaps and weaknesses, the present standards are considered adequate". In addition, while expressing interest in the proposed Convention, the Advisory Group stressed the primacy of education, dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation. A number of issues need to be thought through carefully before work is begun on a Convention on religious liberty.

The WCC is a fellowship of churches. Among its purposes are calling the churches to the goal of visible unity and expressing the common concern of the churches in the service of human need and the promotion of one human family in justice and peace. The WCC understands its ministry among and support to, the poor and the marginalized and the victims of injustice, as integral part of its mission as mandated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This ministry it carries out with and through its member churches and related national councils.

Our record of policies and actions with regard to the Philippines is open. We have supported the churches and the NCC of Philippines, especially in the last decade and a half, in their tasks of evangelization and renewal, in defense and promotion of human rights and in humanitarian and development programmes. We have periodically represented to the governments including the present one, regarding human rights violations and some of the root causes of injustice in the country.

Along with our churches, we pray for a more just society and for reconciliation among the people in the Philippines and will continue to act in that spirit.

Ninan Koshy
Director, International Affairs

Central Committee Statement on the Expulsion of the Christian Conference of Asia from Singapore, Hanover, Frg, August 1988

The "expulsion" of the Christian Conference of Asia from Singapore by the Singapore Government at the end of 1987, in addition to infringing blatantly the rights of the ecumenical body, reflects a pattern of violation of human rights which should be of special concern to the churches.

The "expulsion" of CCA from Singapore has raised four larger issues which should cause profound concern to the churches. Firstly, the functioning and participation in organizations of churches and other religious bodies are part of religious liberty including the freedom of
association that goes with it. Curtailment of such rights is of particular concern to the ecumenical movement. Secondly, the government's action raises again the serious theological question of the churches' understanding of and response to the critical realities of church-state relations. Thirdly, the Singapore government's expulsion of CCA followed the detention without trial under harsh security laws of social and community workers; among them were several who are church-related. One of the charges against the CCA was the support given to them. Fourthly, the government action also was a deliberate attempt to denigrate the ecumenical organization by falsely linking it, to "subversive" movements and "plots".

The General Secretary of the WCC in a letter to the General Secretary of the CCA strongly criticized the action of the Singapore government against an ecumenical organization on the basis of false accusations. "Both because of the support of the wee to the CCA in its activities and because of its own understanding of the mission of the church the WCC rejects the allegations of the Singapore government". The CCA itself in statements and letters to its member churches refuted the allegations reaffirming its commitment to the cause of justice as part of its witness as an ecumenical body.

The Central Committee of the wee, meeting in Hanover, FRG, in August 1988,
1. strongly protests against the action of the Singapore government in expelling the CCA from Singapore;
2. calls the attention of member churches to new disturbing trends regarding religious liberty and human rights in several Asian countries;
3. asks the General Secretary to convey to the governments of the countries the concerns expressed in this statement and seek opportunities along with the CCA and the churches in the region to explain to them the nature and functioning of ecumenical bodies;
4. affirms its support to the CCA, national councils and member churches in Asia in their efforts to promote human rights and work for justice as part of their witness in obedience to the Gospel;
5. as a symbolic action in support of the CCA, recommends that churches and their related agencies seriously consider abstaining from using Singapore Airlines and from holding ecumenical meetings in Singapore until
   a) there is a guarantee from the Singapore government that all accredited delegates are allowed to enter the country;
   b) there is a guarantee of freedom of the press in Singapore;
6. asks the General Secretary to monitor carefully the developments, to take appropriate actions in consultation with the CCA, national councils and member churches and take steps for new ecumenical strategies in response to the challenges of the new situation.

Telex from CCIA Director to President J.N. Duarte, 16 October 1987
We are deeply concerned about the news of the series of threats to kill Bishop Medardo Gomez Lutheran Church of El Salvador. We would ask Your Excellency to take urgent action give him physical protection and to stop the attempts on the life of members of the Lutheran Church and on its property.

We are following events closely. We pray for this sister church. Respectfully yours,

Ninan Koshy
Director, International Affairs
Telegram from Dr. Emilio Castro to the Lay Council of the Rabbinate, Istanbul, 10 September 1986

It was with great shock and dismay we received news of armed attack on Neve Shalom synagogue. We join you in mourning the death of the twenty one innocent worshippers and pray for speedy recovery of those injured. We condemn this act of terrorism against people gathered in a place of worship. We denounce all acts of terrorism and express our profound concern about the fact that often Jewish community has been target for attacks. Convey our deep-felt sympathy and condolence to families of victims. Assure you of our prayers and support at this difficult time.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Oral Intervention at the UN Commission on Human Rights Regarding Religious Liberty by Ninan Koshy, 24 February 1986

Addressing the 1986 Session of the Commission on Human Rights the CCIA mentioned the fact of regularly receiving disturbing reports of continued and newly developing instances of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief. It recalled the WCC’s long and impressive history with the question of religious liberty, thereby stressing the WCC’s concern that it in fact never dealt with religious liberty in isolation. The WCC has stated clearly that the right to religious freedom is inseparable from other fundamental human rights and that no religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect and reverence for the faith and basic human rights of others, including those who do not profess or practice any religion. The CCIA noted to the Commission the church’s own history of intolerance and religious discrimination, the present religious factors which often feed and inflame conflicts among and within nations, including the difficulties which often arise out of conflicts between religious minorities and majorities, and the phenomenon that religion and even the issue of religious liberty is often used for political ends.

The CCIA expressed WCC’s full commitment to the strengthening of implementation mechanisms for the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. At the same time the CCIA deemed it necessary to caution the Commission with regard to the nature of the mechanism to be created. Questions related to intolerance based on religion were different in nature from violations such as torture, disappearances or summary executions. The CCIA emphasized the need for the Commission to adopt an approach of dialogue, between religious communities and their governments as well as among religious communities themselves. CCIA asked the Commission a) to enquire into and analyse the causes which might lead to or exacerbate discrimination or intolerance based on religion or belief b) to examine and keep under review the relevance of national legislation in this respect, and c) to examine socio-political changes and factors which may affect relationships between religious or belief communities and their governments, or among such communities.

Telegram from Dr. Emilio Castro and Dr. Gunnar Staalsett to the Council of Churches, 23 January 1986
The General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation today (23.1.86) released the following press statement of solidarity with the Council of Churches and the people of Namibia:

"The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation have received with shock and profound distress the news about the destruction of the offices of the Council of Churches in Namibia and the Lutheran High School in Oshigambo by arson. We condemn these acts of violence.

The Council of Churches in Namibia has an admirable record of courageously witnessing for justice, peace and reconciliation in the midst of the crisis in Namibia. We are confident that this occasion will prove to be one of rededication to the causes which the Council has upheld. We reaffirm our solidarity with the Council and assure it of our support in continuing its ministry.

We remember in our prayers all the people of Namibia and especially all those related to the Council. As we said on an earlier similar occasion in Namibia 'the things of the world can be destroyed. Christ cannot be destroyed. He lives indeed'.

Rev. Dr. Gunnar Staalsett
General Secretary
Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Priorities in the Human Rights work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Human Rights Advisory Group, Glion, Switzerland, January 1986

In reviewing the human rights work of the CCIA, the Human Rights Advisory Group underlined the need to maintain intensive engagement in the following areas of long-standing concern:

1. Assisting churches, church bodies and ecumenical organisations as they seek to respond to human rights problems in their own situations;
2. Assuring an adequate flow of information internationally in order to strengthen ecumenical solidarity worldwide;
3. Continuing to develop theological reflection as it relates to human rights; in this respect, the three presentations at this HRAG meeting on the theology of liberation, minjung theology and black theology provided a stimulating and insightful point of departure which needs to be expanded and deepened;
4. Continuing to develop a theoretical framework which will enable churches to become more deeply committed to human rights work as part of the engagement for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In the pursuit of these general goals, the HRAG concentrated in particular on three topics chosen by the CCIA Officers as requiring renewed attention:

1. Survival Rights: the root causes of attacks against the integrity of human life;
2. Religious Liberty: new trends and perspectives as exemplified by the challenge of shari'a to Christian life and witness;

1. Survival Rights

The introductory presentation chose Sri Lanka as an example of a situation where survival rights of an entire ethnic group are systematically being threatened. This raised the concern for
the right to survive as a people. In several parts of the globe, genocide is reappearing as a systematic policy of certain governments. The rights of ethnic groups are not guaranteed in present nation-states; indeed, ethno-nationalist struggles for survival are usually interpreted as a threat to the unity and integrity of the state. In many countries, for example in Africa, speaking of ethnic rights is viewed as tantamount to promoting secession.

Another major threat to survival affecting all peoples of the world is the nuclear arms race and the consequences of rampant military expenditures. Included in this problem is the reality of foreign military bases, the transport of nuclear weapons through international waters and the dumping of nuclear wastes.

Related to this is the problem of hunger and starvation. The number of those who have become homeless because of their quest for survival has reached into the tens of millions. The world's refugee population is expanding at an uncontrollable rate. Though there is enough food and the means of distribution in the world, the priorities of expenditures of the most powerful countries continue to emphasize the needs of military confrontation.

2. Religious Liberty

In reviewing situations in which churches experience new trends and problems related to religious liberty, the HRAG noted a sharp increase in the number of conflicts where religion or religious communities are a dominant factor. Because of the major role played by religion, most states are eager to coopt, control or reject religious communities. On the other hand, religious communities are increasingly becoming involved in activities aimed at a transformation of societies and social structures.

Animosities and discrimination among religions themselves, especially when they involve the coming to power of more extremist elements; often become factors making conflicts more difficult to resolve. In this context, an examination of shari'a law became a useful example of the way in which religion can be used in both positive and negative ways within the political context.

c) that the confessional witness of the churches calls for a covenant between the churches of all countries in their pursuit of human rights, justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Themes for Further Reflection

1) Theological issues:
Survival rights- the need to project hope for a more just and secure world in which life and creation are respected as gifts of God; proclamation of the Gospel which calls people to decision and action; the koinonia which exists among all people who follow the example of Christ and are prepared to suffer and sacrifice for their faith.
Religious liberty-more detailed examination of themes linking theology and religious liberty; implications for theology and the life of the church of the universal application of human rights standards; the role of consolation and pastoral theology for churches living in situations of religious conflict.
Militarization- the role of theology in situations where militarism has become an all-encompassing ideology; resistance against the utilization of theology as a justification of militarization; theological undergirding of the spiritual power of the Christian witness against militarization and the violation of human rights.
Debt crisis - need for theological and biblical study of issues relating to the phenomenon of debt (e.g. the biblical concepts of usury, private property, the year of jubilee, etc.).

2) Political ethics:
Analysis of power, processes by which decisions are made against the will of people; the content of the national security doctrine in the process of militarization; the right to peace as a human right confronting the mechanism of destabilization.
3) Debt crisis:
Analysis of the root causes of foreign debts; what is the common denominator of all debtor nations? How do militarism, domestic corruption, false development ideologies, the international monetary institutions and the political use of foreign loans promote increasing foreign debts?

4) Religious liberty:
Need for a new evaluation of religious liberty problems experienced by Christians and churches in all parts of the world; examination of the tendency of civil authorities to define the content of religion; the erosion of the neutrality of the state vis-a-vis religion; the distinction between religious liberty and the liberty of conscience; the right of religious liberty used for political ends, including alienation of people from a willingness to confront reality; human rights within the church, e.g. positions taken by some churches on the rights of women or practices affecting the employment of women in the church.

Recommendations for Action

1) Theological sharing:
The CCIA should monitor and share internationally documents of theological reflection which show the alternative and contrasting signs of the Kingdom of God in this world; such documents as the KAIROS paper from South Africa, or the many statements emanating from Latin America point to a contrast between theological integrity and the political pragmatism which guides most governments in their decision-making.

2) Solidarity with churches living under tyrannical regimes:
There is a need for a greater support by the international ecumenical community for churches in situations where human rights, including the right to self-determination are being violated; the commitment of churches to human rights needs to be strengthened through human rights education; churches need to emphasize social and political witness in society and come to the aid of those who defend the implications of the Christian faith in political life.

3) Inter-regional exchange:
The CCIA should facilitate inter-regional sharing with regard to the defence and promotion of human rights; the witness and role of churches in dealing with the militarization of societies needs to be strengthened by mutual learning and pastoral care; this needs to address both domestic and international causes and develop an inter-regional ecumenical response to the mechanics of death.

4) Inter-religious conflict:
The CCIA should cooperate with the Sub-Unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths in establishing an ongoing dialogue between representatives of Islam and churches living in Islamic countries; with the increasing migration of Muslims to Western Europe, such dialogue should also be carried out in European countries where intolerance and racism is on the rise; a product of such dialogue might be practical guidelines for dealing with problems of religious intolerance; the CCIA should also provide the opportunity for representatives of churches living in countries where the shari'a law is operative to meet to discuss together their problems and ways to deal with them.
5) Debt crisis:
The CCIA should initiate discussions with the Commission of the Churches on Participation in Development (CCPD), particularly its Advisory Group on Economic Matters, for a study of the effects of the debt crisis on the realisation of human rights.

Central Committee Pastoral Letter to the People of the Churches of Central America,
Buenos Aires, Argentina, July/August 1985

1. The members of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 28 July to 8 August 1985, greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2. We have learned of your faithful witness to the gospel from members of our delegation who visited Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua from 12 to 22 July 1985. This delegation included two of our seven Presidents, Dr. Marga Bühlig of the Swiss Protestant Church Federation and Metropolitan Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, Bishop of New Delhi of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India; a member of this Central Committee, Mr. William P. Thompson of the Presbyterian Church (USA); and the Rev. Charles Harper, Secretary of the WCC's Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America. On the basis of their testimony, we are prompted to address you at this moment.

3. Members of our delegation have told us of the social and economic disruption that they observed throughout Central America. They visited persons who had fled their homes within El Salvador and found a haven in facilities operated by churches. From women who had just arrived there, they learned of the increase in bombardment of peasant villages by the army that has elevated the death toll, even though disappearances and assassinations in San Salvador have declined. They learned that other persons have fled across international borders, as in Honduras where refugees from El Salvador and from the indigenous people in the Atlantic coastal area have sought refuge. They were informed of massive repression carried out against the indigenous people of Guatemala as well. They heard from eye-witnesses of the kidnapping, murder and destruction of property as a result of the operations of counter-revolutionary forces operating on both the Honduran and Costa Rican borders of Nicaragua. Many persons still disappear in the countries visited in this region.

4. Our delegation was impressed by regional similarities that were evident in all the countries visited. All these countries are poor; all have a great need for education at all levels. Militarisation pervades the entire region. Everywhere the actions of the United States were observed: in support for the present government in El Salvador; in promoting militarisation of Costa Rica and Honduras; in economic and diplomatic measures as well as constantly increasing military threats against Nicaragua. Our delegation reported that the United States embargo on Nicaragua has cut off spare parts for all manner of technological installations. However, even more distressing, upon visiting a pediatric hospital, they learned from attending physicians that infants and children are dying because essential drugs are prevented from reaching them because of the embargo. Like you, we appreciate the efforts of Christians and others, world-wide, who seek to alleviate the economic pressures on Nicaragua. While our delegation was there, they found the citizens particularly distressed by the warning note from the United States, threatening reprisals if the government of that country believed future acts of terrorism to be inspired by Nicaragua. Everywhere they observed preparations to fend off an anticipated invasion.

5. Our delegation was particularly saddened to learn of increasing attacks on Christian communities and programmes and social projects operated by the churches. In El Salvador, they were-informed that more than 4,000 religious workers of the Roman Catholic Church
had been murdered. In Nicaragua, Baptist and Roman Catholic teachers engaged in literacy programmes had been kidnapped, and primary health care facilities in mountain villages destroyed by counter-revolutionary forces.

6. Our delegation has reported to us in graphic terms on the witness you are making and continue to make to the Gospel of our Lord, despite the risks and difficulties encountered. Not only do you continue services of public worship, often in hazardous situations, but you persist in presenting the claims of the Gospel to your people. Under these circumstances we give thanks to God for the wide sale and dissemination of the Scriptures in Nicaragua. You also conduct relevant and effective humanitarian programmes designed to meet the emergent needs of suffering people; and even amidst the hazards attendant on civil strife as in El Salvador you continue to teach improved agricultural methods, health practices and community betterment. All these you do in the name of Jesus Christ, ministering to all without asking their creed—only their need. Our delegation sensed the tensions in the parishes arising from different perceptions of their situation. However, it observed that the ministries on behalf of those in need have resulted in cooperative efforts among the churches that surely show forth that unity which is God's gift to the Church. This cooperation includes persons and churches not yet fully identified with the ecumenical movement, certainly far beyond the small number of our own member churches in the region. This work together on behalf of the poor has prompted the churches to speak and act in concert, on the one hand to denounce policies of injustice, and on the other to laud those that are more humane.

7. We have heard your voices addressed to us, not only through our delegation but also through your representatives in our midst. And we thank you for your challenging words to us, the factual data you have provided and your expectations that we will be your continuing advocates in the world-wide ecumenical fellowship.

8. Your travail has not gone unnoticed. Together we are part of the one body of Christ that is His universal Church, and as in the human body, "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (I Cor. 12:26). While our suffering cannot reflect the intensity of your own, we too suffer and, in suffering with you, pledge to you that we shall join with you in prayer to Almighty God that you and we may be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit in the places where we seek to serve.

9. We shall seek ways to multiply our opportunities for first-hand information from you through individual and group visits as well as through written and recorded data. We shall also attempt to devise more effective possibilities for you to participate in and contribute to the world-wide ecumenical fellowship. In turn, we urge you to strengthen the ties between and among the national churches of the region. You will need to be especially vigilant to resist attempts to isolate the people of God from one another. Whatever tension may arise, the Church of Jesus Christ is not confined by national boundaries.

10. We promise to tell the truth about you, your churches and your ministry to our own people and, if possible, to others, including our own governments. We shall not hesitate to inform them regarding the critical pressures being exerted upon all the peoples of Central America, in some cases from outside the region, in others by oppressive governments within it. We are convinced that the true struggles in the area are not a result of the conflict between East and West, as it has been characterised, but rather between North and South. Nevertheless, we recognise that the current East-West tensions exacerbate the conflicts. We support the efforts of the "Contadora" group of nations to reduce tensions and to seek peaceful resolution to conflicts in the region. We shall commit ourselves to work with you and others to discern a more just economic order for the whole world. This would, in view, greatly relieve the pressures on you and promote the circumstances under which you could more effectively seek to promote the new society needed throughout the region, especially in
Nicaragua. We recognise your right to choose an order responsive to your own history and distinctive culture, independent and non-aligned, pluralistic, and with an economy designed to benefit the poor. We believe this to be not only a laudable public goal, but a distinctively Christian one as well.

11. We recall the apostle Paul who also suffered at the hands of his own people and others, yet gave his witness to his Lord in such a way that our Lord appeared to him and said:

"Keep up your courage; you have affirmed the truth about me in Jerusalem, and you must do the same in Rome."

12. We perceive that, like Paul, you have been faithful witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ in your own situations. Like the apostle, you do not know what will be required of you in the days ahead. And so in the words of our Lord, we say to you confidently:

"Keep up your courage!"

With all our greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Central Committee of the
World Council of Churches

Message from World Council of Churches to the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, 2 July 1985

1. This message comes to you with hearty greetings from the World Council of Churches, an organisation representing more than 300 churches and 400 million Christians of the Orthodox and Protestant traditions from all parts of the world, the majority of whom are women.

As Christians we believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and cannot be deprived of this divine dignity by sexism, racism and class; neither can the Christian gospel be used to sanctify or perpetuate existing inequalities and injustices against any human being. We affirm that Christ has broken down the barriers that divide people here on earth and has restored a basic equality between the sexes.

2. We humbly admit that the churches have often failed to live up to this affirmation of faith and have legitimized and perpetuated women's inferior status in church and society. By doing so, they have not given leadership and prophetic witness to the world and have not acted in solidarity with women in their struggle for equality.

3. However, the WCC and its member churches have, since its inception in 1948, given high priority to the status of women in church and society. By so doing, we have contributed to and learned from the process which the UN organisations have initiated in declaring 1975 International Women's Year and 1976-1985 the Decade for Women. This was done in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

4. At the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, which took place ten years ago here in Nairobi, it was said: "The WCC must recognise the dimension of powerlessness that affects women in the political, economic, social and ecclesial areas of life ... In order to be truly free, all people must participate in working towards their own liberation. The liberation of women from structures of injustice must be taken seriously as seen in the light of the liberation of all oppressed people and all forms of discrimination..." (Section V, Nairobi Report).

The challenge of this Decade to governments and churches was therefore:
to abandon all practices, teaching and legislation which keep women from fully sharing responsibility, power and decision-making in all spheres of life (not only in the family) and furthermore to make room for women's creative energies. Women's life experience, wisdom, energy, courage and determination contribute to resolving the problems of injustice in the human family and to halting the destruction of nature in a very new way.

5. The gains of the Decade include an enormous growth of awareness both among women and men about the status of women:
- women have started to define their own identity and needs;
- women have discovered how much they have in common with women of other faiths, who are often oppressed by religious practices but want to restore the true meaning of their religious heritage;
- women have started to build a global sisterhood, in solidarity with women in other parts of the world; they are discovering the interlinkage among the different forms of oppression, racism, sexism, class-exploitation;
- by their contributions women have enriched the work of society at large and of the churches. The WCC Sixth Assembly in Vancouver 1983 was a model of highly visible and significant leadership of women.

These gains are the result of numerous efforts and initiatives to change the existing patterns of domination and oppression, which we have learned arise from patriarchal thinking and acting. Sometimes even women perpetuate these patterns.

Letter from Dr. Emilio Castro 10 WCC member churches, 7 May 1985

Dear Friends,

It is with profound concern that I write to you about the recent tragic events in Lebanon. Words seem inappropriate at this stage after so many years of fighting and suffering and with no apparent solution in sight. Yet, it appears that the people of Lebanon have reached a new level of suffering as a result of the deterioration of relationships.

Since the start of the Lebanese war more than ten years ago, the ecumenical community has shared the agonies of the Lebanese people who, as the Vancouver Assembly stated, "have been carrying too large a burden of the problems of the region?"

Throughout the Lebanon crisis, the ecumenical family has responded to the humanitarian needs of the people in modest but concrete ways. It has offered relief materials, food, medicine and tents, and facilitated other programmes of rehabilitation and reconstruction. It has served all communities and groups within a context of reconciliation and solidarity.

Over the last few weeks, during which the Israeli forces have been withdrawing from occupied areas in the south of the country, factional fighting has erupted again in the south and in Beirut, bringing renewed suffering to all communities in the areas concerned. The fighting in and around the southern city of Sidon has however, in this instance, particularly affected the Christian community. Villages have been ransacked and looted, and many thousands of people have been driven from their homes and lands and have fled to Jezzine, to the south along the border with Israel and into the already crowded areas of Beirut.

In this most recent period, efforts at reconciliation have been made by the religious leaders in the country. Both Christian and Muslim religious leaders have met, separately and together, to
try to find ways out of the impasse. We would draw particular attention to the efforts of Patriarch Ignatios IV of Antioch and All the East, one of the Presidents of the WCC, who in a televised statement over the Easter period made an impassioned appeal for peace and reconciliation.

The answer to the Lebanese situation lies with the politicians and governments, but the churches should hold fast to the belief that our Lord called us to be peacemakers and reconcilers, and we must never tire in this task.

At this critical stage in the life of Lebanon we appeal to you, as member churches of the WCC, to express your solidarity, through prayers and messages, with the churches and the people of Lebanon and, where possible, intervene with your governments that they might act in a creative and positive sense to bring an end to the suffering and strife which has characterized Lebanon for so long.

At this critical time we call upon the ecumenical community:

a) To support the independence and unity of the Lebanese people and encourage the government to take effective action to reassert its sovereignty over all Lebanese territory.

b) To support the churches in Lebanon which strive for reconciliation in order to achieve harmony and unity among all communities in the country and against attempts to redistribute demographic patterns by violence and bloodshed.

c) To continue to give generous support to the Middle East Council of Churches and the churches in Lebanon for their humanitarian and social programmes of relief.

Kindly keep us informed of any actions you may take or suggestions you may have in this matter.

It is incumbent on us all to remember Lebanon and especially our fellow Christians in that country constantly in our prayers and thoughts. We urge you all to do this and re- quest that you pass this plea to all your churches, your membership and all who have the interest of Lebanon and the Lebanese people at heart.

With warm greetings.
Yours in His service,

Emilio Castro
General Secretary

Telegram from Dr. Emilio Castro to President Burnham, 20 March 1985

The World Council of Churches learned with dismay of the disruption and prevention of the annual general meeting of the Guyana Council of Churches which was scheduled to be held on Tuesday, 12 March, 1985. We are deeply concerned with the general situation of human rights in Guyana. We call on you to ensure full freedom of religion, including the freedom to hold religious meetings.

Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the people, the churches and the government of Guyana.

Emilio Castro
General Secretary
Human Rights Advisory Group, Terms of Reference (Approved by the Commission at its Meeting, January 1985)

1. Sponsorship

1.1 The Human Rights Advisory Group (HRAG) is established within the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches, in accordance with decisions and recommendations adopted by the WCC Central Committee (Geneva 1984) based on the "Statement on Human Rights" of the WCC VIth Assembly (Vancouver 1983).

1.2 The HRAG shall report directly to the Commission of CCIA.

1.3 On the HRAG's advice and recommendations, the CCIA may:
   a) take actions directly in accordance with its by-laws;
   b) make recommendations to the General Secretary for actions which lie within the competence of that office or which are appropriate for other WCC sub-units;
   c) make recommendations to the WCC Central Committee, its Executive Committee, or to the WCC Officers for appropriate action;
   d) make recommendations to churches and national and regional ecumenical bodies.

1.4 The CCIA shall include relevant information on the work of the Advisory Group in its reports to the Central Committee, and through appropriate channels inform the member churches on its activities.

2. Mandate

2.1 The HRAG is established out of the Christian conviction that "all human beings, regardless of race, sex or belief have been created by God as individuals and in human community. Yet the world has been corrupted by sin, which results in the destruction of human relationships. In reconciling humankind and creation with God, Jesus Christ has also reconciled human beings with each other. Love of our neighbours is the essence of obedience to God." ("Statement on Human Rights", VIth Assembly, Vancouver, 1983).

2.2 The HRAG should be guided by the spirit of international ecumenical solidarity, and should seek to promote the engagement of the churches in the realization of human rights in their own societies, and when needed, through CCIA, to help mobilize the support of the ecumenical community for these efforts. This concept of ecumenical solidarity also involves mutual challenges among the churches based on their loving concern for and deep commitment to one another. In discussing particular situations, the Advisory Group should always take into account the different historical, cultural, social and confessional conditions of the various regions and countries as well as the ecclesiological background and the concrete circumstances in which the churches there live and witness.

3. Functions

3.1 In accordance with the human rights policies of the WCC as laid down by decisions of the WCC General Assembly and Central Committee, the Human Rights Advisory Group should:
   a) act as a means for churches and Christians to share experiences with regard to human rights, as well as a place for challenge and stimulation for churches in the struggle for human rights;
b) propose intensive ecumenical work in this field, in particular regarding special human rights topics, such as the problem of torture, religious liberty, etc.;

c) provide a means of examining and evaluating situations of special urgency, making recommendations as to how these should be handled;

d) provide expertise on the churches' involvement in efforts within the UN system, suggesting ways to strengthen international promotion and protection of human rights;

e) relate to other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations with responsibilities in the field of human rights.

3.2 The HRAG should keep close touch with programmes of churches and ecumenical bodies at the local, national and regional levels, in order to promote and intensify global ecumenical solidarity for the realization of human rights. In particular the human rights programmes of regional ecumenical bodies, AACC, CCA, PCC, Car. CC, MECC, CLAI, CEC, NCCCUSA, Can. CC, should be supported and strengthened.

3.3 Based on the experiences shared among the regions, the Advisory Group may recommend to CCIA:

a) areas for further intensive work to remove root causes of violations;

b) to promote greater ecumenical understanding and cooperation for the realization of human rights;

c) areas where further reflection is required on the theological rationale of Christian concern for the implementation of human rights. "Churches should be encouraged to reflect more deeply on the theological issues related to peace, justice and human rights? (Central Committee 1984).

e) Maintaining Contact with the UN Secretariat. The CCIA has established excellent relationships of trust with the staff in several sectors and departments of the UN Secretariat. These relationships have greatly facilitated important WCC input in certain areas of mutual concern. Among the key contacts are staff of the Centre for Human Rights, Secretariat for the International Year of Peace, the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization, UNHCR, UNCTAD and the World Food Conference. The Staff also maintains excellent working relationships with the NGO Liaison Officers of most of these bodies.

f) Dissemination of UN Materials. As a matter of routine, information about the UN and important documents on issues with which the UN is seized are provided on a selective basis to key contacts in the WCC constituency. This service aims to promote interest in the churches on the UN as well as to encourage special representation in the national capitals.

g) Providing Service to WCC Constituency on the UN. The CCIA is frequently requested by churches and church-related bodies to provide information on the UN and to give advice to them about direct access to the UN. During the period 1983 - 1986, assistance was given to the Canadian Council of Churches, the NCCs of Korea and the Philippines (all on the Commission on Human Rights), to the Pacific Conference of Churches (on the situation in New Caledonia) and to the Micronesia Coalition of NCCCUSA (on the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Trusteeship Council). The CCIA also gave assistance to political organisations in the Pacific and Central America in their work around the UN. Assistance in providing direct contact with the UN Centre for Human Rights was provided to a group of Korean Women on the question of violations of human rights by the Japanese government of Korean residents in Japan.

h) Coordination of and Providing Guidance to other WCC Sub-Units' UN Activities. This CCIA function was carried out on a fairly routine basis. The degree of coordination depended on the nature of the activity. Most frequently the CCIA channelled the information flow, especially when formal communication was necessary. When a written submission was called for on an issue not within CCIA mandate, intensive consultation was held with the sub-unit(s) concerned to ensure that proper procedures were followed.
On occasions when WCC was invited to send delegations to UN conferences, consultations were held not only among the WCC staff but also with member churches and regional ecumenical bodies. The CCIA staff were intensively involved in giving guidance to WCC staff task forces in determining the policy and the appropriate WCC activities in support of the International Youth Year (1985), the Nairobi Conference on the Decade for Women (1985) and the International Year of Peace (1986).

Message from the Executive Committee to the Churches in the Middle East, Geneva, Switzerland, 29 February 1984

The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting near Geneva on 20-28 February, 1984, has prayerfully considered the persistence of conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon. As the Sixth Assembly said in August 1983, the ecumenical community shares the agony of the peoples in Lebanon who have been tragically suffering over the last nine years and who have been carrying too large a burden of the problems of the region.

The Committee pledges full and prayerful support in the coordinated efforts of the religious leaders of Christians and Muslims in Lebanon to seek reconciliation and cessation of conflict, to secure a just and negotiated settlement of all disputed issues, to secure the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanese territory and to rebuild one united Lebanon where people of all religious faiths can live together with dignity, justice and mutual harmony. Christians all over the world continue in prayer for the people of Lebanon that peace with justice may soon prevail in that land.

The Committee also expresses its solidarity with the people of Lebanon in their incessant pain and continued suffering, and assures all possible support for the efforts to bring humanitarian assistance to all the victims of the conflict.

May the God of peace grant you peace, and may His presence and power bring you joy and comfort in the midst of your affliction.

NGO appeal on the right to conscientious objection, 9 February 1984

At the 36th session of the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in August/September 1983, some real progress was made towards explicitly recognising a universal right to conscientious objection to military service, a question that has been under consideration by the United Nations for 35 years.

By fourteen votes in favour, five abstentions and no votes against, the members of the Sub-Commission adopted Resolution E/CN.4/Sub.2/1983/L.39 which transmitted the report on conscientious objection of its special rapporteurs, Mr. Asbjorn Eide and Mr. Mubanga Chipoya, to the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission was requested to study the recommendations of the report, to make appropriate recommendations to the Economic and Social Council and to give the report the widest possible distribution.

It appears to the under-signed non-governmental organisations that this is a particularly auspicious time to work towards achieving the goals outlined in the recommendations of the Sub-Commission report. We have just celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and will embark on International Youth Year in 1985; in addition, the issue of conscientious objection has become the object of increasing concern by
national movements throughout the world as well as by international non-governmental organisations. The 40th session of the Commission on Human Rights to be held in Geneva from 6 February to 16 March 1984 would seem a good opportunity for governments to underscore the commitment of the United Nations to advancing peace and respect for the human being by supporting the recommendations of the Sub-Commission’s report. As one of the members of the Commission on Human Rights for 1984 may we respectfully urge your government to lend its support to these recommendations.

Amnesty International
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs/WCC Friends
World Committee for Consultation
International Commission of Jurists
International Council of Jewish Women
International Fellowship of Reconciliation
International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples
Pax Romana
War Resisters International
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
World Alliance of YMCAs
World Federation of UN Associations

Joint Statement on Lebanon by Dr. Philip Potter, general secretary, World Council of Churches and Mr. Gabriel Hahib, general secretary, Middle East Council of Churches, 13 September 1983

1. The tragic events of the past few days in Lebanon cause us profound concern. A renewed vicious cycle of violence has already claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent people. Villages are besieged and humanitarian assistance to thousands of displaced persons has been made difficult. Hopes of recovering the integrity and unity of Lebanon are being destroyed as the sectarian fighting leads to fragmentation of the country making it more vulnerable to foreign intervention and domination.

2. Deeply saddened by these events we appeal fervently to all concerned to stop the fighting immediately and to enter into negotiations with a view to recovering communal harmony and national reconciliation. We also insistently appeal to all those involved in the fighting forthwith to refrain from any killing of innocent people and spare the lives of the civilian population which should not be made the object of reprisals or used as hostages. Neither human conscience nor any religious tradition can tolerate or condone the massacres. They are an offense to God, the Giver of Life. All facilities should be given to ensure humanitarian assistance to the injured and afflicted people.

3. The peoples in Lebanon have been tragically suffering over the last nine years. In spite of that Lebanon continues for us to be a country with unique opportunities for the living together of various religious communities in equality and a key for peace for the whole area.

4. We want to assure the people of Lebanon once again that the ecumenical community upholds them in prayers, that it is as always ready to render all possible humanitarian assistance and to work with them for reconciliation with a view to achieving harmony and unity among all communities in the country.

Sixth Assembly statement on the Middle East, Vancouver, Canada, July/August 1983

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1. The increasingly dangerous situation in the Middle East threatens the peace of the whole world and places heavy demands on all those striving for justice and freedom. The Middle East is a region of special interest as the birthplace of three monotheistic religions. The churches in the area have their roots from apostolic times. Their continued presence and active participation in the life of the whole area, despite suffering at various periods, is a remarkable witness to the faith. They are facing new challenges and attempting to respond through new forms of witness. While only the churches of the Middle East can determine the nature and forms of their witness, it behooves all churches to strengthen their presence and support their ministry, especially the ministry of reconciliation and witness for peace. Historical factors and certain theological interpretations have often confused Christians outside in evaluating the religious and political developments in the Middle East.

2. Recent developments in the region have further pushed back prospects for peace. The agony of the Lebanese war is not yet over. The integrity and independence of Lebanon are in greater danger than ever. The Israeli settlement policy on the West Bank has resulted in a de facto annexation giving final touches to a discriminatory policy of development of peoples that flagrantly violates the basic rights of the Palestinian people. There are fears of relocation of the inhabitants on the West Bank and their expulsion. A large number of Palestinians are under detention in the prisons on the West Bank and in camps in Lebanon. There is escalation of tension in the Occupied Territories. The consensus among the Arab nations appears to have been lost. External and internal pressures have caused serious rift within the Palestinian movement. In many situations there are increasing violations of human rights, especially of minorities and religious fanaticism is a bane of many communities. The Iran-Iraq war continues to claim an increasing toll of lives and complicates inter-Arab relations. Tension is increasing in relation to Cyprus.

3. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
   i) We reaffirm the principles previously enunciated by the WCC as the basis on which a peaceful settlement can be reached. The UN Security Council Resolution 242 and all other relevant UN resolutions need to be revised and implemented taking into account changes that have occurred since 1967 and that such revisions should express the following principles in a manner that would ensure:
      a) the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all territories occupied in 1967;
      b) the right of all states, including Israel and Arab states, to live in peace with secure and recognised boundaries;
      c) the implementation of the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination including the right of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state.
   ii) We reaffirm that the Middle East conflict cannot be resolved through the use of force but only through peaceful means. Negotiations for a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East should include all those parties most intimately involved: the state of Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and neighbouring Arab states. The interests of the world at large are best represented through the United Nations and the USA and the USSR have a special responsibility in this matter.
   iii) Churches should undertake the following with a view to facilitating processes towards negotiations:
      a) to build greater awareness among the churches about the urgency and justice of the Palestinian cause. In this connection active support should be extended to the UN International Conference on the Question of Palestine to be held at the end of August 1983 in Geneva. The churches should bring to bear their influence on states to participate in it;
b) to encourage the dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis with a view to furthering mutual understanding and enabling recognition;
c) to remind Christians in the Western world to recognise that their guilt over the fate of Jews in their countries may have influenced their views of the conflict in the Middle East and has often led to uncritical support of the policies of the state of Israel, thereby ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people and their rights. In this context we welcome the more open and critical stance adopted by Christian churches in the traditional Jewish-Christian dialogue, but we also urge the broadening of the dialogue to include larger segments of both Christian and Jewish communities;
d) to support movements within Israel, which are working for peace and reconciliation.

4. Lebanon

The ecumenical community shares the agony of the peoples in Lebanon who have been tragically suffering over the last nine years and who have been carrying too large a burden of the problems of the region.

i) We reiterate that the recovery of Lebanese territorial integrity and sovereignty is a key to peace and justice in the region and that for this to be realised all foreign forces must be withdrawn from Lebanese territory.

ii) We appeal to the ecumenical community:
   a) to support the efforts of the Lebanese government to reassert the effective exercise of its sovereignty over all Lebanese territory and to support full independence and unity of the Lebanese people;
   b) to assist the churches within Lebanon in their attempts with leaders of the religious communities for reconciliation with a view to achieving harmony and unity among all communities in the country;
   c) to continue to support generously the Middle East Council of Churches and the churches in Lebanon in their humanitarian and social programmes of relief for all in Lebanon;
   d) to collaborate with the churches in the area in their contribution to the promotion of justice, dignity, freedom and human rights for all in Lebanon.

5. Jerusalem

i) We reaffirm that "Jerusalem is a Holy City for three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The tendency to minimise Jerusalem's importance for any of these three religions should be avoided" (Vth Assembly, Nairobi 1975). The WCC should implement the proposal of the WCC Central Committee (August 1980) that dialogue be initiated with Jews and Muslims so that members of the three religions can understand each other's deep religious attachment to Jerusalem and so that together they can contribute towards political processes that would lead to a mutually acceptable agreement for sharing the city. The churches should give priority to this while continuing efforts to secure a general settlement of the Middle East conflicts. The special legislation known as the Status Quo of the Holy Places must be safeguarded and confirmed in any agreement concerning Jerusalem.

ii) a) We call the attention of the churches to the need for:
   actions which will ensure a continuing indigenous Christian presence and witness in Jerusalem;
   wider ecumenical awareness of the plight of the indigenous Muslim and Christian communities suffering from the repressive actions of the occupying power in East Jerusalem and other occupied territories.

b) We call upon all churches to express their common concern that although Israeli law guarantees free access for members of all religious traditions rooted in Jerusalem to their holy places, the state of war between Israel and Arab states, the political reality
created by the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem and continuing occupation of the West Bank means that Arab Muslims and Christians continue to experience serious difficulties and are often prevented from visiting the Holy City.

6. We uphold the churches in the Middle East in our intercessions as they respond to the new challenges in the difficult circumstances through their witness in the service of Christ. We assure them of the solidarity of the community of faith around the world as we have gathered together here in the name of Jesus Christ, the Life of the World. We pray for the healing of the wounds in the nations of that region.

We stand together with other religious communities in a spirit of servanthood seeking to be faithful in our common calling to be peace-makers and reconcilers and to bring hope for all.

Sixth assembly statement on Human Rights, Vancouver, Canada, July/August 1983

1. The World Council of Churches Sixth Assembly rejoices and gives thanks to God for the increasing commitment to work for the realization of human rights which has been demonstrated in the life and work of the churches throughout the world since the Nairobi Assembly. Many persons, including Christians and their leaders have been imprisoned, tortured or have lost their lives in service to God and humanity. The ecumenical community has increasingly participated in concrete expressions of international solidarity in the struggle for human dignity, often through the World Council of Churches and regional, national and local ecumenical bodies.

2. Cooperation in the field of human rights is emerging between the Christian community and peoples of other living faiths and ideologies, based on their common commitment to human values and social goals.

3. And yet, the tasks have become more difficult, the violations of human rights in many parts of the world have become more widespread and severe, and churches must confess in humility that they have not done enough to counter forces of evil and death, at times even being in complicity with them.

4. As the theme of this Assembly affirms, Jesus Christ is the life of the world. All human beings, regardless of race, sex or belief have been created by God as individuals and in human community. Yet the world has been corrupted by sin, which results in the destruction of human relationships. In reconciling humankind and creation with God, Jesus Christ has also reconciled human beings with each other. Love of our neighbours is the essence of obedience to God.

Lessons from the Past

5. Drawing on the "International Bill of Human Rights" (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights together with its Optional Protocol) and after extensive consultations among the churches, the Nairobi Assembly affirmed its commitment to the promotion of human rights under the following categories: the right to basic guarantees of life; the rights to self-determination, to cultural identity and the rights of minorities; the right to participate in decision-making within the community; the right to dissent; the right to personal dignity; and the right to religious freedom. Following Nairobi the churches have seen the need to broaden
their understanding of human rights to include the right to peace, the right to protection of the environment, the right to development and the right to know one's rights and to struggle for them. We have also come to appreciate more clearly the complexity and inter-relatedness of human rights. In this regard we recognize the need to set individual rights and their violation in the context of society and its social structures.

6. We are increasingly aware of the fact that human rights cannot be dealt with in isolation from the larger issues of peace, justice, militarism, disarmament and development. The fuller the rights that every person enjoys in society, the more stable that society is likely to be; the fuller the implementation of human rights globally, the more stable international relations are likely to be. Injustice in a society, including the corruption of public officials, may contribute to domestic, economic and political disorder, which in turn may lead to the deterioration in relations among nations.

7. We have moved beyond mere reflection to concrete engagement in human rights struggles. In doing so, however, we have discovered how difficult and painful it is to cope with human rights and their violations. We have found that in promoting the rights of women, youth, children, and disabled persons, for example, the churches need to examine and often alter their own structures and methods of operation. In struggling for justice many Christians are experiencing the way of the cross.

**Future Agenda**

8. While recognizing the positive work undertaken by churches, we cannot ignore the general deterioration in the quality of life and the emergence of new forms of human degradation. The prolonged economic disorder has further aggravated an already grave situation, driving some countries to the brink of bankruptcy, leaving millions unemployed, and especially in the developing nations, denying additional millions the basic necessities of life. Of the many pressing problems and emerging trends facing the Christian community, the following call for our special concern and commitment at the time of our Sixth Assembly.

8.1 Many Christians have discovered that the freedom of expression and freedom of association are indispensable as means to promote a life of dignity in their societies. We must reaffirm our commitment to those freedoms and our support for those who in exercising them are suffering.

8.2 Increasingly sophisticated forms of physical and psychological torture, the practice of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions have not only been used more widely throughout the world, but have in many countries become standard procedures of military and police forces. The Sixth Assembly endorses the Central Committee Statements that condemn the practice of torture (1977) and extrajudicial executions (1982), calls upon the churches to engage in extensive human rights education programmes with a view to improving public understanding of these atrocities, and urge member churches and their governments to cooperate with the UN and other governmental and non-governmental bodies in this regard.

8.3 We have been vividly reminded during this Assembly of the plight of indigenous people. Deprived of any real political power, they are often unable to resist the expropriation of their lands, their physical relocation and the denial of their right to maintain their cultural identity. In supporting the Central Committee Statement on the "Land Rights of Indigenous People" (1982), we call upon the churches to identify with the struggle of the indigenous people, including the provision of financial and human resources; to cooperate with indigenous people's organizations, to urge their governments to ratify and implement all relevant UN instruments; to make determined efforts to settle outstanding land rights claims of indigenous
people, including those involving churches; and to monitor implementation of such settlements to assure that governments respect the spirit as well as the letter of these laws.

8.4 The employment of a doctrine of national security to justify the denial of basic human rights has in recent years acquired a wider geographical application. While national security is a legitimate concern of all states, the churches must resist its perverted version such as the ever-increasing militarization of society to preserve an unjust status quo or ensure the perpetuation of those in power thereby sanctioning a persistent and widening violation of human rights, including in some cases genocide.

8.5 In some areas, the growing climate of religious fanaticism and the rise of political fundamentalism have seriously threatened the rights of churches and other religious communities to manifest their faith in worship, observance, practice and teaching. While we welcome the long-awaited adoption of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, we fear that the Declaration does not offer sufficient protection against specific problems facing religious communities today. It is therefore imperative that member churches and the WCC continue to identify and denounce gross violations of religious freedom and extend moral and material assistance to those who suffer oppression and even persecution because of their religious beliefs and practices. Churches and church communities which suffer repression or even persecution because of their spiritual, cultural and ethnic identity or minority position should enjoy the solidarity of other churches particularly within their own nation, as an expression of their fellowship in the one body of Christ.

8.6 In many countries churches are called to take new and firm steps to support the right of workers to establish and join trade unions which genuinely represent their interests, and their freedom to cooperate actively with each other both within their nation and internationally.

8.7 Of growing concern to the ecumenical community is the present predicament of refugees throughout the world. A new dimension added to the existing suffering of refugees involves the difficulty they have had in availing themselves of effective protection. This new factor is due to the refusal by many governments to admit asylum seekers across their boundaries and the imposition of visa requirements to curtail the flow of refugees; to arbitrary detentions and expulsions without due process of law; and to attacks on defenceless refugees by military and paramilitary forces. We appeal to the WCC and member churches to intensify their efforts at the national and international levels to ensure compliance of all refugee receiving countries with international conventions and to identify and respond to situations that lead to the creation of refugees.

8.8 We express great concern for migrant workers who, in ever increasing numbers, face the prevailing problems of unemployment and deprivation of civil liberties in their own countries or in the countries of their adoption. We urge the World Council of Churches to encourage the churches in those countries to take positive action on their behalf.

**Implementation**

9. In the name of Jesus Christ, the life of the world, we reaffirm in fellowship our common commitment to work even more fervently for the elimination of all forms of inhumanity, brutality, discrimination, persecution and oppression, both within our own countries and situations, and in ecumenical solidarity on a regional and world level. As discrepancies inevitably exist between what we profess and what we practise, we must move beyond making declarations about human rights and duties, to making more effective use of existing mechanisms and to devising where necessary, new means for meeting this challenge.
9.1 In working for the implementation of human rights, we urge the World Council of Churches and its member churches to continue their practice of a pastoral approach, which combines prayer, preaching and practical efforts in action.

9.2 We appeal to the churches to dedicate themselves with renewed vigour to raising the consciousness of the people concerning their profound responsibility for the implementation of human rights and for the demonstration of their biblical foundation.

9.3 The churches and the ecumenical movement should strengthen their work of monitoring, advocacy and study in which they are already engaged.

9.4 Additional financial resources must be made available by the churches to carry out their own programmes in human rights and to cooperate ecumenically.

9.5 Considerable thought needs to be given to the development of new initiatives in order to improve the churches' record of implementation. Among the possible initiatives that might be undertaken are the announcement of an international day of prayer for human rights, the creation of a world action week for the education of church members and the promotion of human rights, and the establishment of a series of regional and global review conferences to evaluate the work done by the churches in the field of human rights.

9.6 We urge the continuation of the World Council of Churches' Human Rights Programme and recommend that the Human Rights Advisory Group, meeting regularly and with a more clearly focused mandate, should be maintained to assist the churches and the World Council of Churches in their promotion of human rights.

9.7 While recognizing that East-West tensions are only part of the tragic divisions of humanity, we welcome the work of the Churches' Human Rights Programme for the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, as a model of regional and inter-regional consultation and cooperation, complementing and strengthening initiatives at the world level.

10. We urgently appeal directly to all governments of the world to adopt and ratify inter-governmental instruments of human rights, to respect the rights included in these agreements and to promote by all means both in law and in practice their fuller realization in every country.

II. In the midst of a world of suffering and death, we are called to witness to Jesus Christ, the life of the world. We reaffirm God's gift of life which is entrusted to our care and nurture, to be lived fully in unity with all those who share this precious gift and therefore in respect of the rule of law in defence of justice. It is life lived in Christ which unites us in prayer and active solidarity with all those whose lives are threatened by the forces of death in our world.

Statement on the Situation in Egypt, 14 April 1983

The General Secretary of the WCC, Dr. Philip Potter, in a message on 12 April to the Egyptian government, has expressed deep concern and perplexity about the implications of that day's court decision which has been interpreted by the Government Attorney to call for the deposition of Pope Shenouda III, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and for the appointment of an acting Pope and election of a new Pope.

The Egyptian government is being asked through the Egyptian ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva for clarifications of this interpretation which Dr. Potter sees as implying a most serious and unprecedented infringement of religious freedom and ecclesial independence as previously safeguarded by the Egyptian constitution. According to all Orthodox Canon law such a deposition or required election would create a vacuum in the leadership of the five million strong Coptic Church.
Further clarifications are being sought about the consistency of the recent court ruling with public assurances made both by the late President Sadat and by President Mubarak on his European and American tour earlier this year. These assurances maintained that the ecclesial authority and standing of Pope Shenouda were in no way called into question by the 1981 presidential decree which had confined Pope Shenouda to a desert monastery and appointed a papal committee for administrative and financial matters. That committee has been dissolved by the court decision taken this week.

Telegram from Dr. Philip Potter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 15 November 1982

We have learnt with dismay about the Israeli government’s action concerning Archbishop Karekin Kazandjian of the Armenian Patriarchate a member body of the WCC. STOP. This action is an infringement of the rights and freedom of the religious communities as provided by the international treaties related to the Holy City. STOP. We therefore trust that everything will be done to enable the Archbishop to continue to perform his duties at the Patriarchate without governmental interference.

Philip Potter
General Secretary

Report on Human Rights to the Unit Committee II, Central Committee, Geneva, Switzerland, July 1982

The report outlines WCC human rights activities since the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi, 1975. The Assembly itself, the report indicates, took significant steps forward in its understanding of human rights, under the section on Structures of Injustice and Struggles for Liberation. It proposed an ecumenical catalogue of human rights.

Following the Assembly, there was a search for appropriate instrumentalities for the effective implementation of human rights among member churches. The WCC Central Committee, Jamaica 1979 underlined the responsibility of local, national and regional church bodies for human rights work in their own areas, combined with an international ecumenical solidarity among churches in the ecumenical movement. The WCC responsibility, the report stresses, is to stimulate churches in each region to take seriously the human rights aspects of a variety of church concerns, to draw the attention of churches to human rights problems in their own region of which they may not be aware, and to assist churches and church agencies to fulfil these responsibilities. It acts as a link among churches through meetings, studies and concrete actions.

By far the most dramatic development since the Nairobi Assembly in the field of human rights has been the intensified engagement of churches and Christian groups in countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Middle East, where repression has grown in many cases. Often the church has remained a last remaining base of protest and protection against violations of human rights. This renewal of the church is seen by some as a threat, and the incidence of harassment, arrest, disappearance and assassination of Christians who have witnessed in word and act to the needs of the oppressed has increased alarmingly. Churches and individual Christians more and more frequently become the direct targets of official government, military and para-military repression.

Encouraged by the human rights emphasis of the WCC and stimulated by the programmes of the CCIA, many national and local instruments of the churches for concrete work in the field
of human rights have been created. Many national church bodies have during the period following the Nairobi Assembly appointed staff persons for committees or advisory groups with exclusive responsibility in the area of human rights. At present, all regional councils or conferences of churches have major human rights programmes, in most cases involving full-time staff.

These activities have evolved a qualitatively new dynamic in church relations, creating new constituencies for the ecumenical movement, but also creating new tensions, both within and among churches. Human rights activities have a dynamic of their own which at times conflicts with the priorities and momentum of the church as a whole. At times, churches are unwilling or unable to pay the political or social costs extracted by the human rights struggle. The paradox that human rights activities create both unity and division needs to be taken more seriously by the ecumenical community.

The growing programmatic involvement of churches in the field of human rights has shaped the programmatic response of the WCC. Since the Nairobi Assembly, many programme sub-units have highlighted human rights aspects of their ongoing work or taken them up as a part of programme focus. Types of activities include the support of churches, groups and networks engaged concretely in the struggle for human rights, the mobilization of the churches' resources to combat violations of human rights in various parts of the world, serving as a communications centre and information-gathering and disseminating body, and awareness-building and education on human rights.

The report highlights the human rights work undertaken by various units and sub-units of the WCC, including the Human Rights Resources Office for Latin America, the Programme to Combat Racism and the CCIA. It indicates the progress made in the Churches' Human Rights Programme for the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, which was initiated through the work of the CCIA in 1977.

The CCIA itself has undertaken study and action on a number of specific areas, as reflected in other parts of this volume. Particular attention was given to continuing work on the problem of torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions, on the relationship between militarism and human rights, on religious liberty and on theological reflection on human rights.

Five regional consultations were held to look at linkages between human rights and other issues such as the arms race and economic questions. Extensive publication activities were undertaken in the period (see page 184). The Human Rights Advisory Group held two international meetings on which there is a separate report on page 26.

Telegram from CCIA Director to President Ferdinand Marcos, 4 March 1982

Deeply concerned about arrest and detention of Violeta Marasigan, Laura Ocampo, staff National Council of Churches Philippines and Avelina Emile, staff Student Christian Movement. STOP. We appeal to you to release them immediately.

Ninan Koshy
Director

The same message was sent to the Ministry of National Defence

Delegation to Turkey, 30 November-4 December 1981
In response to a call from the Middle East Council of Churches' Christian Presence Consultation of October 1980 and the recommendation of the WCC Executive Committee meeting in Dresden, August 1981, an ecumenical delegation visited Turkey from November 30 to December 4, 1981 to open channels of communication with government officials concerning the plight of the Souryani community and to explore ways in which the WCC can work in Turkey to improve the situation of Christian minorities.

Christian communities have been declining steadily over the years, currently numbering about 100,000. The Souryans today are the weakest, numbering between 25 to 30,000. European governments which have been receiving Souryans in large numbers in the 1970s have stopped the migration in 1980, with some thousands seeking asylum in Europe and threatened with forced repatriation. Because of the close European involvement, the delegation was composed of Rev. Andre Appel, President of the Conference of European Churches and member of WCC Central Committee, Prof. Antoine Wessels, Free University of Amsterdam, Mr. Richard Butler, Church World Service, NCCCUSA, Rev. Jirgen Micksch, Foreign Office of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Rev. Melvin Wittler, Director of the Service of the Near East Mission of the United Church Board for World Ministries, USA, Mr. Wail Kheir, Middle East Council of Churches, and Mr. Ghassan Rubeiz, Secretary for the Middle East, CICARWS, WCC. The delegation visited Istanbul and Ankara, meeting with church leaders and two high ranking officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It assessed the situation of the Souryani community, giving due attention also to the Armenian and Greek communities. The delegation, in its evaluation of the visit, considered that it had been able to register the ecumenical community's concern for Christian communities to officials of the Turkish government and to open channels of communication for further relations. The report of the team also concludes with a number of recommendations for dealing with the situation in the future. The visit was viewed as an expression of solidarity by the church leaders visited.

Central committee commends to churches Statement adopted by the CCIA Commission (Friedewald, FrG, May 1981), Dresden, Gdr, August 1981

"The Christian community of Latin America is stupefied by the deterioration of the political, economic and social situation of El Salvador. We are alarmed that crime, persecution, disappearance and other violations of human rights have not been contained; rather repression continues with impunity and has worsened. Many Christian leaders have been persecuted and assassinated. Peasants have fled zones of conflict in great number... food and medicine are in acutely short supply. The wounded are brought to hospitals and clinics only to be viciously executed by paramilitary groups. Abject poverty grows alongside walled colonies of opulence..."

(Statement of the Latin American Council of Churches in Formation-CLAI-Santiago de Chile, 13 December 1980.)

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Friedewald, FRG, 11-15 May 1981, shares the stupefaction and alarm of Christians throughout Latin America and the whole world at the continuing, intensifying conflict in El Salvador. The WCC has protested against this gross injustice, issued urgent appeals to those who callously aid and support the forces of repression, and has sought to support Christians and their churches in their courageous efforts to minister to the poor, the persecuted, the homeless and the sick in body and soul.
The WCC has brought the plight of the people of this and other Central American nations to the attention of the United Nations along with appeals for international action to bring a halt to what can now only be described as a massacre.

Central America has become a battlefield, the site of a genocidal war against the people. It is a war waged by governments by their armies and paramilitary groups who act with impunity against the poor. It is a war fought not only with the sophisticated instruments of modern warfare, but also by means of torture, mass extermination and institutionalized terror. It is a war whose victims are wives and children as often as husbands and fathers. And it has now become very much a war against the Church and the Gospel whose primary targets are bishops, priests and pastors, catechists and lay preachers. The Bible itself is considered a threat and is being removed from peasant communities, especially in Guatemala, by the "forces of order".

The cause of this war, which has been going on for decades, is not subversion, either from within or without. It is the product of the disintegration of the political, economic and social system of these countries which has ignored the interests and rights of the poor and exploited their bodies and their land to the benefit of the very few.

The privileged few have traditionally been allied with the United States, which to protect them and its own perceived interests has intervened either openly or by covert action in this area since these countries gained their independence early in the 19th century. Again today, that foreign power is present and threatens to intervene in still more massive ways. Costa Rica, traditional haven of democracy and social well-being in Central America, is not immune. Nicaragua, where through great sacrifice the people rid themselves of a brutal, 40 year-long dictatorship, and are engaged in the construction of a new, more just society, is threatened. The Guatemalan government, demonstrably and directly responsible for thousands of murders is now being considered for renewed military assistance. Honduras, like parts of the United States itself, is used as a training ground for mercenaries, many of whom are former members of Somoza's National Guard.

The situation in Central America itself poses a serious threat to peace in the whole region, and there are now clear indications that a number of countries in the Caribbean as well are included in what appear to be widespread intervention plans.

Yet in the midst of the sorrow we feel at this situation, we have reason to give thanks for God's strengthening of the Church in Central America "The firm faith, courage, and concrete witness which has led hundreds of Christian Samaritans to martyrdom humbles and strengthens us in our resolve to support them in all ways we have available." With a deep sense of solidarity in our One Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we call upon the churches once again to:

1. Join together throughout the ecumenical fellowship in continuing prayer for our brothers and sisters throughout Central America, and especially in El Salvador and Guatemala, giving thanks for their witness, and asking God's mercy upon them;

2. Redouble their efforts to come to the aid of the victims of this conflict;

3. Renew their efforts, in all ways available to them, to cause the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala to cease their repressive activities, and the government of the United States to desist from all direct or covert, present or planned intervention in the countries of Central America and the Caribbean;

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4. Resist and seek to eliminate the systematic defamatory campaigns of "disinformation"
distorting the truth about the reality of Central America, the plight of its people, and the
witness of its church and those in solidarity with them.

Central Committee Statement, Dresden, Gdr, August 1981

During the past year, significant changes have occurred in the Namibian situation to which
the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Dresden, 16-26 August
1981, calls the attention of the churches.

1. Recent Developments

a. Nearly four years of negotiations leading up to the UN Namibia plan collapsed after South
   Africa rejected a solution which it had previously accepted, during a special meeting called
   in January 1981, in Geneva, by UN Secretary-General Waldheim.

b. On 1 May 1981, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States vetoed five UN
   Security Council resolutions proposed by the African Group of States urging
   comprehensive sanctions against South Africa.

c. On 3 May 1981, the ministers of the five-nation Western Contact Group (Canada, France,
   Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom, United States of America) issued a joint
   statement indicating a move to abandon UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) as the
   sole basis for a negotiated settlement for Namibia. Further, they stressed their desire to
   enlarge the negotiation process through the inclusion of "all parties", which would
   legitimize the claim of the South African-backed Democratic Turnhalle Alliance that it
   represents the Namibian people.

d. The new United States Administration has extended its collaboration with the South
   African apartheid regime as an ally and friend. This has given rise, among other things, to
   visits to South Africa of high-level government officials, the offer of training to the South
   African coast guard, increased links between the intelligence services of the two countries,
   and the proposed restoration of direct military ties through exchanges of military attaches
   in their respective embassies.

Statement by Dr. Philip Potter, Geneva, Switzerland, 19 May 1981

Having heard the urgent appeals coming from Lebanese leaders, both Christian and
Muslim, and deeply concerned about the threat of increasing conflicts and suffering for people in
Lebanon and the Middle East region, I make this appeal in the name of Jesus Christ, whose
Gospel is a message of peace.

CCLA COMMISSION STATEMENT ON LEBANON, FRIEDEWALD, FRG, MAY 1981

Disturbed and deeply concerned with the violent sequence of events that has again caused so
much death, pain, anguish and ruin in Lebanon;

Moved with deep compassion and sympathy for the people of Lebanon because of this new
escalation of violence;

Recognizing that Lebanon is ever more becoming a battlefield for settling regional and possibly
even wider international differences, thus becoming the concern of the inter-
national community; and


Moved by the appeal of the patriarchs, bishops, and leaders of the Christian Communities in Lebanon (April 11, 1981) to the peoples of the world "to help bring an end to our tragedy";

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs:

Reiterates the appeal of the World Council of Churches Executive Committee (May 1976) to the people and all parties involved in Lebanon to renounce violence and to spare human lives through a renewed commitment to finding negotiated solutions;

Reaffirms its belief that the conflict continues to be essentially a political one despite the religious overtones, motivations and implications stemming from the confessional structures of Lebanese and Middle Eastern Societies;

Affirms that Lebanon should not be sacrificed in the process of enabling the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate rights or in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict;

Believes that recovery of Lebanese unity and territorial integrity are key to the solution of the Lebanese problem and supports all efforts to strengthen the government of Lebanon as it attempts to reassert the effective exercise of its sovereignty over all Lebanese territory;

Calls for

- the termination of Israeli attacks and interventions against Lebanon and Palestinians in South Lebanon, which Israel claims is necessary for its security and a help to Lebanon, because the security of both;

- new peace initiatives by the Arab League and the United Nations which would lead to national unity and other conditions in Lebanon making the presence of the Syrian army as the Arab deterring force unnecessary;

- an important United Nations role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation that will be necessary following the conflict

Prayerfully supports Christians and Muslims in Lebanon as they seek to restore the harmonious community life which has traditionally characterized their country and work together for a united Lebanon devoted to the defence of justice, development and peace in the Middle East; and

Expresses appreciation to the member churches of the WCC for their responses in the past and reiterates the Executive Committee (May 1976) appeal to the churches to provide humanitarian aid and assistance through the WCC "to bring relief to the victims of this conflict, regardless of their religious, ethnic or political affiliation."

Telegram from WCC Acting General Secretary to the Junta de Gobierno de El Salvador, 30 October 1980

Deeply shocked information received brutal assassination Ramon Valladares Perez and Maria Magdalena Henriquez both leaders internationally respected Human Rights Commission El Salvador as well as Felix Ulloa rector San Salvador University. STOP. Appeal you initiate urgent effective measures clarify circumstances deaths bringing responsible elements to justice. STOP. WCC requests you provide information whereabouts Christian student leader Jose Guillermo Castro Romero detained illegally police El Salvador 29 February 1980. STOP. Also in light fresh reports continued indiscriminate bombardments civilian population by Air Force Morazim Department we reiterate strongly WCC Central Committee statement August 1980 urging you immediately to cease all repressive activity in El Salvador carried out against the people, their organizations and Church.


Letter from WCC Acting General Secretary to the Chief Rabbi in France, 10 October 1980

Dear Chief Rabbi,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I wish to express our shock and dismay at the bomb attack on the Synagogue in the Rue Copernic in Paris which caused the death of four people and injured many others. We are deeply concerned that this tragic event should have been preceded and followed by a series of acts of violence against Jewish institutions in Paris and elsewhere in France. They are indications of a trend which we condemn in the strongest possible terms.

As its first Assembly in 1948 the WCC called upon "all the churches we represent to denounce anti-semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-semitism is sin against God and man." Since 1948 various official WCC bodies have reiterated this emphatic rejection of anti-semitism on a number of occasions.

We welcome the prompt reaction by the French Protestant Federation and other church bodies and endorse their call for greater vigilance and determined action to counter all forms of racism directed against Jews or any other groups.

We also view with grave concern the alarming proliferation of neo-fascist groups and the acts of terrorism perpetrated by them in a number of European countries.

We ask you, please, to convey our heartfelt sympathy to the families of the victims of this attack and assure you of our prayers and support for your community at this difficult time.

Yours faithfully,

For the General Secretary
Konrad Raiser
Acting General Secretary

Letter from WCC acting general secretary to H.E. Juvenaly, Metropolitan of Krutilzy and Kolomna, 1 October 1980

Your Eminence,

This letter is written to convey to you our continuing preoccupation regarding the trials and sentencing of some Christian clergymen and believers in the Soviet Union. There have, of course, been numerous conversations with representatives of our member churches in the Soviet Union regarding these cases. We are aware that you have been deeply concerned and that you regret what has happened in this regard. Your counsel and advice has helped us greatly.

Because of the concern we share, we have consistently refrained from entering into public debate regarding such cases, even when member churches outside the USSR have urged us to do so, since we wish to preserve a sober and careful approach that respects the complexity and...
particular character of the context in which your church with its millions of believers, as well as other Christian communities in your country, make their witness. This pattern of consultation and reflection also expresses the nature of our relationship with all our member churches.

My colleagues in the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) wrote to you last December regarding the arrest of Fr. Gleb Yakunin, and again in March of this year on the wider concern regarding subsequent arrests of Fr. Dimitri Dudko, Lev Regelson and others. Meetings of the CCIA in February and the WCC's Central Committee in August were the occasion of direct conversations with delegates of the Russian Orthodox Church, and we have remained in communication in the meantime through the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Geneva.

These communications have been of vital importance for us in determining appropriate responses on the part of the WCC. We have been grateful for your help in referring our concern to the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and that you have requested them to make it known to responsible legal quarters.

Your cooperation has helped us to clarify some erroneous press reports, for instance the one implicating the Russian Orthodox Church itself in giving testimony against Fr. Yakunin. We are now able to assure other member churches that the two church-related persons who appeared at the trial did so as private citizens and at the direct order of the court. We understand also that the testimony required of them involved a letter addressed to the WCC's Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 and are somewhat surprised that this letter should reappear five years later under significantly changed circumstances.

Yet despite the helpful information and clarification which we have received from you, a number of serious problems continue to trouble us:

1. We are disturbed by the coincidence of a number of cases involving Christian believers which are presently on trial. The most widely publicized are Father Gleb Yakunin, Father Dimitri Dudko, Mr. Lev Regelson, Mr. Alexander Ogorodnikov, Mrs. Tatyana Velikanova, and Mr. Victor Kapitanchuk. We are aware of the fact that the charges against these people do not refer to the practice of their religious belief which is formally protected under the Soviet Constitution and other relevant laws. We have also been informed that several of the defendants have made public confession to the effect that they had engaged in activities outside the realm of religion. Nevertheless, we are not convinced that the "non-religious" basis on which these trials are said to be conducted will be easily understood, either within or outside the Soviet Union, and we are concerned that the accumulation of these trials and the wide publicity given them in the Soviet media may influence Soviet public opinion against the life of the churches.

2. We find the kind of sentences pronounced in the trials already concluded to be disproportionate with the seriousness of the crimes which have allegedly been committed. It seems particularly difficult to understand that, according to the information presently available to us, Fr. Yakunin is to undergo a second trial, after having already been sentenced to five years of prison and five years internal exile.

3. The timing of these trials comes at a particularly unfortunate moment, some weeks before the opening of the Madrid meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The WCC, together with its member churches, has worked hard to assure that this meeting would re-establish an atmosphere conducive to detente. We have earnestly sought to
help reduce the tensions which have led to a renewed round of arms race. A series of trials such as those in process now can only make that task immensely more difficult.

In view of these considerations, I take the liberty of requesting Your Eminence to convey our concerns to the highest relevant authorities, informing them also of the intent with which we make these comments. Of course you may assure them that we are ready and eager at any time to discuss further these issues, either by correspondence or in person.

Since a number of leaders of our member churches have made enquiries in this matter, we intend to make public the contents of this letter after an appropriate delay, to allow time for you to receive and consider it. We trust that we will receive your help, co-operation and advice in this our common concern.

Please be assured of my continued deep respect and admiration.

With fraternal greetings in Christ,

Konrad Raiser
Acting General Secretary

Central Committee Statement on Jerusalem, Geneva, Switzerland, August 1980

1. On the basis of previous WCC statements the Central Committee opposes the Israeli unilateral action of annexing East Jerusalem and uniting the city as its "eternal capital" under its exclusive sovereignty.

2. This decision is contrary to all pertinent UN resolutions. It most dangerously undermines all efforts towards the just solution of the Middle East problem and thus jeopardizes regional and world peace.

3. The Central Committee reiterates the statement on Jerusalem issued by the WCC Assembly in Nairobi 1975, which stressed that the tendency to minimize Jerusalem's importance for any of the three monotheistic religions should be avoided. The destiny of Jerusalem should be viewed in terms of people including Christians as well as Jews and Muslims and not only in terms of shrines. Therefore, just as the future status of Jerusalem has been considered part of the destiny of the Jewish people, so it cannot be considered in isolation from the destiny of the Palestinian people, and should thus be determined within the general context of the settlement of the Middle East conflict in its totality.

4. The Central Committee calls the member churches to exert through their respective governments all pressure on Israel to withhold all action on Jerusalem, the future of which should be included in the agenda of official negotiations involving Israel and the Palestinian people on self-determination and on the solution of the Middle East conflict.

5. Recognizing that Jerusalem is a focus of the deepest religious inspiration and attachment for all Christians in the world, the Central Committee urges the WCC to undertake an active role in expressing the concerted Christian voice and to aid churches in fully assuming their role as partners in deciding the future character of Jerusalem.

6. The Central Committee also urges the General Secretary to explore, in consultation with member churches in the area and the Vatican, possibilities of trying to find the best solution to the problem of Jerusalem through all appropriate and effective means and ways such as convening jointly or separately international consultations or any other approaches or actions on Jerusalem. The General Secretary should also explore possibilities of consultations with the
Muslim and Jewish communities concerned with the future character of Jerusalem in order to seek ways to consolidate justice and human co-existence in the City of Peace.

Central committee adopts guidelines and recommendations for future work in regard to the Middle East, Geneva, Switzerland, August 1980

1. The Role of Local Churches

The Central Committee gives thanks to God for the historical origin and life and witness of the indigenous churches of the Middle East Many of them have their roots in the area from apostolic times. Their continued presence and active participation in the whole life of the area, despite all forms of suffering, is a remarkable witness to the faith. Most of these churches today speak ecumenically through the MECC which carries a special responsibility of promoting universal commitment towards preserving Christianity in the lands of the Bible.

Facing today's political and religious developments, the main task of the churches in the region is to secure the continuity of Christian presence to deepen the spiritual quality of their people and to foster Christian unity as an essential dimension of common witness in the multi-religious Middle Eastern societies. In this context it should be recognized that the role of the local churches in the ecumenical movement and in the relationship with Islam and Judaism is of paramount importance to the international Christian community.

Therefore, Middle Eastern Christians continue to witness in their own style and from within their own cultural ethos. Churches outside the region should continue to express their Christian fellowship with the local churches and through the Middle East Council of Churches in their process of spiritual renewal, their search for unity, and their common witness to the resurrected Christ.

2. Christian Emigration Policy

Because of the political situation in the Middle East and fears about the effects of the fundamentalist tendencies in Islam and Judaism on the future of society, many Christians are led to leave the region and seek settlement abroad

The WCC is asked to respond to the local churches' appeal through the following actions:

a) to participate with the MECC in holding an ecumenical meeting focusing on the emigration of Christians from the Middle East This meeting should have the purpose of proposing a common policy as well as ways and means to assist the churches in the Middle East in their efforts to deal with the causes of migration and to help their people continue to live and witness in the lands where they always belonged;

b) to foster programmes aiming at motivating and enabling people to stay in the region. Such programmes could include promotion of educational institutions, job opportunities, housing and other pastoral and social services;

c) to provide more information to member churches on the dynamics of Christian life and witness in the Middle East with the purpose of helping them formulate relevant policies and actions vis-a-vis the Middle East political and religious issues.

d) to request the member churches in the countries which have already received immigrants from those regions to help these Christians in an ecumenical spirit to preserve and to keep alive their religious and cultural traditions in a strange land
3. The Cyprus Question

The Central Committee welcomes the news that negotiations between the Greek and the Turkish communities in Cyprus are being resumed. It requests the CCIA to closely follow the developments of the talks and to participate with the MECC and the Church of Cyprus in their efforts to promote understanding between the communities towards a just and peaceful solution of the Cypriot problem.

These guidelines are additions to programmes already approved or being implemented by the CCIA in other areas of concern in the Middle East.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE RECEIVES STUDY PAPER ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, AUGUST 1980

On the recommendation of the Unit II Committee, the Central Committee agreed to receive with appreciation the Study Paper on Religious Liberty submitted to the WCC Central Committee for information by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs at the request of the WCC Executive Committee of September 1979, and

a) commended it, along with the Executive Committee statement on Religious Liberty of September 1979, to the member churches of the WCC for careful study and reflection, with the request that they communicate to the CCIA the results of their own study, reflection, and experiences including that of living with other religious communities, for subsequent collation;

b) expressed its serious concern about the fact that work on a "Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief" within the UN Commission on Human Rights has proceeded very slowly indeed, and urges that this work be pursued more vigorously so that an acceptable Declaration can be completed without further delays;

c) encouraged the WCC General Secretary to continue to respond with care and sensitivity to the expressed needs of churches in areas where they are experiencing difficulties as a result of an infringement of religious liberty, assuring him of the support and prayers of the whole ecumenical community;

d) requested that the General Secretary continue to keep further developments in the issue of religious liberty under constant review and explore the possibility of raising this concern at the Assembly in the context of human rights.

Telegram from CCIA Director to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 18 June 1980

Having received formal expressions of serious concern by various WCC member churches about project of Israeli Basic Law on Human Rights eventually enacted by Knesset Law Committee end July would highly appreciate your sending us at earliest convenience text of said proposal and available information about intended date of enactment STOP. Concern expressed refers to alleged brevity vagueness and ambiguity deemed seriously jeopardize human and religious rights presently still benefit both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens and non-Jewish inhabitants Israel West Bank Gaza and East Jerusalem. STOP. Sincerely.

Leopoldo J. Niilus
Director
The same message was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Statement of a WCC/WARC Delegation to Taiwan, 16 May 1980

We have come to Taiwan as a delegation representing two worldwide Christian religious bodies—the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches. The WARC is a family of churches stemming from the Genevan Reformation of the 16th Century. It is composed of 145 member churches with more than 70,000,000 members. The WCC is a fellowship of churches including, in addition to the Reformed Churches mentioned above, Lutheran and other Protestant Churches, Anglican Churches, Pentecostal Churches and Eastern Orthodox Churches. It cooperates closely with the Roman Catholic Church. There are 297 churches in the Council whose membership exceeds 400,000,000.

Our delegation is made up of Propst Uwe Hollm, Deputy Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg (West Berlin); Dr. Edmond Perret, General Secretary of the WARC and Dr. William P. Thompson, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA

We have come at this time because of the arrest on April 24, 1980 of Dr. C.M. Kao, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. Dr. Kao is well known throughout the Christian world as a committed pastor who follows in his daily life the teachings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that his disciples should minister to those in need. He is known to be a man of integrity who has served the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan with vigour and foresight.

We would first address the officers, pastors and people of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. Your church is a long-time member of the WARC and has recently reactivated its membership in the WCC. We have followed with keen interest the life of your church. We have applauded your innovative evangelistic outreach, your devotion to a life of Christian discipline, and your courageous witness to the implications of the Gospel of our Lord to the situation in which you have been called to minister. We assure you of the solidarity of your brothers and sisters in Christ in all parts of the world at this time. You may be confident of their continuing concern and prayer in the days ahead.

We would also address the people of Taiwan and the authorities of the Government of the Republic of China. We regret that we were unable, despite repeated efforts, to meet with any government officials on this visit. Had we been able to do so, we would have assured them that we come with the firm determination that we shall not interfere with the internal affairs of this nation. However, we are obligated as members of world organizations to express the perceptions which we have observed beyond the boundaries of the island regarding recent events here.

We regret that we must report that to Christian observers in other parts of the world, it appears that when the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan began to articulate the relevance of the Christian Gospel to their daily life in this society, that church and its leaders became the objects of persecution. Freedom of religion means more than simply the freedom to worship; it means freedom to live out the implications of one's faith as well.

We have seen encouraging evidence of the nurturing of diverse groups in this society in the past. We urge that such steps be advanced. For we are convinced from our own experience in quite different situations that a nation is most secure which receives the voluntary support of free citizens who are able to express that support with courage and enthusiasm.

Uwe Hollm, Edmond Perret, William P. Thompson
"Deeply shocked at attempt on your life and relieved at providential preservation continuing thoughts and prayers with you and your wife.

Dr. Philip Potter
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

It is due to our earlier conversations about matters also related to Bishop Dehqani-Tafti that I take the liberty to bring this latest event to your attention. We do trust, of course, that the appropriate Iranian authorities, be they local or central, will take all the necessary police and security measures in order to prevent such incidents to happen in the future. We recognize the complicated processes of rebuilding which your country is undergoing and which you were most kind to brief us about in detail.

Nevertheless, if common criminal elements were eventually to repeat such actions with a tragic outcome, this would unavoidably create most serious repercussions, especially in the public opinion world over and would greatly damage our common interests and the endeavours for justice and liberation of all peoples everywhere.

Yours sincerely,

Leopolda J Niilus
Director

Letter from WCC Acting General Secretary to President Abolhassam Bani-Sadr, 12 May 1980

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I am writing this to bring to your kind attention a matter of deep concern to large sections of the constituency of the WCC which consists of about 300 churches in more than 80 countries of the world.

This matter relates specifically to the Episcopal Church in Iran. The news of the assassination of Mr. Bahram Dehqani-Tafti, son of Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, in Teheran on the 6th of May came as a shock to us and is causing grave and profound concern coming in the wake of a series of threats and violent acts against the leadership and employees of the Episcopal Church of Iran. The Episcopal Church of Iran is a Diocese of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East which is a member church of the WCC.

You may be aware that Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti himself narrowly and providentially escaped from an assassination attempt on 26th October, 1979, in which his wife Margaret was wounded. Earlier on February 19, 1979, the Rev. P.A Sayyah, the pastor of the Episcopal Church in Shiraz was killed. There was also an attack on the Diocesan Office. Again on 1st May, 1980, Miss Jean Waddell, the Secretary to the Bishop was attacked by two gunmen in Teheran and was seriously wounded.

While we presume that all these are actions by misguided elements they form a pattern and suggest systematic planning that cause us considerable anxiety about the safety of the personnel of the Episcopal Church in Iran and about its future.

From time to time we have made representations to your government on this matter through the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN in Geneva. On 26th October following the attack on the Bishop, the Director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the WCC wrote to the Ambassador in which he said "We do trust of course that the appropriate Iranian authorities, be they local or central, will take all necessary
police and security measures in order to prevent such incidents to happen in the future." We deeply regret that if any such measures have been taken, they have been inadequate to prevent a recurrence of violence.

We are aware of the immense difficulties that are there in the process of building a new Iran and the tensions that are unavoidable in such a process. We have been very much encouraged by the assurances that your government has given about the rights and freedoms of religious minorities in Iran and hope that all efforts are being made to ensure them.

We therefore appeal to you to take all necessary measures to ensure that criminal and anti-social elements are not allowed to put in jeopardy your efforts to build an Iran based on human rights and justice in which all religious minorities are able to function with full freedom. We especially urge you to give the necessary security and protection to the lives of the leaders and members of the Episcopal Church.

During the past several years the WCC has been encouraged by the warm friendship which was grown between Christians and Muslims through constructive dialogue on matters of common concern.

The WCC would very much welcome an opportunity for learning about recent developments in Iran and the achievements of the revolution through a visit by its representatives and of discussing with you and other authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran issues of mutual interest and we earnestly hope that you will be kind enough to provide such an opportunity at the earliest.

With prayers for the people of Iran.

Yours respectfully,

Konrad Raiser
Acting General Secretary

Telegram from Dr. Philip Potter to President Chiang Ching Kuo, 25 April 1980

World Council of Churches expresses its great shock and grave concern at arrest of Reverend Kao General Secretary Presbyterian Church Taiwan. STOP. Christians in all parts of world hold him in great esteem STOP. We urge his immediate release.

Philip Potter
General Secretary

Telegram from Dr. Philip Potter to the Ayatollah Khomeini, 2 April 1980

The approaching Easter Holy days remind Christians of the hope of all humanity for reconciliation before God and between one another. STOP. On this occasion, as in my message to Your Eminence at Christmas, I wish to reaffirm our desire to strengthen the bonds of cordiality and respect between Christians and Muslims. STOP. Central to both of our faiths is a shared commitment to the cause of peace and justice. STOP. We are eager to see this cause become a full reality for all peoples. STOP. This can only occur when all persons of goodwill are able to move effectively to join forces to this end. STOP. As Christians the world over celebrate God's Grace and Mercy during this Easter Season we are especially reminded of the families of the hostages held in Teheran and appeal to Your Eminence to show compassion by facilitating
the early release of the hostages. STOP. I am convinced that such an act on your part would strengthen the efforts of all those who work for better understanding among nations. STOP. With greetings and prayers for the people of Iran.

Philip Potter
General Secretary

Telegram from WCC Acting General Secretary to the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, 16 January 1980

Gravely concerned about arrest of members and workers of Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. STOP. Assure you of our continued support and prayers. STOP. Warm Christian greetings.

Konrad Raiser
Acting General Secretary

Appeal from Dr. Philip Potter to the Ayatollah Khomeini, 20 December 1979

Desirous of reaffirming the bonds of affection and respect between Christians and Muslims, considering the imminent approach of the celebration of the birth of Jesus, dear to both Christians and Muslims, and concerned with the danger to world peace of the rapidly deteriorating relationships between nations, in the context of the continued holding of hostages in Teheran in the name of the Islamic Revolution, we appeal to Your Eminence to show compassion and release the hostages in time for Christmas reunion with their families and friends. With our prayers for the people of Iran in their search for integrity, fraternity and justice.

Philip Potter
General Secretary

Executive Committee Statement on Religious Liberty, Geneva, Switzerland, September 1979

1. The World Council of Churches has been actively engaged in the struggle for religious liberty from the moment of its inception. Churches joining the WCC have done it on the realistic assumption that their visible membership in a world community of churches would enhance their own possibilities of life, witness and work and in some cases their own freedom and safety as religious communities. Since the first Assembly of the WCC in 1948, the subject of religious liberty has been dealt with by WCC decision-making bodies in 27 major statements, reports, memoranda and declarations, in addition to the number of initiatives and actions taken with regard to specific situations.

2. Careful study of these statements reveals that there has been a progressive evolution in the ecumenical understanding of religious liberty, which has been augmented and refined by the variety of concrete experiences of member churches as they live and work in vastly different environments. The realization has grown in the ecumenical movement that religious liberty cannot be divorced from other aspects of human rights, and that the church is not credible if it fights for its own rights isolated from a concern for all rights for all people. But if it speaks in universal terms, the church cannot isolate for priority consideration the question of its own religious freedom. Conversely, a church which struggles for all rights for all people has, often with surprise, rediscovered something of its essential evangelical mission. These should
be seen as central concerns for all world religions and thus merit priority attention in efforts of
dialogue and concrete interactions in community life especially in multi-religious societies.

3. The Fifth Assembly, Nairobi, 1975, summarized these insights as follows:

The Right to Religious Freedom

The right to religious freedom has been and continues to be a major concern of member
churches and the WCC. However, this right should never be seen as belonging exclusively to
the church. The exercise of religious freedom has not always reflected the great diversity of
convictions that exist in the world. This right is inseparable from other fundamental human
rights. No religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect
and reverence for the faith and basic human rights of others.

Religious liberty should never be used to claim privileges. For the church this right is
essential so that it can fulfill its responsibilities which arise out of the Christian faith.

Central to these responsibilities is the obligation to serve the whole community. The right
to religious freedom has been enshrined in most constitutions as a basic human right. By
religious freedom we mean the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's
choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or
private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice
and teaching. Religious freedom should also include the right and duty of religious bodies to
criticize the ruling powers when necessary, on the basis of their religious convictions. In this
context, it was noted that many Christians in different parts of the world are in prison for
reasons of conscience or for political reasons as a result of their seeking to respond to the
total demands of the Gospel.

4. The insights gained in the whole period since World War II are the fruit of experiences
which might roughly be categorized in four types:

(i) The experience of churches functioning in accordance with their teaching, tradition and
practice, in countries undergoing radical social transformation including a total
secularization of state and society, accompanied by new juridical relations between the
state and religious communities.

(ii) The problems encountered by Christians and people of other faiths in countries
struggling for liberation and self-determination or newly-independent, when their
relationships with religious organizations outside the country and the support received
from them, as expressions of the universal dimensions of religions, are interpreted to
be in conflict with national aspirations and loyalties.

(iii) In some societies, with very varied political systems and social backgrounds, which
grossly violate basic human rights, an increasing number of churches have become
actively involved in struggles for justice and human rights based on their sincere
understanding of the Gospel of Christ, although governments usually regard these as
purely political activities.

(iv) In an increasing number of countries, communal and national aspirations are framed
not in secular but religious terms, creating the climate for religious revival of a type
which causes friction between dominant religious forces and minority religions.

5. Obviously, ecumenical response to these situations cannot be uniform, but must vary
according to the precise needs of its member churches, based on the best available analysis of
each case. Each case must furthermore be seen within its particular historical, cultural and social context, although certain emerging common trends need urgent attention.

6. The Executive Committee of the WCC, at its meeting from 10 to 14 September, received detailed information on new developments with regard to religious liberty. During the past two years, incidents and events which have a direct bearing on religious liberty have occurred with alarming frequency. Complaints by member churches in a variety of countries around the world have multiplied, making it imperative for the WCC carefully to examine whether these individual cases constitute a major trend on a world scale.

7. The Executive Committee expresses its appreciation to the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs for its continuing work with regard to religious liberty and human rights in general, and to the General Secretary for the care and sensitivity with which the concerns of member churches regarding their religious liberty have been answered. The particular cases which we have examined show that the question of religious liberty is posed in a variety of ways, with greatly varying severity. If responses by the World Council of Churches have been by and large rather cautious, this is because thirty years of experience has taught that an overzealous reaction from abroad can have in some cases disastrous effects, especially when national sensitivities are not taken into account. We are gratified to note that churches experiencing difficulties continue to approach the WCC with trust and respect.

8. In analyzing the trends in religious liberty, we note that some of the problems encountered have an old historical basis, aggravated by an insecure national government. In other cases, we see the familiar feature of new revolutionary governments wishing to exert rigid control over religious institutions which are seen either as alien elements or potential opposition forces. Legislation is increasingly being used to exert control, either by registration and regulation of church structures, or by the prohibition or discouragement of conversion. In some cases these legal means are meant to increase the popularity of existing governments among certain sectors of the electorate; in others they are attempts to limit either active or symbolic opposition to unpopular and un-democratic regimes.

9. The Executive Committee instructs the Human Rights Advisory Group of the CCIA to undertake further study and analysis of changing trends with regard to religious liberty, giving attention to areas either where there has been a marked worsening of the situation within the recent past, or where new legal enactments or administrative measures have been proposed or promulgated which our member churches regard as indicative of a trend in the direction of a restriction of religious liberty. This study should include some reflections on the principle of religious liberty itself, examining how the concept is viewed by different societies and religions. A detailed, reflective report should be prepared by the CCIA for presentation to the Central Committee in August 1980, and in preparation for the same, a preliminary study paper with further detailed analysis of the four different situations outlined under point 4 above, and formulating questions of principle and practice where further clarification is needed.

The Executive Committee feels the need for a constant review of a fast changing scene, as also for a vigilant pastoral concern, not only for all whose liberties are curtailed but also for those elements within all ideological systems and religious leaderships who are earnestly seeking a reinterpretation along more humane lines of previous judgments on the human rights of those who disagree with them on religious grounds.

The Church of Jesus Christ was born and nurtured in a world where Christians were not only denied religious liberty, but in fact were deliberately and often ruthlessly persecuted. And persecutions were not confined to the Church's infancy. Today, how- ever, Christians have to be
concerned about more than their own religious liberty. Our concern must extend to the defence of the human rights and liberty of all—whether they profess other religions or no religion. We have to help find ways in which the common humanity of a pluralistic world can be expressed in societies which affirm the dignity and freedom of all human beings.

Telegram from Dr. Philip Potter to President Chiang Ching- Kuo, 13 August 1979

World Council of Churches has learned with deep concern about proposed regulations for religious bodies in Taiwan. STOP. We appeal to Your Excellency to ensure that local voices for preservation and upholding of religious liberty be heeded.

Philip Potter
General Secretary

Letter from Dr. Philip Potter and Dr. Carl Mauto lieutenant colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam, 12 June 1979

Your Excellency,

Based on information which was received here a week ago that Kes Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and Chairman of the Council for the Cooperation of the Churches in Ethiopia was arrested on June 1, 197 and after careful assessment of that information, we sent to Your Excellency the following cable on Friday, June 8th, 1979, a copy of which also was handed over to the Ethiopian Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva:

We have closely followed the developments in Ethiopia since the revolution started in February 1974 and noted that fundamental social and political changes have taken place. We have with particular appreciation noted the freedom of worship which the Christian churches have enjoyed so far and the assurances given by your Government in the declared National Democratic Revolution Programme and in other public declarations that no Ethiopian citizen should be discriminated against because of religion, sex or ethnic origin.

We fully realize that when fundamental social and political changes of this nature and magnitude take place, a certain amount of control must be exercised by the authorities. We also
realize that if individual Christians are found guilty of any unlawful activity, they have to be subjected to due process of law like any other citizen.

However, when we learn that church leaders and lay people are subject to acts infringing on their rights with no specific charges having been formulated, we become deeply concerned and consider it our obligation as international organization representing the worldwide Christian community, to express this concern and plead for immediate investigation of alleged irregularities and necessary action to correct such irregularities wherever proved to be true.

We trust that in accordance with declared principles of your Government, Your Excellency will give this matter urgent and serious consideration.

Your sincerely,

Philip Potter
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Carl H. Mau, Jr
General Secretary
Lutheran World Federation

Telegram from Dr. Philip Potter to the National Christian Council, 21 May 1979

On the basis of information received on the freedom of religion bill World Council of Churches shares concern of all churches in India and encourages you in making representations to authorities of government of India. STOP. WCC reaffirms its commitment and support for promotion of religious liberty and human rights for all people.

Philip Potter
General Secretary

Central Committee adopts guidelines on the Middle East, Kingston, Jamaica, January 1979

In following up the issues in the Middle East, the positions on which have been stated by the V. Assembly and subsequent meetings of the Central and Executive Committee, and of the CCIA, urgent continuing attention must be given to:

a) The unresolved conflicts in the Middle East posing serious threats to peace in the region and globally.

b) The lack of progress towards peace and negotiations involving all parties concerned including the Palestinians.

c) The extension of areas of conflict and tension. In addition to the long-standing Israeli/Arab/Palestinian conflict and the struggles regarding Lebanon and Cyprus; recent developments in Iran, Turkey, and North and South Yemen de and attention.

d) The exacerbation of internal tensions within various countries of the region. e) The disturbing social, political and religious trends in the area which encourage fragmentation into ethnic and/or religious groupings.

f) Tendencies within religious revivalism leading to extremism and tensions between religious communities with serious consequences for human rights, including religious liberty.
g) Abridgement or violations of human rights in the area.

h) Implications of these developments for the life and witness of the churches in the area.

Active collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches should be continued. Appropriate initiatives by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs should be taken in consultation with MECC and member churches to explore with various parties concerned new possibilities of WCC action towards understanding and peace. In these efforts the staff of the sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, of CCPD and CICARWS should be consulted as appropriate. There should be regular sharing of information with member churches on the above-mentioned developments.

WCC executive committee statement on new legislations in South Africa, Boldern, Switzerland, February 1978

The South African government, soon after the banning of eighteen organizations working for racial justice, took steps to enact legislation that will prevent the formation and growth of other lawful organizations to take their place. The Social Workers and Associated Professions Bill, the National Welfare Bill and the Fund Raising Bill, when implemented, will impose the most severe restrictions that will in effect prohibit organizations and groups in South Africa from raising funds for, or channeling funds to, victims of oppression. The implications of these pieces of legislation for churches in South Africa are obvious. The South African churches will find themselves confined to a narrow range of strictly defined 'religious' activities, because living out the social implications of the gospel becomes 'unlawful'.

More sweeping than this set of legislative measures, is the bill reported to be before the South African Parliament which aims at totally and finally denying citizenship to blacks in South Africa making it obligatory for them to seek 'citizenship' in one of the 'homelands'. The bantustan policy has seriously affected the work of the churches and the Methodist Church of South Africa is being forced to reorganize itself to suit the political structures of a 'bantustan'.

The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in February 1978 in Boldern, Switzerland, calls upon the member churches

1. to mobilise public opinion against the three new bills that will severely restrict the activities of the churches,
2. to extend all possible support to churches in South Africa in their efforts to assist people in the context of intensified oppression, and
3. to bring pressure upon their respective governments and the South African government to halt and reverse the South African government's policy of denying blacks citizenship in South Africa and to abandon apartheid policy including the existence of bantustans.

The CCIA should make a further report on this matter to the Central Committee at its next meeting.

Central committee receives CCIA report on Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland, August 1977

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65 Appendices have been omitted
1. Introduction

1.1. The need for more intensive ecumenical reflection and involvement in the field of human rights seen by the Central Committee in Addis Ababa (January 1971) reflected an existential concern of the churches. In equating human rights with human survival, the Central Committee provided an early glimpse into what became in its 1974 meeting a major WCC preoccupation with the future of human beings in a world threatened by multiple, inter-connected crises. In Addis Ababa, and increasingly since then, ecumenical concern for human rights has derived less from intellectual elaborations at the top than from the experiences and needs of the churches and Christians engaged in often dramatic struggles for justice and human dignity in their own situations.

1.2. Through the process of study, reflection and action on human rights in which the churches all over the world engaged in preparation for the St. Polten consultation (1974), it became apparent that violations were becoming more widespread and brutal in many parts of the world, and that urgent action by the churches was required to counter them. A new set of ecumenical guidelines for human rights were developed which opened up new possibilities for this to happen.66

2. Human Rights at the Fifth Assembly

2.1. The Nairobi Assembly was faced with a series of inter-related issues unprecedented in their scope, complexity and recognized urgency. In that context, the churches' work during the previous four years in the field of human rights proved to be essential in helping the Assembly come to grips with these issues.

2.2. Human rights provided a certain common frame of reference. By the time of the Assembly, many churches had studied carefully differences in interpretation or emphasis on human rights remaining, the ecumenical guidelines contained there had contributed to the formation of a growing consensus regarding the framework within which human rights could be usefully discussed and acted upon. Human rights also provided a language which could be used to translate the complexities of the various issues discussed into terms which would be more easily understood in the churches.

2.3. Human rights helped to link together apparently separate concerns. In the period leading up to the Fifth Assembly, very many churches had become engaged directly in the struggle for justice in terms of human rights. Thus they often presented their own situations in these terms, making it easier to see how violations in many parts of the world were linked to trans-national structures of injustice.

2.4. Human rights provided a new possibility for action. When violations of human rights were seen in terms of unjust structures, new possibilities of acting to remove root causes emerged, and the temptation to treat symptoms only was reduced. To see complex problems in terms of human rights also aided the Assembly to avoid resignation in the face of world problems so massive as to appear insoluble. Possibilities emerged for Christians and churches to become engaged where they are, and to see their contributions as important parts of a global effort.

66 see Nairobi Vth Assembly Section V, "Report and Recommendations on Human Rights"
2.5. The new ecumenical guidelines on human rights indicated new possibilities of relationships among churches living in very different situations. The new ecumenical guidelines stressed that the churches' primary responsibility is to discover and act upon violations of human rights in their own societies. But they went on to speak of the need to establish links of international, ecumenical solidarity among the churches and with others living and witnessing in different contexts. Through developing better communications with other churches and through a more intensive involvement in their own societies, churches at national and local levels could engage in actions whose possibilities of effectively benefiting others was increased. This was particularly important in terms of the Assembly's concern to involve the local congregation more in the total ecumenical enterprise.

Report of the second colloquium on the churches' role in the application of the final act of the conference on security and cooperation in Europe, Montreux, Switzerland, July 1977

5.7 The Colloquium went into further detail regarding the program at the level of the Helsinki Area in terms of meetings, encounters and exchanges among the churches, and of common studies they may agree to undertake together.

6. Meetings, encounters and exchanges among the churches

6.1 Ecumenical experience has shown that face-to-face contacts among representatives of the churches are of fundamental importance in overcoming our differences, in deepening our own self-understanding and in developing new forms of common, effective ecumenical action.

6.2 He believe that meetings, encounters and exchanges among the churches need to be organized in a regular and systematic way so as to strengthen our work together in supporting the principles set out in the Helsinki Final Act. This aim can be achieved only in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence. We therefore propose:

6.2.1 That there be held at least two meetings in the five-year period of this program where representatives of the churches in the area can:

a) share the results of common studies they have agreed to undertake;

b) enter into substantial discussion on one or more urgent and relevant topics related to human rights and religious liberty in the overall Helsinki context including the interrelatedness of security, disarmament and international cooperation with these topics;

c) discuss current human rights and religious liberty concerns in the area, including an exchange of information regarding the general situation and concrete cases;

d) evaluate the effectiveness of ecumenical undertakings in this field.

6.2.2 That the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations concerned should be informed of the intention to reflect together upon the problems surrounding human rights and religious liberty in the context of the Helsinki Final Act and that its appropriate bodies should be consulted about the possible avenues for future cooperation.
6.2.3 That, in addition, smaller working groups be formed on an ecumenical basis (at national, sub-regional or Helsinki Area levels as appropriate) to pursue in greater depth particular problems identified by the churches in the meetings described in para. 6.2.1 above, and/or to discuss and make proposals to the churches on matters of urgent concern.

6.2.4 That bi-lateral and multi-lateral exchanges of groups and individuals, especially women and youth, be promoted as a regular activity organized by the churches for both information-sharing and substantial discussion of common concerns.

6.2.5 That contacts between churches, at the national level, and ecumenical bodies and Roman Catholic bodies responsible for human rights be encouraged.

6.2.6 That the churches be encouraged to look for possible forms of dialogue with their respective governments, similar to those which the latter have with other non-governmental organizations in the application of the Helsinki Final Act. It is indeed desirable that the churches be participants in these dialogues which take place within the framework of the life of a nation or that they take the initiative in proposing such dialogues with their governments.

Memorandum to the General Secretary of the WCC from the Colloquium on the Churches' Role in the Application of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Montreux, Switzerland, July 1976

I. INTRODUCTION

1. From July 24-28, 1976 representatives of churches in the countries which signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, met in Montreux, Switzerland, at the invitation of the General Secretary of the WCC. This invitation came as the result of a request of the Fifth Assembly, which asked Dr. Potter "to see to it that the questions of religious freedom be the subject of intensive consultation with the member churches of the signatory states of the Helsinki Agreement, so that a first report could be presented to the Central Committee meeting in August 1976".

2. The Montreux colloquium was prepared by the CCIA and brought together some 30 representatives of the member churches in the countries concerned. They based their discussions mainly on the texts of Section V of the Fifth Assembly, the Final Act of Helsinki, ICC documents on human rights and religious freedom up to 1976, answers by the member churches to some specific questions of the General Secretary and other related documents. Participants in the meeting contributed additional relevant material.

3. The colloquium was reminded that since the beginning of the ecumenical movement, human rights, and religious freedom as one important such right, have been a concern of the churches. It was in the context of the movement that churches found new and broader opportunities to relate concern for their own rights to the service of the world community. Thus churches have contributed to the formulation and the implementation of international declarations and conventions, which are now gaining increasing acceptance in the human family.

4. The colloquium recognized the close relationship between the efforts of the NCC (St. Polten, Assembly Section V), the LHF's study on human rights, the theological work of the WARC and the ongoing concerns of such organizations as CEC and the CPC.
ecumenical thought on confessing Christ today and on the unity of the church also pays serious attention to the need to promote human rights.

5. The most important ecumenical resource for this task is the power which flows from God's promises and commands. From Him we derive our common calling which comes to all who share common faith and motivation, though we live in vastly different circumstances. Herein lie both the unique function and the unique possibility of the ecumenical movement. Our resources also include theological insights, new and old, as well as ecumenical guidelines or programme proposals which need to be further developed and implemented.

6. The tension inevitably arising out of our common calling and the need for varied implementation should neither be ignored nor exaggerated. We should learn to use it for our mutual correction and enrichment. Our common calling provides us with the mandate to consult each other and indeed to act together. The need to implement that calling in our different societies requires mutual confidence, respect and willingness to learn from one another. We are deeply grateful to God for the existence of the we and other ecumenical organizations, for what they have already accomplished in recent decades and for the possibilities they represent for common action in the future.

It is in the ecumenical movement that we have learned, as a mandate of faith, that the church should be at the service of all whose rights are violated. We have learned that this service should happen in the context of fraternal relations between the churches and their leaders.

7. To keep together these two elements of the ecumenical mandate will not always be easy. Churches inevitably are affected by the social, political and cultural struggles of our time. Tensions between power blocs do not leave the churches untouched. Loyalty to the Lord and loyalty to our respective countries may well involve us in conflicts. Churches have their share of tensions between developed and less developed countries.

They know of the conflict between the poor, whose basic rights to life are often violated, and the rich who often give priority to a whole range of individual rights. Christian support for detente may well conflict with the Christian conviction that acts of solidarity with people struggling for human rights are essential to the furtherance of peace and justice. Christians do not only live in a divided world, they are part of the division. They make different political choices and are part, however much they strive for objectivity, of the environment in which they are called to witness and to serve.

Like all other people they are subjected to a variety of pressure which limit religious liberty (e.g. governments, ideologies, economic structures and the claims of other religions). Like others, the churches are tempted to assert a privileged position for their particular understanding of religious liberty as though the alone were valid. They know at all times that their understanding of religious liberty must be rooted in biblical thought. To hold together the prophetic and servant vocations requires a constant readiness to submit to Divine judgement.

These tensions, conflicts and temptations often strain our confidence in one another and undermine our mutual respect. Too often they cause us to judge one another by our own presuppositions, thus rendering impossible the dialogue for which we are nevertheless uniquely equipped.

8. At the same time the churches have special opportunities to fulfil the tasks entrusted to them. The ecumenical movement, through the churches, has access to thousands of local
II. THE CHURCHES AND THE HELSINKI FINAL ACT

9. The Final Act of Helsinki constitutes a historic event for all the Signatory States. It was not a victory for any one group of nations or for any ideology but a practical regional application of the principles that underlie the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Covenants consequent on that Declaration. The churches should do all in their power to help to preserve the positive political will implicit in the signing of the Final Act.

10. While in some states, especially in Eastern Europe, special efforts have been made, with the active participation of the churches, to disseminate and evaluate the text for wide sections of the population, in others the full content is little known. It is a creative task for the churches in all Signatory States to show that all ten principles are inter-related and that, as was recognized at Nairobi, "security and the development of genuinely human relationships across frontiers go together".

11. The churches in their dedication to work for peace and reconciliation should particularly value the commitment made at Helsinki to refrain from the threat or use of force by all parties as a way of settling disputes. They should explore in this context how they might together more effectively promote the reduction both of national armaments and the limitation of the international arms trade.

Furthermore, the churches should give active support to the proposals of the Swiss Government to promote a European instrument for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Recent

III. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

16. The most recent ecumenical definition of religious liberty was given by the wee Fifth Assembly:

"The right to religious freedom has been enshrined in most constitutions as a basic human right. By religious freedom we mean the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. Religious freedom should also include the right and duty of religious bodies to criticize the ruling powers when necessary, on the basis of their religious convictions."

The Helsinki Final Act says:
"The participating states will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

17. Religious freedom may neither be separated from the concern for other fundamental human rights, nor confused with claims for special privileges for religious communities. The loss of former privileges should not necessarily be interpreted as a violation of religious liberty. The churches must exercise a continuous self-criticism of their practices which in the name of religious liberty denied other essential human rights. As it was said at St. Pölten, there have been times and places where the church, claiming its rights and abrogating its responsibilities, has itself instigated or condoned violations of human rights.

18. The problem of interpreting and implementing religious liberty is complicated by the fact that there are different approaches to the issue:

   a) In some churches most members, influenced by the long traditions of their churches, insist primarily on the freedom of the congregation to worship;
   
   b) In other churches there is greater insistence on religious liberty which includes the free exercise of education, mission and prophetic ministry towards their societies as stated by the Fifth Assembly;

   c) The views of governments and other secular powers sometimes differ from the convictions held by the churches thus causing conflicts.

Ecumenical efforts to implement religious liberty must take into consideration all of these perspectives.

19. In working for the implementation of religious liberty the different confessional, historical and social traditions of the various regions and countries as well as the ecclesiological background and the concrete circumstances in which these churches live and witness must be taken seriously. For this task the churches must be guided by the spirit of true conciliar fellowship. Churches may assist each other to defend or exercise their freedom, but should take into account respective church disciplines and traditions, on the condition that they are not in contradiction with the spirit of the ecumenical fellowship, brotherhood and cooperation. The spirit of conciliarity ought to be applied by churches to members and groups of members who are at variance with the official policies of their churches out of their personal Christian conviction.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

20. We urge the churches to set aside the human and financial resources necessary to fulfil the human rights aspirations of the Fifth Assembly as contained in the report of its Section V.

21. Helsinki follow-up

   a) The wee should explore how best to make known to the 1977 Belgrade Review Conference the concerns expressed in this report. It should further ask the member churches of the Signatory States of the Helsinki Final Act to
approach their own governments and ask them to ensure that the Belgrade Conference is seriously prepared, and
to strive there for the full realization of the provisions of the Final Act.

b) The U.N. and its member churches should contribute to the realization of the Helsinki Final Act in all its aspects, especially cooperation in humanitarian and other fields.

c) The Helsinki Final Act provides an important new impetus for the continuation and deepening of the Christian-Marxist dialogue, and the ongoing dialogue between the churches and the states in which they serve, concerning peace, justice and human rights. Cold War attitudes, still alive, contradict the spirit of Helsinki. In this context, the churches should welcome the statement of European Communist parties who met in Berlin (June 30, 1976), that they recognize the need to cooperate with religious communities and believers and to enter into dialogue with them.

22. Actions related to the U.N.

a) Helsinki provides a new opportunity to use international structures, both governmental and non-governmental, to urge governments which have not yet ratified the U.N. Covenants on Human Rights to do so. The fact that after a ten-year process of ratification, these two Covenants have come into force immediately following upon the Helsinki Final Act, provides new instruments for all signatory Governments to help implement the human rights provisions of the Final Act.

b) The human rights principles inherent in the Helsinki Final Act are relevant to the mandate of the U.N. Human Rights Commission. To make the Helsinki Agreement more effective the churches should urge their governments to enable the Commission to work more effectively. The Helsinki Agreement could also provide some further impetus towards the conclusion of an international Convention on the Elimination of Religious Intolerance.

23. Recommendations to the WCC on Human Rights and Religious Liberty

The WCC should:

a) strive to strengthen further the ecumenical fellowship and help the churches in the signatory states of the Final Act of the Helsinki Declaration to implement the recommendations to the churches listed above. In particular, the churches in socialist countries should be enabled to contribute more fully to the various levels of the work of the WCC.

b) engage in efforts to clarify and concretize continually the different understandings of human rights and religious freedom in specific social and political contexts, so that gradually a concrete and common understanding of these notions becomes acceptable in all countries.

c) in accordance with the recommendations made in the report of Assembly Section V, paras. 21-25,
- strengthen the facilities of CCIA to enable it to serve as an instrument for collecting and evaluating information concerning human rights situations and for publishing occasional reports on specific issues of human rights and religious liberty;
- set up within CCIA an advisory group to examine and evaluate problems and serious cases of violation of human rights which are brought to the attention of WCC. In cases where a member church is involved, it should be consulted;
- on the basis of the advisory group's work, the General secretary of WCC may decide whether to follow up the case and/or strengthen the appropriate regional structures for action particularly in the area of the Signatory States of the Helsinki Final Act, and in collaboration with the CEC;
- the fulfillment of these recommendations will largely depend on the churches' readiness to respond positively to para. 20 of this report.

Letter from Dr. Philip Potter to President Kahuzu Bauda on the reported persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

Your Excellency:

During the last few months we have been receiving representations and reports about the plight of Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi and the information we have on this matter causes serious concern to us.

These reports particularly refer to the Jehovah's Witnesses who have returned recently to Malawi from the neighbouring countries. There is substantial evidence to show that they have been subjected to considerable harassment and persecution by local officials and members of the Youth League. Reports have come to us that many were tortured. The information we have received about Jehovah's Witnesses in detention camps near Dzaleka is most disturbing.

We are not unaware of the difficulties that have existed during the last several years between the Jehovah's Witnesses in your country and the political authorities there. We also realise that their teachings on, and attitude to, the state have in part at least contributed to this tension. The World Council of Churches, as you are aware, has always encouraged participation by all Christians in the welfare of the countries in which they live.

But the fundamental human right of such participation also involves the freedom to dissent as well as the freedom to refuse to join any particular political grouping or party. We, therefore, feel that your country's apparent policy of compulsory membership in the Malawi Congress Party is a curtailment of human rights and that punitive measures against those who do not take membership are unjustifiable. The WCC has attempted to uphold human rights everywhere and for all and we express our deep concern about the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi, especially those who are reported to be in detention or under arrest for refusing to buy membership cards of the Congress Party.

It is quite possible that some of the reports which have appeared may not be correct. But as we have indicated there is much evidence of continuing hardship caused to the Jehovah's Witnesses by local officials and members of the Youth League, etc.

We therefore appeal to you to take appropriate measures by which those now detained in camps and those arrested are released and can go back to their villages to lead a normal life. He further request you to reconsider the attitude and policies of the government and the Congress Party to the Jehovah's Witnesses and to engage in conversations with their leaders in the country.
with a view to exploring how best a lasting solution can be found to the problem. We assure you of our support and cooperation for such efforts.

With all good wishes to you and to the people of Malawi. Yours sincerely,

PHILIP POTTER General Secretary Hay
31, 1976

P.S.: In view of the interest of the wider public in this matter we intend to release the contents of this letter after a fortnight.

Letter from Dr. Philip Potter to member churches in states signatories to the "final act" of the conference on security and cooperation in Europe, March 19, 1976

Dear Friends,

Through the reports of your delegates to the Fifth Assembly, you are well aware of the considerable attention given in Nairobi to the need for the churches in countries who signed the "Final Act" of the Conference on Security und Cooperation in Europe to contribute more effectively to the implementation of the "fundamental freedoms, including freedom of conscience, religion or belief", particularly in the context of the Helsinki Declaration. In this connection, the Assembly requested me "to see to it that the question of religious liberty be the subject of intensive consultations with the member churches of the signatory States of the Helsinki Agreement and that the first report be presented at the next Central Committee meeting in August 1976".

Some delegates were mainly concerned about restrictions on religious freedom and intellectual dissidence in the socialist States of Eastern Europe, particularly in the USSR. As the debate on these issues progressed, however, attention was drawn to the need expressed in the report of Section V at the Nairobi Assembly to recognize the inter-dependence of the human rights - social, economic, cultural, civil and political – enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights to which the Helsinki Declaration refers. In our work together in recent years, we have learned that to isolate religious freedom from other rights, or to seek to apply criteria from one social system to another without seriously considering the very different contexts rarely helps us to achieve our desired goal of implementation of human rights.

In the light of the total Assembly discussion on human rights, the new Central Committee "agreed that questions of human rights in socialist states would be considered within the normal processes of the WCC for which no new programmes or structures would be required". Therefore, the proposal which I make now with regard to furthering our understanding of human rights in Europe and of the churches' responsibility to work ecumenically for their implementation represented another step along what we have always recognized to be a long road. It is but one important part of the total response to the Assembly in this field, and discussions are being held on how to intensify our work related to other regions as well. We should recall the recent ecumenical background against which our future work must be planned.

In the period since January 1971, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), has engaged in a broad process of intensive consultation with the churches, inviting them to reflect critically on their approaches to human rights, and to share their reflections with others. The emphasis has been on the implementation of human rights, as
underlined by the consultation on "Human Rights and Christian Responsibility" (St. Pölten, Austria, 1974), which established a framework for a new ecumenical approach to human rights.

The WCC has understood its role, as the Report of Assembly Section V states as being to "provide a place for mutual challenge of the churches to become better servants; a place where the churches can come together to give one another pastoral and material support as they become more courageously engaged in the struggle for human rights where they are; and a place to share strategies for struggle”.

In preparing my first report to the Central Committee this August, I consider it essential to indicate how the churches in the signatory states intend to use together the Helsinki Declaration in spirit and in fact as "a new opportunity for solutions", and what assistance they expect from the WCC to that end.

I have asked Mr. Leopoldo J. Niilus, Director of CCIA, to consult with you on my behalf about these matters and to organize a small, informal exploratory meeting with some thirty representatives of your churches in July. The purpose of that meeting will be to determine what future steps might be taken, and to assess what progress has been made on these questions since the Assembly in the individual churches and through the bilateral discussions which some of you have undertaken since Nairobi. The CCIA will develop, in consultation with you, a draft agenda for that meeting. Much background material for this meeting is already available. Basic guidelines are contained in the attached Assembly Section V reports on human rights, and the resolution on the Helsinki Declaration. The documents of the Conference of European Churches related to its work in this field provide substantial bases for reflection. Further, I would urge you to obtain and circulate copies of the Helsinki Agreement amongst your congregations and church leaders for their study well in advance of the July meeting.

The CCIA will also be consulting you about participation at the meeting. We will seek to ensure with you a proper sub-regional and confessional balance, and will take into consideration your points of view. Though not every Church can be represented at this first meeting, it is essential that each church be engaged in its preparation.

In addition to studying the materials you have developed yourselves and those I have mentioned, it would be helpful if you could share with one another and with us your current thinking on these matters. I would therefore propose the following questions as an outline for this next level of exchange:

1. In what ways is the Helsinki Declaration being studied in your churches?
2. Can you identify practices in your society which may contradict the spirit or the letter of the Helsinki Declaration?
3. What possibilities does your church have to aid in the diffusion, study and understanding of the Helsinki Declaration in your country, and its implementation, particularly with reference to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief?
4. What actions is your church now taking or intending to take in this regard?
5. In what ways does your church envisage further international ecumenical cooperation amongst the churches in the signatory states for the more effective implementation of the Helsinki Declaration? What role do you wish to see the WCC play here, in the light, for example, of the involvement of the Conference of European Churches, the
Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and other ecumenical and confessional bodies' initiatives?

CCIA will collect your views on these points and share them with other member churches to which this letter goes so that all can participate in the discussion in their own churches. These replies would also serve as the major input for the July meeting. It is realized that the time limit established by the Assembly for this first report is very short. Therefore I am sure that you will not expect of one another exhaustive answers to these questions now, but certainly responses will be necessary which give evidence of the reflections of your church on these matters.

In order that your view can be shared with other member churches involved, they should be communicated to the Director of CCIA by May 15, 1976, at the latest.

We plan to convene the exploratory meeting on 24-28 July, 1976, in order that I may consider its finding in preparation for my report to the Central Committee.

He look forward to your response to the questions asked and to your reactions to the proposal for an exploratory consultation. You can be assured that we shall do everything possible to accommodate your suggestions.

With best wishes, Yours sincerely,

PHILIP POTTER

General Secretary

Disarmament - the Helsinki Agreement Religious Liberty, Nairobi Vth Assembly, 1975

1. Ecumenical bodies (WCC, CEC, LHF) and several churches of Europe have played an active part in the efforts which led to the signing of the Helsinki Agreement on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975. They regard this Agreement as a sign of hope in a world torn apart by opposing ideologies and divided by conflicting interests.

2. The Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches appeals to the signatory governments to implement the Helsinki Agreement without delay and in all its parts. A climate of mutual trust will be created by respecting the Ten Principles governing relations between nations.

3. These principles are:

1) Sovereign equality for the rights inherent in sovereignty.
2) Refraining from the threat or use of force.
3) Inviolability of frontiers.
4) Territorial integrity of states.
5) Peaceful settlement of disputes.
6) Non-intervention in internal affairs.
7) Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief.
8) Equal rights and self-determination of peoples.
9) Co-operation among states.
10) Fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law.

4. We emphasize the clause referring to fundamental human rights as proclaimed by the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. The churches have the responsibility to be involved whenever it is necessary to make clear that security and the development of genuinely human relationships across frontiers go together. The churches should be especially concerned with the need for rules of behaviour, the purpose of which is to avert the danger of violent action in the attempt to establish new conditions securing respect for the dignity of men and women in Europe. Non-violent structures are also needed for the settlement of disputes between nations (e.g. "Draft Convention on a European System for the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes").

5. The Churches appeal to the good will of all in every nation who are entrusted with authority to make decisions. They are nevertheless realistic, and recognize the power of evil (individual and collective egotism, distrust, search for power, etc.). Their contribution will be effective as individuals and nations begin to learn that peace demands the willingness to admit one's own faults. Peace demands also the preparedness to give up one's own position. The churches will show forth the implications of reconciliation for the relationships of nations.

6. Concrete proposals on all the many aspects of security and co-operation in Europe will be needed for the forthcoming bilateral and multilateral negotiations over the implementation of the Helsinki Agreement. The churches can contribute much from their experience of contacts across frontiers and of humanitarian work.

7. The individual churches of Europe, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and the Churches' Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) need to be prepared for this task. They must also be ready to speak of their experiences in the implementation of the Helsinki Agreement at the evaluation meeting of the CSCE to be held in Belgrade in 1977.

8. The churches will also be concerned with those clauses in the Helsinki Agreement which deal directly with their own position and functions (religious freedom, freedom of belief and worship, contacts between the churches, exchange of information, etc.). They will make clear to the governments their own understanding of these sections and how they could be implemented.

9. We commend the nations who drew up the noble principles of the Helsinki Agreement and signed them. We hope and pray that the nations will do all in their power to implement these principles; and we urge other nations to join them in this worthwhile venture.

10. The Assembly has devoted a substantial period to the discussion of the alleged denials of religious liberty in the USSR.

11. The Assembly recognizes that churches in different parts of Europe are living and working under very different conditions and traditions. Political systems, constitutions, and administrative practices vary from nation to nation. In most western European countries the churches have the opportunity to seek to reach people through many different public media and to organize special groups for young people and others. In the absence of such possibilities in many eastern countries, the churches reach people including youth through religious education.
of children in the family, catechizing in the Church of interested persons, and vital public worship.

12. In spite of these differences, Christians in both parts of Europe, and indeed throughout the whole world, are one in Christ. The solidarity which results from faith in our common Lord permits the mutual sharing of joys and sufferings and requires mutual correction. Christians dare not remain silent when other members of the Body of Christ face problems in any part of the world. But whatever is said and done must be preceded by consultation and must be an expression of Christian love.

13. When a problem relates to fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief, the Helsinki Declaration provides a new opportunity for solutions. The spirit of Helsinki clearly reflects the commitment of the signatories to prevent a new era of "cold war".

14. Therefore the Assembly urges the Central Committee and the General Secretariat to take such situations seriously and to undertake appropriate actions.

15. The Assembly requests the General Secretary to see to it that the question of religious liberty be the subject of intensive consultations with the member churches of the signatory states of the Helsinki Agreement and that a first report be presented at the next Central Committee meeting in August 1976.

16. This Assembly recognizes that all the signatory nations appended below have equal responsibility to observe and carry out all the principles of this solemn agreement.


34. The right to religious freedom has been and continues to be a major concern of member churches and the wee. However, this right should never be seen as belonging exclusively to the church. The exercise of religious freedom has not, in ways reflected the real diversity of convictions that exist in the world. This religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect and reverence for the faith and basic human rights of others.

35. Religious liberty should never be used to claim privileges. For the church this right is essential so that it can fulfill its responsibilities which arise out of the Christian faith. Central to these responsibilities is the obligation to serve the whole community.

36. The right to religious freedom has been enshrined in most constitutions as a basic human right. By religious freedom we mean the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, and freedom, either individually in community or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. Religious freedom should also include the right and duty of religious bodies to criticise the ruling powers when necessary, on the basis of their religious convictions. In this context, it was noted that many Christians in different parts of the world are in prison for reasons of conscience or for political reasons as a result of their seeking to respond to the total demands of the Gospel.
Human Rights and Christian Responsibility

37. Churches and other Christian communities carry, on the basis of the Gospel, a special responsibility to express in word and fundamental freedoms are denied.

During its deliberations, the Section made frequent reference to the report of the consultation on "Human Rights and Christian Responsibility" held in St. Polten, Austria, October 1974.

Structures of Injustice and Structures for Liberatino, Report of Section V, Nairobi Vth Assembly, 1975 - The Right to Dissent

The Right to Dissent

29. The right to dissent preserves a community or system from authoritarian rigidity. It is essential to the vitality of every society that the voices of dissenters be heard and that their right to hold opinions without interference, to freedom of expression and the right of peaceful assembly be guaranteed. Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ have a solidarity with the people who suffer because of their religious faith and practice and because of their stand in favour of political and social justice. Christian solidarity means a definite choice on the side of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners and refugees. The churches should make all efforts both in their witness, intercessions, and by providing remedial assistance and support to those fellow human beings who suffer.

30. In readiness to reassess and to change their own structures and attitudes wherever necessary, the churches must give all due attention within their communities to men, women, and young people who take a critical stand towards the predominant views and positions of their churches.


The CCIA at its meeting June 1975 has reviewed the Report of the Consultation on Human Rights and Christian Responsibility held at St. Polten, Austria, October 1974 which was organized under CCIA auspices on the mandate of the WCC Central Committee.

It considers that this report, the recommendations it contains, and the related documents represent a major step forward in ecumenical thinking, especially the affirmation of the interrelationship of

- individual rights and collective rights
- the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights
- religious liberty and all other liberties
- human rights in general and the structures of society.

It is necessary to intensify our studies in this field, in the light of our theological insights, to examine the problems of human rights as they arise in each society, and to respond promptly and effectively to violations of these rights. Prayer, study, and action all essential elements in the struggle for human rights.
Because the greed for power and wealth and its consequences frequently result in violations of human rights, the CCIA considers that there is need not only for the incorporation into legislation of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also for Christians to identify the root causes of these violations and seek to eliminate them. Churches need to scrutinize carefully the implementation of human rights in the societies in which they have responsibilities and take appropriate actions in cooperation with all those who share this concern. Moreover, the churches should consider it their first duty to set a good example and to educate their members and clergy to understand and act in the area of human rights.

The CCIA recognizes the need for study of the St. Polten report and related documents; for continuing consultation on the national, regional and world level; and for the further elaboration of emerging issues regarding human rights.

The CCIA

1. Approves the report of the St. Polten Consultation on Human Rights and Christian Responsibility and judges that it contains important and necessary guidelines for the further development of ecumenical policy on human rights.

2. Recommends that the report be forwarded to delegates to the wee Assembly in a form which makes its main lines easily accessible.

3. Directs the officers of CCIA to draw up, on the basis of the report, succinct policy proposals for submission to the Assembly.

4. Adopts the recommendations contained in the parts of the consultation report entitled "Equipping the Local and National Churches to Identify Human Rights' Violations and to Protect the Victims" and "Equipping Regional Ecumenical Bodies and the wee for more Effective Defense and Promotion of Human Rights".

5. Expresses its sincere hope that the Assembly will ensure that the issues raised by the consultation and the recommendations made by it are given high priority in the future policy and programme of the HCC, and will direct the new Central Committee accordingly.

Telegram from acting general secretary Dr. Alan Brash, to Premier Chiang Chin-Kuo on confiscation of Bibles, April 25, 1975

World Council of Churches deeply concerned about confiscation of bibles by your government and consider the action a serious infringement on religious freedom.

Appeal for release of bibles. ALAN BRASH

Acting General Secretary

WCC officers statement on the trial of Georgij Vins, January 30, 1975

The World Council of Churches has received information that the trial of Mr. Georgij Petrovic Vins, the well-known leader of a Baptist group, is imminent in his home city of Kiev, in the Soviet Union.
We regret that there has been no response from the Minister of Justice of the Soviet Union to the request made by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Philip A. Potter, in his letter dated 14th November, 1974 regarding the case of Mr. Vins. The General Secretary's appeal was on the basis of representation received in this matter from several persons in the USSR.

The General Secretary in his letter had asked in particular that the text of the indictment against Mr. Vins be made available, that a legal observer be allowed to follow the proceedings of the trial and that legal defence be provided according to the expressed wish of Mr. Vins.

We understand that Mr. Vins is charged with the violation of Soviet law, in particular Article 209-1 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code. We have reason to believe on the basis of information received that the charges against Mr. Vins are made primarily because of his religious convictions and activities.

In view of the commitment of the World Council of Churches and its member churches to the fundamental right of people to live according to their own chosen religious convictions, we call upon the Government of the Soviet Union to contribute towards international understanding by according permission to a legal observer to attend the trial as suggested by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

M.M. Thomas, Chairman, Central Committee
Pauline M. Webb, Vice Chairman
Philip A. Potter, General Secretary, WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

WCC executive committee resolution, Bad Saarow, German Democratic Republic, February 1974

Current negotiations following the most recent crisis have given new hope for resolving the conflicts in the Middle East.

The WCC Central Committee in Canterbury in 1969 had stressed the need of both redressing the injustice done to the Palestinian people as well as providing guarantees for the existence of the State of Israel in the context of the implementation of the appropriate U.N. resolutions.

What we desire is equal justice for both Palestinian people and Jewish people in the Middle East.

With a view to achieving lasting peace with justice in the Middle East it is imperative to assert the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and to urge the immediate implementation of these rights. For this purpose the Palestinians should be guaranteed official status on all levels and formal opportunity to express their view freely about their future and to implement their rights.

It is of the first importance that the rights of the Israeli Jews and the implementation of the rights of the Palestinians should not lead to injustice to either people.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 22-29 August 1973:
-Recalls the 'Report and Further Recommendations on Human Rights' it considered in Utrecht. We recommended that a consultation on human rights be held before the end of 1974, the main theme of which should be:

how to relate standards of human rights to the cultural, socio-economic and political settings of different parts of the world, attention being given to religious liberty as a basic right, and emphasis being laid on finding more effective means of international cooperation for the implementation of human rights.

We said that the consultation:

should include men and women from the various parts of the world with knowledge and practical experience of the application of human rights and the results of their violation.

That mandate was made in the light of the report which we received which stated that:

- it is a demand of the Gospel that Christians become directly involved in processes of change of all social structures in which human rights are not fully implemented;

and that it is necessary:

- to study constantly how to relate the provisions of existing international instruments for the protection of human rights to the struggle for social and economic justice and other fundamental rights(...) (Utrecht Minutes, p. 25, and Appendix VI, pp. 147-9)

-Expresses its appreciation for the work done by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs in preparation for the consultation on 'Human Rights and Christian Responsibility', according to this mandate.

- Urges once again the member churches:

- to take the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1973, to renew and intensify their study, reflection and action for the implementation of human rights;

- to study with care the guidelines for the 1974 consultation and initiate programmes at local, national and regional levels to prepare themselves for making effective contributions to the ecumenical movement in this field before, during and following the consultation; and

- to give special consideration to participating in the indispensable financing of the consultations.

-Notes the intention of CCIA to sponsor regional preparatory meetings so that the consultation will accomplish the Utrecht mandate, and encourages them in this effort which it considers to be a precondition for the churches to become more effective instruments for aiding the victims of human rights violations, and better to express their solidarity with one another and the victims.

Appeal to Christians and Member Churches on the Situation of Palestinians in Lebanon

The Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches in its twenty-eighth meeting in Visegrad, Hungary, 14-19 June 1973, noted with regret the recent Israeli raids against Palestinian camps and Palestinian leaders in Lebanon and the eruption of violence between government and Palestinian forces in

67 Adopted by the Executive Committee.
Lebanon. We know Lebanon to be a country where peace, brotherhood and liberty are held dear, and one where a unique experience of dialogue and cooperation among different communities is being carried out. For this and other reasons it merits our respect, and violations of its territorial integrity which disrupt this peaceful atmosphere are unacceptable. Yet against the background of recent Middle East history, this outbreak causes us to be especially concerned about the future of the Palestinian people, a large part of which resides in Lebanese territory.

We note with approval that the dialogue and unity among the Lebanese has survived this trying period and that 1) the Palestinians in Lebanon have affirmed their respect of the sovereignty of Lebanon, and 2) the Lebanese have reaffirmed their support for the Palestinians in their legitimate rights. This agreement could be an important step towards the full recognition of a Palestinian national identity having its own institutions, and thus a contribution to the establishment of a just and durable peace in the area.

The painful events which claimed both Palestinian and Lebanese lives cannot be separated from their regional context and for us are but the manifestation of the injustice of which the Palestinians have been the object in the region for the past 25 years and which has menaced their very existence.

We recall in this respect the statement adopted by the World Council of Churches' Central Committee in Canterbury, August 1969, which expressed the convictions that:

'(...) no lasting peace is possible without respecting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian and Jewish people presently living in the area(...)';

and that:

'(...) in supporting the establishment of the state of Israel without protecting the rights of Palestinians, injustice has been done to Palestinian Arabs by the great powers which should be redressed.'

Resolution on the continuing crisis in the Middle East68

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, while expressing its appreciation for the continued contributions of its member churches in relief and rehabilitation work given to the refugees in the Middle East, reaffirms that the churches have also a great responsibility to work towards peace and justice in the area.

The situation in the Middle East is one of extreme tension which is now spreading outside the area. This should be a matter of peace-loving concern for all Christians and all men of goodwill.

The Central Committee calls on all member churches, especially those in countries whose governments exercise great influence in the Middle East, to urge their members who hold authority or influence to mobilize all their efforts and imagination towards exploring avenues of active involvement that could change a situation of despair into a situation of hope for all parties living in the area.

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The Central Committee asks the General Secretary to take the necessary steps for implementing this appeal and authorizes him to investigate how best the World Council of Churches can contribute effectively towards this aim.

We also recall the statement and recommendations of the Consultation on the Palestinian Refugee Problem jointly convened in Cyprus from September to October 1969 by the member churches of the World Council of Churches in the Middle East and by the Division of Interchurch Aid, Refugee and World Service of the World Council of Churches which said:

'We consider it our duty to call upon the churches of the world to use all their influence towards a just solution involving necessarily the recognition of the rights of the Palestinians from which alone a lasting peace could come to the Middle East.'

Therefore the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs calls on the World Council of Churches' member churches in the Middle East and on all Christians in that region to work actively for a just solution to that conflict, so urgently needed. We realize that theirs is a difficult task, and we call upon the other member churches of the World Council of Churches, especially those in countries whose governments exercise great influence in the Middle East, to work actively in support of the efforts of Middle East churches and to urge their governments to abstain from any policy which would further menace the Palestinian people.


2. Development of the Consultation Idea
a. At the request of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches recommended in January 1971 (Addis Ababa) 'that a consultation be held on the initiative of the CCIA to focus member churches' concern on human rights, to stimulate greater awareness of, and interest in, the problems involved vis-à-vis human rights and to present a report to the Central Committee with the purpose of initiating guidelines for future appropriate action in this domain'.69

b. Taken alone, this recommendation appears vague and general. Therefore it must be seen in its context: 'Report and Recommendations on Human Rights'. That document lays constant emphasis on the implementation of the human rights standards which have been set by the United Nations, and its specialized agencies, regional inter-governmental organizations and individual governments. Implementation of human rights, it insists, is a precondition for human survival in today's world. Therefore this is not an optional concern for the churches, but a necessary high priority. And since human rights are interdependent they cannot opt to work for the protection of one at the exclusion of another.

c. The document goes on to urge strong support for the United Nations and pays special tribute to its important accomplishments in establishing human rights standards. Yet it laments the fact that with rare exceptions the member states have been unwilling or unable to provide even a minimally effective legal machinery which could permit the implementation of these standards. The same can be said generally for regional inter-governmental organizations and most individual states. For that reason this document calls the member churches 'to impress upon their governments the urgent need to establish or to strengthen national channels

through which complaints about the violations of human rights can be handled impartially
and through which the protection of such rights or remedies in case of their violation can
be assured speedily for all(...) (and) to promote effective judicial machineries at inter-
national and regional levels(...) to assure the effective protection of human rights'.

d. Action is urgent, for unless human rights are effectively protected, there can
be no peace either within or among nations, there can be no justice, there can be no authentic progress or
development, and the threat of global distinction will remain. This premise underlines both the
Memorandum and the Recommendations. It goes together with another which is
inferred in the recommendations: human rights can be implemented only if threats to or open
violations of them are opposed in terms of the socio-economic and political contexts in which they occur.
Concrete recommendations are made regarding specific international and intranational
conflicts, making clear that both implementation and violation of human rights are political problems
which have international political implications. 70

e. This approach to human rights was qualitatively new for the ecumenical movement, and
the CCIA felt that it was essential to work out its implications in more depth and to
apply it to the WCC’s work in international affairs. Thus during its twenty-sixth meeting
(Geneva 1971) the CCIA Executive Committee dedicated much time to consideration
of this problem. It heard major presentations on the theme by Mr Marc Schreiber,
Director of the UN Division of Human Rights, and Qr Orlando Fals Borda, CCIA
Executive Committee member, and several other CCIA commissioners contributed
orally and in writing to the discussion. 71

f. The CCIA Executive Committee held its next meeting in Utrecht (August
1972), just prior to the WCC Central Committee meeting. There a working group on
human rights reviewed the progress made during the previous year and prepared the
document 'Report and Further Recommendations on Human Rights' which was adopted
with minor changes some days later by the Central Committee. In addition, the CCIA
Executive Committee recommended to the Unit II Committee 'that a WCC programme be
established to help defend groups', nations' and individuals' human rights'. This was
discussed by the Unit II Committee and remains on its agenda.

g. In its 'Report', the CCIA stated its conviction 'that the implementation of existing
international standards of human rights is a matter of the highest priority. This conviction
is derived from the study of actual situations in which these rights are either menaced or
openly violated. It is a demand of the Gospel that Christians become directly involved in
processes of change of all social structures in which human rights are not fully
implemented.

h. 'At the same time the CCIA finds it necessary to study constantly how to relate the
provisions of existing international instruments for the protection of human rights to the
struggle for social and economic justice and other fundamental rights often ignored even
by governments which have formally accepted the duty of safeguarding them.'

i. The Utrecht Central Committee resolution then spelled out further the idea
of the consultation, recommending 'that, in fulfillment of the mandate give to the CCIA by
the Central Committee at Addis Ababa "a consultation be held (...) on human rights(...)" -
such consultation should be held before the end of 1974, and should include men and women from the
various parts of

the world with knowledge and practical experience of the application of
Human Rights and the results of their violation; (and) that the main theme of this consultation be how to
relate standards of human rights to cultural,
socio-economic and political settings of different parts of the world, attention

70 cf 'Vn ty and Human Rights in Africa', p. 76
71 A summary report of that discussion is to be found on pp. 87 ff.
being given to religious liberty as a basic right; and emphasis being laid on finding more effective means of international cooperation for the implementation of Human Rights’. The Central Committee further agreed to ‘give consideration to making appropriate resources available for this consultation’.72

3. The Consultation and Continuing Programme

a. The idea of a Consultation on Human Rights and the Churches emerges out of and is inseparable from the continuing concern of the CCIA and the WCC as a whole. A brief glance over its history suffices to show that in one way and another human rights have been central to the work of the ecumenical movement. The CCIA was actively present in the person of its first Director, Dr O. Frederick Nolde, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being drafted and when it was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, in Paris. Since then, a CCIA representative has been present at virtually every meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission, and from the Amsterdam Assembly on, the WCC has regularly urged the churches to support the human rights programme of the UN.

b. For many years the most energetic ecumenical activity in the field of human rights was devoted to religious liberty. The CCIA considered that there it had special responsibility and expertise. Thus religious liberty became the point of departure for ecumenical human rights concerns. As the first Director of CCIA put it, ‘While religious liberty is in one sense basic to all other human rights, especially civil rights, it is at the same time inseparably related to them.’

c. The primacy of religious liberty has in more recent years given way to the more integral approach to human rights described earlier in this paper. This development corresponds closely to the emergence of new social concerns as ecumenical priorities. From its beginnings, of course, the WCC has worked with refugees and has continually prevailed on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to improve international standards for the protection of the rights of refugees. In more recent times other concerns have come to the force as well: the struggle against white racism and apartheid; the participation of the churches in the economic and social self-development of peoples; the need to change unjust international social, economic and political structures which oppress whole underdeveloped nations, large non-white majorities in some countries, and important racial minorities in others, particularly in the developed world.

d. Obviously, this development is not exclusive to the newly created WCC Unit on Justice and Service of which the CCIA is a part, nor to the World Council of Churches as a whole. It is reflected in the programme emphases of the member churches throughout the world and their national and regional conferences. As its Utrecht report on human rights states, the CCIA is seeking to improve its cooperation with others in this broad ecumenical enterprise, and to serve their needs.

e. The consultation should therefore not be taken as an isolated event. It should provide an occasion to review, to learn and to plan. All of that, and particularly actions to implement human rights, is too urgent to wait for or to be confined to an event. It must begin now, and for

72 Minutes of the WCC Central Committee, Utrecht, August 1972. Emphasis added. cf Excerpts from CCIA reports to WCC Unit 11 and Central Committees.

that reason the process of preparation for the consultation is as important as the consultation itself, and it must involve and begin to effect the whole life of the churches.

Summary Record of the CCIA Executive Committee's Discussion on Human Rights during its 26th Meeting: III Discussion – 24 May, 1973

III. Discussion

The rights of women. Mr Schreiber, in listing the major achievements of the UN in the field of human rights, neglected to mention the Convention on the Status of Women. The UN has made major progress here, but again only the surface has been scratched. If we talk, as Professor Fals Borda does, of the rights of peoples, we must recall that this includes those of women. Unfortunately, Latin American representatives to the UN leave them out all too frequently when speaking of the needs of the masses. (Driberg- UK, and Henderson- USA)

The right to rebel for justice. This concept is certainly important, but controversial. It implies breaking the law. Is this not a fundamental contradiction? (Patijn- Netherlands) It is always easier, too, to speak about this right in the context of another's society than one's own, although it is less difficult when we disagree with the dominant order in our own country. But what happens when one agrees with the existing system? How does one deal with the question of 'revisionism'? (Dahlen- Sweden)

True, the right to rebel for justice does imply the right to break the law, but only when that law is not just. Still, one must be cautious not to give facile answers to difficult questions. For that reason, it must be said that this 'new right' is inseparable from the other of cultural self-determination. The two together provide a measure of the justice or injustice of the dominant legal system. To be precise, we should recall that the rights of peoples is a Spanish concept, a part of Western tradition, which may come into conflict with the idea of cultural self-determination. The two must therefore go together to ensure that it is the authentic popular will and not some other which is being promoted and defended. This may help us to avoid situations like, for example, when Indians were given their individual rights, but in the process had their collective rights violated when they were stripped of their land.

For a new order to emerge with minimum violence, interference by foreign forces must be prevented at all levels: political, economic, cultural and military. In this context nationalism makes sense. The nation is conceived of not exclusively as a political system, but as a human, cultural entity as well. Foreign intervention in Latin America has contributed to the destruction of and hindered the rediscovery of the rich cultural traditions and diversity which exist there. The creation of a new society based on authentic human values and. rooted in these traditions will be accelerated if these nations are left free to this task. (Fals Borda)

From Africa, one can but agree with these comments. The new Constitution of Ghana is a mere repetition of Western rhetoric and practically ignores indigenous traditions. This is partly due to a long history of foreign economic domination, although this has not yet taken the drastic forms in Africa that Professor Fals Borda sees in his own Latin American context. But neo-colonialism in Africa is a reality. It is exercised to varying degrees by Russia, Qina, the United States and Europe. All seek to exploit the African nations and implant their own ideologies. What is the best ideology for Africa? The desire of the people is to protect their own culture and traditions, and that desire is shared even by many of the national elites, even though many have been corrupted. The emerging young elites challenge their elders at this point, while at the same
time questioning the retrograde elements of traditional society as they search for new social structures for their nations. A problem common to both elites, old and young, is that they are frequently out of contact with the masses, jealous of their privileged positions which they fear would be threatened by greater popular participation in the society.

The idea of rights of peoples, group rights, is especially germane to African society with its communal traditions. Sometimes with good intentions, tribal structures have been broken down in favour of national integration. But this has not always been positive, especially at the level of the right to cultural self-determination which is seriously threatened in Africa today.

For the African context as well, one must avoid simplistic application of universal principles. Many African societies suffer, for example, from the dominant role of women. It is for each culture to determine which rights will be given priority in their own context. (Adu-Ghana)

Suggestions for further investigation. Professor Fals Borda risks giving a simplistic view of Western traditions, one of which is exactly the right to rebel and another respect for minority groups in a pluralistic society. The points made, however, demonstrate that further study is necessary in the CCIA on at least these points:

- Minority group rights are often subordinated to Western inspired ideas of nation-building and integration which have sometimes been accepted by Third World Nations with disastrous results. Examples in recent history would be Nigeria, Pakistan and Sudan. CCIA should give attention to the rights of minority groups in these kinds of national settings.
- The critique made of Western capitalism and of 'modernizing' tendencies in the Third World make us aware of the sorts of adjustment difficulties present in moving from traditional to modern society. Some of these problems have been faced in the West already, and should be studied for the benefit of the Third World.
- The right to rebel raises the question of when it is acceptable to use violence to overthrow a tyrannical regime. More theological reflection is necessary on this. Something which has not been mentioned so far is religious freedom. The CCIA should study situations of religious oppression and give support to oppressed Christian groups in societies which explicitly deny the Christian faith.
- When can human rights best be dealt with universally, and when on a regional basis? The example of the ILO should be studied for guidance here. It shows that at times more progress can be made regionally— as in Latin America and Europe— where a greater degree of cultural, theological and political homogeneity exists to simplify matters. (Goodwin- UK)

Summary Record of the CCIA Executive Committee's Discussion on Human Rights during its 26th Meeting: VI. Human Rights from a Theological Perspective

Firstly, I doubt if there anything in the Bible about 'human rights' as such. (There is much in the Bible which is the basis for an understanding of human rights but it does not seem to me that our (Western) concept of 'human rights' has a biblical 'feel' as such.) There is however a great deal in the Bible about human possibilities on the one hand and about the divine attacks on obstacles to these possibilities on the other.

Man is to be open to all the possibilities implied in being in the image of God (viz. infinite possibilities) and there is a constant wrestling to move towards the understanding that 'man' means all men and each man, woman and child. God is to be seen as He who is constantly disturbing the status quo (including priestly or religious 'systematizations' about Himself, His
worship and His requirements) in order to set men free from sinful limitations in themselves or in those who rule over them so that they move onwards into the fulfilling purposes which He has for man.

We have also to reckon with the fact that the supreme embodiment of God's attacks on those things which impede the wholeness (salvation) of man is Jesus. This puts a concept such as 'human rights' in a very particular light. It does not look as if God uses his powers to set men free in the same way as men tend to use theirs. Just what are we to make of the fact that the supreme embodiment of God's power was the powerless Jesus? This is one of the greatest problems and challenges which Christians have to face. I can do more than draw attention to it here, as a reminder that we cannot take any approach which has so far been worked out to human rights for granted or suppose that we have yet arrived at a satisfactory understanding of what is involved in pressing for human rights.

However, I would tentatively suggest that theological reflection of the type I am indicating would at least tend to remind us that all human rights are strictly secondary, derivative and elative. That is to say that 'human rights' must not be thought of as 'things' which people possess or should possess and still less must they be absolutized in any way. Human rights are of importance only in relation to the possibilities of exercising human capacities and becoming more human.

There is a second large block of considerations to which I should like to draw your attention. They arise for me out of my experience in conducting the Humanum studies and out of my reflections of theology in the light of these experiences. As I have tried to pick up vital points, questions and hints concerning our understanding of man and the human situation today by drawing on many of the concerns in which the World Council of Churches is involved throughout the world I have come to see that Christian theology is faced, among many other challenges, with at least the following three questions:

1) How shall we understand and express the centrality of Jesus to all human concerns now that it is finally clear that the 'Mediterranean matrix' out of which Christianity arose is not the centre of the civilized world or the source of culture, truth, authority, etc.?

2) How are we to understand the value and destiny of the human person so that we neither lose what we have so far learnt through historical Christianity nor are shut up in too Western a personalism?

3) How do we take account of the ubiquity of the political in all human concerns?

Obviously these three questions require a considerable commentary for their proper exposition but I just mention them now because I think they raise questions also for our approach to human rights.

These questions are not precisely corresponding to my first three but are inter-connected with them:

1) How do we see to it that our approach to human rights is not too Western and individual? The 'tradition' arises out of a very Western discussion from the seventeenth century onward. There is nothing 'wrong' with this, it is just a historical fact. But if past history becomes a strait-jacket or a prejudice then we are clearly failing - failing man in his ecumenical fullness as he is called into the fullness of God.
2) How do we work to ensure that full account is taken of the political and social dimensions of human rights? And see also that taking the political and social dimensions seriously demands both realistic relationships with present political systems and actual societies and also a vision which is aware that man's only finally fulfilling 'polis' is the City of God and the saving society is the society of the love of God shared in the Body of Christ?

3) How, therefore, do we put our pursuit of and programme for human rights in the perspective and judgment of 'eschatological enlargement'? That is to say how do we make our concern for human rights part of our concern to be moving towards 'the new man in Jesus Christ'? It is the good pleasure of God that all things come to their summation and climax in Jesus Christ. Therefore, no present 'Christian' or 'Western' or 'United-Nations' or any other consensus, if there be such, on human rights is sufficient, even if applied and practised, for what we are after and what will fulfil men. 'Eschatological enlargement' means taking a dynamic approach to all human questions and being concerned always to break through to enlarging concepts and enlarging possibilities. We are not concerned with human rights but with expansion of men and women towards freedom. Human rights must be seen in this dynamic, human and eschatological context.

A parenthesis may perhaps be inserted here picking up the earlier reference to the 'powerlessness' and suffering of Jesus. It may be that a Christian contribution to the search for proper expressions of human rights should be a concern for setting men free to the point where they can of their own accord give up some of their rights and opportunities for the larger good of men. That is to say there should be a concern to bring men in particular societies to the point where they can make sacrifices for humanity. A so-called 'sacrifice' which is not made freely is simply deprivation and exploitation but we need to be realistically aware that human fulfilment is not possible without sacrifice. Is it a human right to be set free from exploitation and oppression to the point where such sacrifices can be freely made?

However that may be I would conclude these loose remarks and suggestions by summarizing my reflections on human rights in a theological perspective as suggesting that human rights are to do with:

1) the removal of obstacles to the free exercise of human possibilities;
2) to enable men to exercise their human responsibilities to, for and with their fellows so that
3) there may be an ever-enlarging exploration of the possibilities of life in human societies.

Hence human rights will never be static, they will never be an end in themselves and they will not be the same in every situation. (For example under certain conditions men need to be free from religion, under other conditions they need freedom for religion. There is no such fixed entity as 'religious liberty'. Or again, under certain conditions men need to be set free from state interference but under other conditions men need to be free to mobilize the power of the state of fight again dehumanizing things. And so on.)

Thus we need continual theological reflection on our programmes and practices with regard to human rights. I would suggest that a central purpose of this theological reflection would be to disturb us and to encourage us to disturb much that is taken for granted. For theology is to do with God and God as seen in the Bible and as seen in Jesus Christ is surely the God who
constantly disturbs patterns, policies and powers so that men may be free to seek their fulfilment in one another in Him and in Him in one another.

**Statement on the question of conscientious objection to military service**

The Non-Governmental Organizations listed above warmly approved the adoption by the Commission on Human Rights at its 27th session of Resolution 11 B (XXVII) which requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on national legislation and other measures and practices relating to conscientious objection to military service. They therefore welcome the publication of this report (E/CNA/1118) and trust that its importance will be recognized by the Commission. They believe that the time has come for the Commission to take a decisive step towards the international recognition of the right of conscientious objection to military service.

This belief is based on a number of considerations. First, there is widespread and growing concern in the world's religious communities that young people who refuse to participate in war on conscientious grounds should not be penalized for their moral stand. The most recent declaration on this subject by a religious body was adopted by the latest World Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church: 'Let conscientious objection be recognized and regulated by law in each nation.' Earlier statements by representative religious bodies, including one by representatives of the world's major living religions, are reproduced in a useful booklet published by the International Peace Bureau, *The Right to Refuse to Kill* (see pp. 23 and 24).

Secondly, a conscientiously held conviction that it is wrong to perform military service may be based on clear ethical or moral grounds, and such a conviction becomes a vital and integral part of the individual who holds it. Several of the states which have contributed to the Secretary-General's report make provision in their legislation for conscientious objection based on other than religious grounds. It is therefore not surprising that the defence of freedom of conscience has also been undertaken by secular bodies such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations Youth Assembly and the International Peace Bureau.

Respect for the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, for development of the human personality and for the integrity of the individual requires the state to recognize the right of conscientious objection to military service.

Thirdly, the question of conscientious objection to military service is to be discussed under the item 'The Role of Youth in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights', thus giving recognition to the fact that the subject is of primary concern to young people of military age. Young people today are aware that the United Nations proclaims peace, has condemned the crimes against humanity which have been part of the conduct of war and stresses the importance of service in the cause of economic and social development. Too often, national laws do not offer any civilian alternative to military service which many young people cannot reconcile with these objectives. The evident conflict between the professed ideals of nations and their actual practice is, we believe a fundamental cause of the lack of commitment of young people to the United Nations.

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74 This statement was submitted by the CCIA, together with eight other Non-Governmental Organizations, to the UN Commission on Human Rights on 9 March 1973, where it was circulated as Document No. E/CN.4/NG0/171, dated 12 March 1973.

75 See *The Right to Refuse to Kill*, pp. 21 and 22.

Fourthly, the question is of increasing practical relevance. In countries which have compulsory military service, numbering about 84 at the present time, the objector faces the dilemma of choosing between the dictates of his conscience and his fear of punishment. Experience shows that, when an objector is denied a positive alternative way of serving his country, he will prefer a prison sentence to performing a service which violates his deeply held convictions. This is a waste of human resources which could be made to further the cause of peace and development through alternative civilian service which conscientious objectors are not only ready but eager to perform. There have, in fact, been reports of conscientious objectors refusing military service in some 48 states, including 18 developing countries. Recognizing the dilemmas posed by compulsory military service, both to the individual and to the state, 25 states have granted at least partial legal recognition to conscientious objection, and 12 others have provided informal administrative means for exempting all or some objectors from military service. Though in no country does the number of objectors exceed a small fraction of the eligible conscripts called to military service each year, the numbers have substantially increased during the last five years with the rising interest in the subject throughout the world.\footnote{We derive the information in this paragraph from a comparative study published in the December 1972 issue of the Review of the International Commission of Jurists. This study was undertaken with the assistance of jurists and scholars from many countries to supplement the report prepared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We respectfully commend it to the attention of members of the Commission. While every attempt was made to acquire accurate current information, it is possible that the study may contain some inaccuracies of fact. The International Commission of Jurists would be grateful for any corrections which might be brought to their attention.}

The issue of conscientious objection cannot be considered merely as a national or regional question; it involves fundamental principles of human rights enunciated by the Universal Declaration and arises in every region of the world. Furthermore, we believe that it is particularly appropriate that the United Nations, a body dedicated to the achievement of world peace, should give recognition to those who stand for peace as the basis of individual conduct. For all these reasons we urge the Commission on Human Rights, at its 29th session, to recommend to the United Nations General Assembly the adoption of a declaration recognizing that conscientious objection to military service is a valid expression of the right of freedom of conscience, and that conscientious objectors should have alternative means of service to the community available to them.

Consultation on Human Rights and the Churches in Latin America
San Juan, Puerto Rico, 25-28 February 1973

I. Introduction
Latin America is privileged to have one of the broadest and most complete declarations of human rights and one of the most advanced systems for protecting the fundamental rights of the human person. Our countries' constitutions are among the most liberal in terms of the protection which they afford citizens against the abuse of power by the established authorities or by those whose power is derived from other sources such as their economic, social or religious positions. Our basic legal systems stipulate free access to the courts, a free press, freedom of movement within and without the country, religious freedom, etc.

Yet despite the guarantees all these formal instruments provide for the protection of the rights of Latin America citizens, our continent is experiencing profound anguish engendered by the violation of the basic rights necessary for a dignified life. As Christians, pastors, leaders of Latin American churches, we have witnessed the hunger, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, expulsion from their homelands and the death of our brothers and neighbours. We have
experienced the lack of basic, essential freedoms throughout the continent, such as freedom of expression and of the press, the inviolability of correspondence, and above all the right to adequate legal defence.

As we review the situation of human rights in our countries and in the whole continent today, we see a very sad picture. Situations of brutal repression that we had known for some time in our continent, but which we thought had improved, in fact continue to deteriorate. What we had imagined as improvements were in many cases simply the application of more subtle, more sophisticated schemes of repression which continue at levels of brutality which would be unacceptable even during open warfare.

In the name of 'order', our governments -most of them self-declared - decree laws which annul our constitutions and take from the people those few remedies which it has left to defend itself.

In country after country we find a reign of terror produced by unjust national and international structures and imposed either directly, through the police or the military, or indirectly through para-police groups, by the authorities.

The attempts of the authorities, through the mass communications media, to convince the people that this is a normal state of affairs is resisted by courageous men and women who struggle relentlessly against this misrepresentation of the truth and this injustice. Many of them have been killed in the streets or torture chambers. Others have been separated from their families and expelled from their countries. Among them are to be found pastors, priests and laymen from our churches, men and women, who, motivated by the Gospel message, have had a vital faith in the future and have committed themselves seriously to their brothers and sisters in the conviction that as beings created by God and in his image, everyone deserves a dignified life.

We cannot avoid expressing our solidarity with those who struggle for justice, liberation and against all forms of oppression. Nevertheless mere expressions of solidarity are no longer sufficient. Thus we have met to see what we can and must do together with and through our churches to ensure better protection of all men on this continent.

**II Sensitization or conscientization of the churches with respect to the violation of human rights**

From the conversations and exchange of views we have had during these days it has become clear that not only is there a great ignorance in large sectors of the Christian churches of the human rights theoretically approved of by the majority of the world's nations and even incorporated in some of their constitutions; there also predominates a deplorable insensitivity to their frequent violations near to or far from the churches' own communities.

Due to their long-standing identification with the existing order and their quasi-sacralization of it, the Christian churches very frequently seek to justify in the name of 'law and order' and 'peace' as ultimate values the repression or even the annihilation suffered by those who attempt to change the predominant system or to modify some of its conditions.

One of the saddest results of the deterioration of human rights in Latin America is the appearance in many of our countries of an even greater number of people persecuted or made refugees or prisoners for their political views. The use of torture has become an integral part of the repressive policies of many of our governments.
This demands an intensive and sustained effort on the part of ecclesiastical authorities, educational agencies, and ecumenical organs to call attention to this situation, to create among Christians a profound and permanent sensitivity to abuse, and to mobilize them in defense of life and human rights, both of which are dangerously threatened at the moment.

A. Through international bodies
1. It is recognized that the resources of various bodies, the WCC among them, to reach congregations and even church leaders are very limited.

2. Without furthering the illusion that these bodies can completely overcome that limitation, it is recommended that their directors and staffs initiate a new stage in their relationship with Christians in Latin America and that they seek to develop, particularly with the churches, a pastoral labor through more direct personal contacts and publications of a simpler and more popular character.

3. It is emphasized as well that the task of sensitization and conscientization cannot be reduced to verbal teachings or to the written press, but that it acquires particular significance and vigour through concrete actions and decisions (e.g., the Programme to Combat Racism of the WCC).

4. In this same line, the need to intensify the conscientization of churches who financially support projects and programmes in our continent is also affirmed in order that they might be better able to understand and to interpret the problems and necessities of Latin America.

B. Through national and local resources
With regard to the sensitization and conscientization of congregations and other ecclesiastical and para-ecclesiastical groups, it is recognized that there exist multiple national and local resources, and that there are no limits to their creative and imaginative utilization. Among the suggestions made, we can mention the following:

1. Programmes of conscientization for ecclesiastical leaders (bishops, pastors, lay leaders, etc.) through institutes, conferences, literature, etc.

2. Taking into account the fact that an immense proportion of the Latin American masses know neither how to read nor how to write, attempts should be made, in addition to the publication of popular literature, to use other forms of communication (cinema, theatre, radio, and other audio-visual methods) which could reach communities and social sectors which are not literate.

3. No conscientization is more rapid and effective than that produced by personal encounters with the crude reality of the violation of human rights (be it through a visit to a jail, an interview with someone who has been tortured, or the discovery of the internal drama of a slum.) In this sense, there ought to be organized ecumenical teams which could come to know concrete situations of violation of human rights, to serve and reflect in the midst of them, and to become, in turn, conscientization agents in their respective communities.

4. The use of speakers particularly gifted to proclaim the Christian message in its entirety (which includes the social dimension of the Gospel); and/or the distribution of Christian literature which, as do the writings of Dom Helder Camara or Martin Luther King, expound that message with such vigour and fidelity, ought to be intensified.

5. The preparation of a modern Protestant catechism which would serve the Protestant Churches of Latin America in their reinterpretation of the Gospel for our time is recommended. (Project approved by CELADEC.)
6. The celebration this year of the 25th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights should be accompanied by publications, courses, conferences, etc. which would demonstrate to our peoples its significance as well as its violations.
7. The creation and training of small teams or groups to perform a pastoral and prophetic ministry within and outside the churches are suggested.

Statement on European Security and Cooperation

A. I. The Central Committee of the WCC, meeting in Utrecht, Netherlands, 13-23 August 1972, welcomes the evident signs of the relaxation of tension in Europe indicated by such developments as:

a) the treaties of the Federal Republic of Germany with the Soviet Union and Poland;
b) the Four Power Agreement on Berlin;
c) the agreement on traffic control between the two German states;
d) the progress made in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT);
e) the negotiations currently under way between the CSSR and the Federal German Republic for the successful outcome of which the World Council of Churches is praying.

2. As a next step in the relaxation of tension, the Central Committee welcomes the proposals for an all European Conference which would genuinely seek to facilitate security and cooperation.

3. The importance of solid agreements that would lessen the danger of war within and originating in Europe is obvious and not for Europe only.

B. I. Within Europe the proposed conference has been understood to involve the following significant aims:

a) the maintenance of the present political balance in Europe;
b) mutually balanced force reduction;
c) recognition of the territorial status quo;
d) elimination of political tensions;
e) examination of possible fields of cooperation.

2. Progress towards these aims would encourage the transition from the military confrontation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries to new forms of cooperation. Depending on vigour and sincerity in the search for such cooperation, new and more hopeful patterns of relationship could emerge.

3. The cooperation that would be essential should include, inter alia:

a) agreement on an acceptable method of supervision of military forces;
b) agreement on the rights and obligations of European states under international law;
c) agreement on cultural exchanges to improve mutual understanding;
d) agreement on the understanding and implementation of civil and religious rights.

C. 1. Outside Europe Christians affirm the desirability of progress in understanding within Europe, believing that peaceful security in Europe is essential to world security.

But, as a representative and worldwide body of Christians we would insist that European security and cooperation must be seen in a global context. There is widespread and understandable fear, especially within the developing nations, that if the major purpose of European detente is to secure an even more powerful Europe, there could follow in a new guise new attempts at still further increasing European domination in other areas of the world.

2. The acid test is the stance of Europe with regard to world affairs. A stronger, more united Europe could be of immense value for justice, order and peace in the world- or it could introduce a new and dangerous factor.

78 Adopted on the recommendation of CCIA by the WCC Central Committee, meeting in Utrecht, Netherlands, 13-23 August 1972.
3. Even in the contemporary situation, both possibilities are present. The World Council of Churches has consistently appealed for more generous support, both by trade and aid, for the developing nations. It has emphasized the necessity for equal partnership between nations. A stronger Europe could accept more readily these positive responsibilities. Fear of potential dangers should not hide from us the great potentiality for good. Nor is this simply an appeal to the 'benevolence' of Europe. Without social justice in the world, there is no lasting security for Europe.

4. European security must be understood in the context of the collective security of all nations. It implies the cessation of the export of European problems and tensions to other parts of the world, as this would threaten the security of other countries. Nor shall it include the maintenance and pursuance of the present trade in arms and strategic materials as this would perpetuate an unjust international system which both generates and maintains poverty and insecurity.

D. The churches in Europe should continue to give serious and informed consideration to these questions being assured of the full cooperation of the WCC and its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

But the churches have additional responsibility and opportunity: to develop between themselves models of cooperation and understanding.

Peace Breaks Out in the Sudan

Peace is at last a reality for the people of Sudan. Following the ratification of the agreement between the representatives of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Sudan and the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) in Addis Ababa in March, a ceasefire has taken place. Energies that have been devoted to war for more than 16 years are at last turning to the construction of a new, just and richer Sudan.

Ten months of patient negotiation have brought an end to the bitterly fought war, which has involved constant disruption and instability for the people of the South. The burden has been a heavy one. Little development work has taken place. Few schools, hospitals or clinics have been able to function. There has been recurrent famine which has cost many lives. In addition, some 200,000 refugees have fled into the neighbouring countries of Zaire, Uganda and Ethiopia.

Small wonder then that there was joy on the faces of African ambassadors in Addis Ababa when the two parties came to them with their agreement. Mr Diallo Telli, Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity, gave expression to this in his 'salute' not only to 'this great victory for Sudan, her people, her Government and her President, but also, and above all, to the new era (the agreement) signifies for the peaceful resolution of disputes within Africa.'

The peace agreement makes far-reaching proposals which involve movement by the government and the SSLM. The government has agreed that the Sudan should not be an Islamic republic; freedom of religion and conscience are recognized in the agreement. The southerners have given up the idea of secession.

Already three of the Commissions envisaged by the agreement have been set up and are at work. They cover military matters, repatriation and resettlement of those who fled into the bush or over the borders. Steps are now under way to group the three southern provinces into an autonomous region, with its own assembly, as part of a unified Sudan with a federal constitution.

The regional assembly, headquartered in Juba, will have control over economic, social and political life in the south, while the central government continues to look after foreign affairs and external defence.

Provision is also made for a massive reconstruction and development programme to improve agriculture, establish health and education services and create employment opportunities. It is hoped the refugees will soon start to return, though many people inside the Sudan think it could be several months before this will happen. The legacy of bitterness still runs strong among some.

In Khartoum, the mood is good. When Major-General Joseph Lagu, commander of the SSLM forces, came to Khartoum after the ratification, he was unsure of his reception. But on arrival at the airport he found large crowds of former friends and well-wishers to greet him. An unofficial welcoming committee of his old classmates in military academy was also on hand to welcome him back.

An Open Letter on Human Rights

Many of the member churches of the World Council of Churches, and some who are not, are very concerned about the denial of human rights throughout the world. Last year the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands sent a letter to Dr Eugene Carson Blake, the General Secretary of the WCC, asking his advice on how they could give expression to their concern for human rights in the Sudan and in Eastern Europe. In the following letter Dr Blake gives his reply.

General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Utrecht, Netherlands

Dear Friends,

Some time ago I received your letter which expressed concern about the neglect of human rights in Eastern Europe and the Sudan. I have already expressed my gratefulness for your letter but asked for some patience because one of the countries you were concerned about was in the midst of negotiations to end its internal strife.

Now that a very positive settlement has been reached in the Sudan, your question about that country can be answered easily. Our Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service has a programme for the rehabilitation of the Southern Sudan in which we can all help to strengthen the peace which we were allowed to help build. I apologize that the involvement of the World Council of Churches in the Sudan negotiations had to be kept absolutely confidential for a long time, but the outcome will make you appreciate that an organization like ours often contributes best in cases of human rights by playing its quiet role behind the scenes.

Your other question pertains to Eastern Europe, and you ask what your church can do. My answer is the one the World Council has always given:

a) the churches are an important channel for reliable information;

b) the ecumenical movement offers us a great opportunity for visitation and exchange; and

c) each church must protest as effectively as it can and at the proper address where it feels conscience-bound so to do.
Allow me to work this out in some detail. Reliable information about church life, its strengths and hardships in Eastern Europe is rare. Most people in the West and in the two-thirds world have only a partial image of the life of God's people in socialist countries. They are often victims of cold war propaganda, repeating stories from the worst period of Stalinist oppression, or they are confused by enthusiastic reports about the strength of faith in a particular church and so believe that all is well. Others are so ideologically biased that they can see no wrong in certain countries. I am often astounded at how many people can ignore the amazing differences between the religious situation in the nine socialist countries of Europe: a sign of the disastrous effects of the formation of isolated political blocks.

I am afraid that an effective contribution by our churches to the amelioration of human rights in Eastern Europe will only be possible if we build it on the solid base of a much more reliable and differentiated strategy of information. Churches who believe that there is persecution of Christians in some Eastern European countries should be willing to pay the price of such an information service. There are enough reliable centres specializing in Eastern European studies to make it possible for congregations to know more than just the appalling incidents of religious persecution. The many restrictions on churches in Eastern Europe make it difficult to ask these churches to publish more about their life themselves, but studies made and reported in the West can help to lay a solid base for real knowledge, understanding and effective help. However, information is only the first step.

It seems to me that the most important help we can give our member churches in Eastern Europe, as well as to other groups in these countries, like the Jews, is to take more seriously our ecumenical opportunities. If we do not really get to know the churches in socialist countries, our expressions of critical concern become cheap and can only be understood in the countries concerned as anti-communist, i.e. political/ideological, declarations.

The great gift of the ecumenical movement is that, for the first time after a long history of alienation and isolation, we can now get to know each other. A number of churches have understood this and have built up a relationship with a fellow-church in the other part of Europe. Common planning in national councils of churches makes it possible to relate to different traditions in different countries. In Eastern Europe such relationships are deeply appreciated, and Western churches have learned more than they expected from their Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant brethren in the East.

I express the hope that in the Dutch Council of Churches such a programme of regular communication, visitation and exchange can be established.

This leads me to a second point. Relations with the churches in Eastern Europe- and hopefully with Christians in the People's Republic of China- have become even more necessary because Marxist thinking is becoming so important in the Western churches. Sometimes it seems that of all secular philosophies Marxism is becoming the most popular and persuasive among our people, especially among our young intellectuals. This development, however critically or positively we evaluate its existence, deserves much more serious attention in our churches than it usually receives. The theological reflection on Marxism is now a common necessity for all churches, under whatever form of government they live and witness. If such study were not to involve churches which live in socialist lands, we would deprive ourselves of the experience and witness of churches who live and work in countries where secularization is not only a cultural process but a governmental programme. We would do well to listen much more carefully to whatever contribution such churches can make to us.
I therefore hope that your church, and other Dutch churches within the framework of the Dutch Council of Churches, will reflect on this and take action. The World Council’s programme of Dialogue with People of Other Living Faiths and Ideologies would also greatly benefit from such an initiative and provide a framework in which it can be shared and deepened.

We can base our statements and actions on human rights on such an effective and broad contact with the churches in Eastern Europe, and within the framework of a new concern for Christian reflection on Marxism. I do not have to go into detail about human rights in each country of Eastern Europe. The situation in Poland is totally different from that in the DDR, and Yugoslavia shows a very different picture from that of the Soviet Union. Presently they all have one thing in common, however: the Christian faith is deemed irreconcilable with Marxist doctrine and therefore church and state cannot but live in constant tension, in spite of the official separation of church and state and in spite of a proclaimed policy of non-interference. In each country, the Christian churches live under severe restrictions, at least from a Western point of view, even if these churches are made up of loyal citizens of their country.

Religious freedom is guaranteed in all Eastern constitutions, but the interpretation of such freedom differs greatly. What is regarded as basic for freedom in the West is often forbidden in the East. Free publications, youth work, social work, open evangelism, freedom to establish organizations, to build meeting facilities, schools, monasteries or seminaries; freedom to criticize the government publicly, to travel abroad or be host to international conferences, are often severely curtailed. In some countries more is allowed than in others, but everywhere restrictions exist and are often crippling to the full life and witness of the churches.

And although a hostile Western press may often exaggerate the number of really persecuted Christians and the fate befalling them, there are too many open letters sent by Protestant and Orthodox Christians alike, too many people who are sent to labour-camps or kept in psychiatric institutions, too many churches and monasteries closed, to believe that there are not regular actions carried out against minorities which live from sources other than the prevailing ideology. In this connection one has to mention the Jewish community. Their situation is in many ways comparable to that of the Christians but made even more difficult because of the desire to maintain their ethnic identity.

The World Council of Churches is not unaware of this situation and knows that many of its general pronouncements on human rights are as much applicable in Eastern Europe as in South-East Asia, North America, Southern Africa and Latin America.

Some of our member churches, especially concerned about such situations, have, after carefully establishing the facts through study and direct contacts, made contact directly with the embassies of specific countries in their own land. Such direct contacts with representatives of governments concerned or contact through one’s own government in the country concerned are certainly more effective than requests or complaints to our member churches in Eastern European countries.

We must ask in each case: Do we really help by public protest, or should we make a non-public approach? Several of our leaders and staff members have made private demarches to government officials in socialist countries in order to advocate greater freedom for the churches. It must be remembered that we have often found that such approaches are more successful than public declarations.
The World Council of Churches will continue to enlarge our common concepts of human rights, to press governments for the acceptance and application of these principles. It will do all it can to bring and to keep as many churches as possible in a fellowship which facilitates common enrichment and correction; act as a centre where the member churches can inform each other, and speak when the occasion requires. Member churches can base their own speaking and action on such statements and may well be more specific than the World Council can be.

There are two more points I would like to make.

There are many people in our constituency who plead for equal treatment in all cases of discrimination. They would like to protest in exactly the same terms to a country where public opinion is a mighty force as to others where public opinion has little influence. They would like to use the same language in countries where churches are regarded as an important part of the electorate and a strong moral force as in countries where churches are hardly tolerated. Even if churches get into major trouble when the World Council criticizes their government, they feel that the World Council should speak there exactly in the same way as in countries where churches are allowed or even encouraged to make their constructive and critical contribution.

I know that a policy in which the difference of situations is disregarded may help the public image of the World Council of Churches, but I am not willing to pay such a price for our image. More important than the image of the World Council is the quality of our fellowship and a genuine fellowship expresses itself through differentiated approaches according to the real needs of those suffering discrimination. In the ecumenical movement respectful attention for different cases- and consequently for different means of improvement is essential.

All this should not lead us to silence in cases in which we must speak, but it may well lead us to a different way of speaking. We may criticize the one, where we plead with the other, or protest publicly in one case while we try to persuade behind the scenes in another.

Last but not least: We must be very careful not to create the impression that we regard the situation in Eastern Europe in isolation or even that we give it automatic priority. Your letter asks specifically what your church can do for people who claim a violation of their human rights in Eastern Europe. I am sure that in the Netherlands you will have received criticism on that choice. Why not choose torture in Brazil, arbitrary justice with regard to black Americans, political prisoners in Indonesia, Iran or North Vietnam? Why not choose the situation of Indians in East Africa, of the Aborigines in Australia or of the Eskimos in Canada? Or why not communists in Greece or liberals in Paraguay?

I do not doubt for one moment that your genuine interest goes out to all people who ask for support against discrimination, but we must say this clearly time and time again.

I have tried personally always to put the general problem first. In my public letter to U Thant, dated 19 April 1970, I asked, in the name of the World Council of Churches, that the United Nations do everything it can to provide the Human Rights Commission with the power to investigate complaints about human rights and to apply them. In that letter I cited eleven countries in all continents and the different political blocs from which we have received complaints and requests for help. Again, in my address to the American Ecumenical Witness Conference on Vietnam on 15 January 1972, I mentioned a large number of countries by name, so making clear that we are not singling out one political system or any one particular country as the most guilty one.
There are others in our constituency who apparently feel that churches should protest more strongly against non-Christian governments than against fellow Christians in positions of defence of a Christian civilization. With them I disagree. We shall continue to speak up for better justice everywhere but we cannot lose sight of our primary responsibility over against those who deny men their rights and do it in the name of our faith.

That is why I hold the ecumenical Programme to Combat Racism to be so important. Through the evil of white racism millions of people are denied their dignity and justice. I know that your Synod is still discussing the extent of your participation in this programme. Already a good number of the members of your Church have participated in it personally and financially. They have contributed to a new credibility of the churches in Africa. The positive involvement of the churches in the Sudan negotiations would have been impossible without the Programme to Combat Racism. They have also contributed to a new credibility with many outside the Church. I would not be amazed if our attitude - and consequently our action - against white racism which is perpetrated by misled Christianism political power, proves to be an important factor in favour of our being head and heeded by atheist governments when we plead for full human rights of Christians and non-Christians alike in their countries.

Respectfully yours,

EUGENE C- BLAKE
General Secretary
Geneva, April 1972

WCC General Secretary's plea on Human Rights to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Dear Mr Secretary-General,

I have taken this unusual way of addressing you because of the increasing deterioration of the cause of human rights and dignity to which cause you and the United Nations are clearly committed as are the churches associated in the membership of the World Council of Churches.

In these last weeks and months, a stream of documented pleas for justice and redress have come to me in increasing numbers from men and women who claim their civil or religious rights are being violated in so many nations of the world that I find myself unable to keep silent.

The nations where alleged violations of basic civil, religious and human rights are cited include but are not limited to:

Angola   Brazil   Greece   Mozambique   USA
Czechoslovakia   Guatemala   Rhodesia   USSR
Lesotho   South Africa

The reasons justifying police cruelty and arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement of laws given by the various governments are generally the same:

'Ve must protect our nation against anarchy or subversion', sometimes alleging foreign support of such subversion. The social and economic systems and the political-ideological allegiances of the various governments complained against over the whole spectrum of states, including West and East, North and South.
Competition by the great powers to compete for spheres of influence amongst the lesser powers tend to create the necessity of 'exceptional regimes of emergency', especially in the former colonial areas.

But even within the big powers or 'rich nations' arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement and enactment of laws seems to be increasing. It is hard to resist the conclusion that there is a general increase of the use of force and violence by governments, quite unrelated to their various traditions of law and freedom, their present material wealth or ideological allegiances.

Can you, Mr Secretary General, take an initiative through the UN Commission on Human Rights or otherwise to resist this apparently increasing tendency on the part of governments to act politically against their own citizens in the name of law and order? Is it possible that the great powers would agree to restrain their own tendencies to support regimes with whom they are sympa the tic when these regimes violate the standards of civil and religious liberty to which the member nations of the United Nations are committed? Is it possible that the great powers themselves will examine their own practices in this regard?

For I judge that any hope for world order and the peaceful establishment of greater justice within and among the nations depends most of all upon self-restraint in the use of their power by governments and their agencies.

I assure you, Mr Secretary General, of full support of any initiative you may be able to take. I have sent a copy of this letter to His Holiness Pope Paul VI.

Respectfully yours,
(Signed)  Eugene Carson Blake
General Secretary
World Council of Churches
17 April 1970

INDOCHINA
STATEMENT ON VIETNAM

I. Introduction

A new year has just begun in Vietnam and each day new deaths and suffering are added to the tragic toll of the last twenty years. The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches is impelled to plead once more for peace in that unhappy land.

Ever since 1954, the World Council itself, in a succession of statements and appeals and direct representations to all the parties concerned, has expressed its concern for peace in Vietnam.

It is almost two years since the government of the United States began to change its policy in Vietnam from that of seeking a military solution to the search for a negotiated settlement. The government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has responded positively to the changed American policy by agreeing to engage in negotiations. In general the scale of the conflict has been reduced. For many months official conversations on Vietnam have been held in Paris.

80 Adopted on the recommendation of CCIA by the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, 16-20 February 1970.
between the four parties involved in the war. Last summer when the Central Committee of our Council was in session, it refrained from making any statement about Vietnam because it was judged that such a statement might disturb delicate negotiations on the basic differences still to be resolved.

II. General Recommendations
As six months have passed and no discernible progress in the Paris official conversations has emerged, nor has the danger of a possible re-escalation disappeared, the Executive Committee of the WCC addresses the following appeals to all the parties involved:

1. We welcome and support the appeal of the UN Secretary-General for 'the emergence of a broad-based national government in Saigon that has the confidence and allegiance of most factions in South Vietnam' and commend it to all the parties concerned.

2. We also urge that accelerated steps be taken which will create conditions that would lay the foundation of peace by and for the Vietnamese in their country. Such steps should include as a minimum a determined stand against any re-escalation of the military activities and against acts that could lead to it, and against any actions that might spread or widen war activities in adjacent countries (such as is the case presently in Laos).

III. Specific Appeals to the Different Parties
Besides the general appeals we also address the following specific appeals to the four parties involved:

1 To the USA
To refrain from methods of warfare which by long-term damage to the soil and vegetation further endanger the life of human beings, and from destruction of villages and from 'search and destroy' missions.

2 To South Vietnam
To provide immediately for fuller political and religious freedom and ensure that prisoners are treated with due regard to internationally established standards.

3 To the Provisional Revolutionary Government
To refrain from acts of reprisal and bombings against civilian population.

4 To the Democratic Republic of Vietnam
To release lists of US and allied prisoners and show to the satisfaction of world conscience that it acts towards them in accordance with international standards of humanitarian law.

The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches also appeals to all peoples to exert their influence on their governments to seek, in all possible ways, peace in Vietnam.

Message from the Presidents of the World Council of Churches for Human Rights Day
10 December 1968

1968 has been a year dedicated to the commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights- a time not only to remember but to act. In this year the followers of Christ and indeed all men of goodwill again stress the need to move towards a responsible society in which dignity and respect are recognized and observed. Yet violations of the basic rights of man continue not only through racial discrimination, apartheid, arbitrary arrests, detention without
trial, curtailment of religious freedom, and economic injustice and imbalance nationally and internationally, but also through violence, terror, slavery, starvation, even massacre.

To remove these deplorable conditions requires the mobilization of the total constructive and curative resources of mankind in effective action - locally, nationally and internationally.

The Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches underlined once more the need to ratify and give effect to the international covenants and other instruments on human rights. The Assembly did so, because Christian understanding of man recognizes as basic the dignity and equality of all men everywhere.

We therefore ask you to press forward the struggle against apathy and not to rest until governments have indeed ratified such instruments on human rights, and we urge you to find ways to help your governments and peoples to put into practice the standards set forth in these instruments.

We urge every congregation and Christian to express their Christian concern for their fellow-men in concrete ways so that:

- each person without distinction may enjoy respect for his dignity as a human being and equal opportunity in all fields of endeavour - cultural, religious, social, economic and political - conducive to fully human existence;
- each person may profess, practise and propagate his religion or belief without external coercion or persecution. This includes the right freely and responsibly to choose and manifest one's religion or belief without the fear of political, economic or social disability;
- each person may be free from all forms of racial discrimination, especially policies of legalized racialism which constitute most flagrant abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- each person may enjoy basic social rights such as nourishment, medical services, education, work and social security;
- each person may have a right to protection from invasion of privacy and threat to personal integrity, especially in this age of technological manipulation;
- each married couple may be free to have the knowledge and means according to the teaching of their church and conscience, to plan their families in order to safeguard the quality of life of the family as a whole;
- each person may travel and freely communicate beyond national boundaries with people of all continents, creeds and traditions to create better understanding and human fellowship;
- each person may be free from the fear of persecution which forces him to flee from home and homeland; and existing refugees may be allowed to return to their homes without fear, or be assured of the right to seek and enjoy asylum in the country of their choice;
− each person may enjoy freedom of thought and conscience, peaceful assembly and association, opinion and expression, including freedom to hold opinions, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers;
− each person and association may be assured of adequate legal safeguards for the protection of their rights, including the right of petition and protest before appropriate international organizations when their liberties and rights are infringed upon and when all available domestic remedies have been exhausted;
− all people may have a right to exercise government by consent including the right freely to choose their form of government and to elect their officials; and to develop their particular way of life, giving adequate consideration to the legitimate concerns of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups.

We realize that we are far away from a world in which these basic rights are accepted and safeguarded. Yet we are not discouraged. The Gospel of Christ renews our hope. We are therefore impelled to work day by day to the end that human rights and fundamental freedoms may be fully respected and observed.

The Presidents of the World Council of Churches:

(Patriarch) GERMAN of SERBIA- Belgrade, Yugoslavia
(Bishop) HANNS LIUE- Hannover, Germany
(Rev. Dr) D. T. NILES - Atchuvely, Ceylon
(Rev. Dr) ERNEST A. PAYNE- Pitsford, England
(Rev. Dr) John C. SMITH- New York, USA
(Rev. Dr) W. A. VISSER 'T HOOFT- Geneva, Switzerland
(Bishop) A. H. ZULU- Eshowe, South Africa

Statement on religious liberty


On the recommendation of the Policy Reference Committee, and after amendment on the floor, it was VOTED to adopt the following Statement on Religious Liberty:

1. Mankind is threatened by many forces which curtail or deny freedom. There is accordingly urgent need to reinvigorate efforts to ensure that every person has opportunity for the responsible exercise of religious freedom.
2. Christians see religious liberty as a consequence of God's creative work, of his redemption of man in Christ and his calling of men into his service. God's redemptive dealing with men is not coercive. Accordingly human attempts by legal enactment or by pressure of social custom to coerce or to eliminate faith are violations of the fundamental ways of God with men. The freedom which God has given in Christ implies a free response to God's love, and the responsibility to serve fellow-men at the point of deepest need.
3. Holding a distinctive Christian basis for religious liberty, we regard this right as fundamental for men everywhere.

4. We reaffirm the Declaration on Religious Liberty adopted by the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council in August-September 1948, and hold to its provisions. We recognize the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations in December 1948, as an important instrument in promoting respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. Although freedoms of every kind are inter-related, religious liberty may be considered as a distinctive human right, which all men may exercise no matter what their faith. The article on religious freedom in the Universal Declaration is an acceptable standard, always provided that it be given a comprehensive interpretation. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

6. The recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family requires that the general standard here declared should be given explicit expression in every aspect of society. Without seeking to be inclusive, we illustrate as follows:

7. Freedom of thought, conscience and belief, even considered as inner freedom, requires freedom of access to reliable information.

8. Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, in public or in private and alone or in community with others, is essential to the expression of inner freedom.

(a) It includes freedom to worship according to one's chosen form, in public or in private.
(b) It includes freedom to teach, whether by formal or informal instruction as well as preaching with a view to propagating one's faith and persuading others to accept it.
(c) It includes freedom to practise religion or belief, whether by performance of acts of mercy or by the expression in word or deed of the implications of belief in social, economic and political matters, both domestic and international.
(d) It includes freedom of observance by following religious customs or by participating in religious rites in the family or in public meeting.

9. Religious liberty includes freedom to change one's religion or belief without consequent social, economic and political disabilities. Implicit in this right is the right freely to maintain one's belief or disbelief without external coercion or disability.

10. The exercise of religious liberty involves other human rights. The Universal Declaration proclaims, among others, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; the right to freedom of opinion and expression including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers; the prior right of parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children; freedom to participate in choosing the desired form of government and in freely electing officials; freedom from the retroactive application of penal law; and freedom to leave and to return to one's country and to seek asylum elsewhere.

11. The freedom with which Christ has set us free calls forth responsibility for the rights of others. The civil freedom which we claim in the name of Christ must be freely available for all to exercise responsibily. It is the corresponding obligation of governments and of society to ensure the exercise of these civil rights without discrimination. It is for the
churches in their own life and witness recognizing their own past failures in this regard to play their indispensable role in promoting the realization of religious liberty for all men.

NOTE.-The religious liberty defined in this Statement should be exercised in accord with the Report on Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty, received and commended to the churches by the Third Assembly on December 4, 1961.

The following points were made in the discussion:

Professor Berkhof proposed an amendment of paragraph 3 to read as follows: Holding a distinctive Christian basis for religious liberty, we regard this right as fundamental for men everywhere.

The amendment was approved.

The Metropolitan of Carthage proposed that the Statement should contain a statement to the effect that religious liberty should be exercised in accord with the report on Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty adopted by the Assembly on December 4, 1961. After discussion, it was voted to place such a paragraph at the end of the statement, the exact drafting to be left to the officers of the Assembly in consultation with the Metropolitan of Carthage.

The Metropolitan of Carthage moved to amend paragraph 10, line 10, to read as follows: application of penal law; freedom to leave and to return to one's country and to seek asylum elsewhere.

The amendment was seconed and voted.

Human rights and religious liberty


56. The protection of human rights by international instrument has grown in more recent development to be a fundamental concern of international law and order. It has been the constant endeavour of the CCIA to urge governments to implement the standards proclaimed in the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and to assist in the work, yet to be completed, of elaborating covenants by which all states will undertake to assure civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. International efforts to advance the status of women are also followed with care. The Committee approves this work and asks the CCIA to continue with it.

57. The position of man in society, as defined by declarations and conventions on human rights in international law, can be more effectively secured by the creation of international safeguards for the observance of those rights. This will open for individuals direct access to international institutions against infringements upon these liberties by their own governments. The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms has created such institutions and these are working well. The CCIA could profitably explore similar developments in other regions, always provided that such international standards as have been recognized shall not be lowered.

58. As all peoples of the world rise to a growing consciousness of the foundations for a just and progressive human society, guided by the moral principles of freedom, justice and
equal rights for all, governments still responsible for dependent territories should accept—as some already have—some basic code of human rights as legally binding upon the exercise of power.

59. In the present time the improvement of economic conditions and of means of communication, migration and cultural exchange opens new ways of contact and co-operation between peoples of all continents, creeds and traditions. Freer movement may carry with it a better understanding of peoples and may help to surmount old prejudices. There may arise, however, the danger of new racial ten-sions, since the evolution of social groups to higher status and greater freedom may arouse fresh opposition by formerly privileged groups. One must hope for the establishment of healthy communi-cation between men from various countries and continents in the spirit of a common human fellowship without distinction of ethnic origin, race, colour, sex or creed. Christians living together in the common brotherhood of the family of God must oppose racial dis-crimination in all its forms as contrary to Christian doctrine. They must work as individuals and as communities for the abolition of racial privileges and injustice, and thereby bear witness to the Christian faith.

60. The growing together of the peoples of the world, the ex-changes and migration between various countries and continents, lead to a new confrontation of religions. In many parts of the earth rena­scent non-Christian religions exercise a great influence upon the social life of the nations. Christians living in a minority in these countries may be confronted with the resurgence of the concept of an established religion or with endeavours to form the social life of a country after the traditions of a non-Christian religion. This calls for a re-assertion and rethinking of the principles of religious freedom which the World Council of Churches has stated in former declara­tions (Amsterdam Declaration on Religious Liberty, 1948). The churches will benefit in their future work by actions on religious liberty taken by this Third Assembly, notably the report on 'Chris­tian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty' and the Statement on Religious Liberty (see pages 159-60).

61. The fundamental implications of religious freedom must be respected within every system of government and within every sys­tem of relationship between Church and State, in a country with a state religion as well as in a secular state.

62. The CCIA is commended for its work since the Evanston Assembly. It is hoped that the preceding paragraphs will be helpful to it as it goes about its difficult but highly important mission in the next period of the activities of the World Council of Churches.

Dilemmas and opportunities


The Report of the Assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference (Kuala Lumpur, May 1959) truly said: "A form of society and a programme of political action cannot be derived from the Gospel. But effective exercise of Christian responsibility in political life requires a knowledge of the concrete political realities and techniques, and the capacity to evaluate alternate possibilities in the light of the revealed purpose of God for man and society."
This means that the Church must seek to give pastoral guidance to Christians on important political issues, so as to stimulate sensitive awareness, to foster sympathetic understanding of the complex realities of the situation confronting the politicians, and to enable comment to be made or action taken before an issue has been decided. To do this some method of education in Christian citizenship should become part of the organizational structure of the Church. Where some such organization as a Commission on Social Responsibility or Department of Christian Citizenship functions as part of the regular activity of the Church, this pastoral guidance can be given. Machinery is thus provided for the systematic consideration of important issues, for direct contact with local churches, and for communication with political or industrial authorities. The work on Christian responsibility in national political problems of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society affiliated to the National Council of Churches of India, is one of the best examples of ecumenical action of this type. We must not despise organization, for it may facilitate more effective service. We believe that this form of organization within the structure of the Church, will enable us to keep continually before us this vital aspect of the fullness of the Gospel.

III. Religion and the State

There are innumerable patterns in the relation between religion and the State. The traditional European patterns of national or state churches may under some conditions be acceptable in the countries of their origin but they cannot be transplanted. Whatever their positive value, neither is desirable unless provision is made for the religious liberty of minorities, unless the Church can win freedom from control by the State in its own life and witness, and unless each national Church demonstrates its supranational character by maintaining close relations with churches in other countries.

In this report we are concerned primarily with the relations between religion and the State in the countries of rapid social change, countries which usually have not been traditionally Christian and which are in the process of nation building and therefore have to work out the relationship between religion and the State. Whether or not there is within these countries one dominant non-Christian religion, there is some measure of religious pluralism and large portions of the population have been secularized. In these countries Christians should work for the development of a State which is neutral as between the various religions represented in it. Sometimes this is called a "secular state," but this should be distinguished from a State which promotes "secularism," or which is based upon dogmatically secularist assumptions. Such a neutral or secular State should give encouragement to religion without providing special privileges to any one group.

There are two kinds of neutrality: one, of which India is an example, where the State considers religion as outside the sphere of its direct responsibility and does not interfere except to protect the right of every person to choose any religion or no religion; the other, of which Indonesia is typical, where the State concerns itself with the religious welfare of the people by directly promoting the several historic religions of the country. Both of these patterns have their own advantages and raise their own difficulties. The first easily tends to encourage that secularism which denies that religion
has any right to remind the State that it lives under the law of God; the second in practice tends to strengthen the religion of the majority. The temptation to interpret religious tolerance as recognition of the equality of all religions is strong in some countries, and it may limit the freedom of missionary religions like Christianity and in effect deny or limit the right of a man to change his religion. Christians should be aware of these dangers and should, in co-operation with others, be vigilant lest freedom of conscience be threatened.

In this context we are speaking of Christianity as one religion among others because the Christian Church does act as a religious institution, but it should be recognized that as a religion Christianity always remains under the judgment and inspiration of the revelation of God in Christ which transcends all human religious institutions and practices including those which are "Christian."

One essential test of the pattern of relationship between religion and the State is the provision which the State itself makes for freedom of religious expression. The kinds of expression which Christians emphasize cannot be separated from the freedom of citizens as citizens. For example, freedom of worship involves the more general freedom of assembly, and freedom to preach and to witness publicly to Christian truth is inherent in the more general freedom of speech and of the press which should be available to all citizens.

However, Christians have a special compulsion to work for religious liberty, since they already possess freedom in Christ which is the freedom to obey him in word and deed. The Christian as an individual and the Christian community are under obligation from the Gospel to claim freedom to worship and to witness. Christian obedience also involves prophetic criticism of the State. No constitutional provisions can fully guarantee to the Christian and the Church freedom to obey Christ. We can expect in the best ordered societies in a sinful world to have tensions and conflicts between Christians and the State. Our hope should be for the establishment of constitutional provisions for religious freedom, but we are under the commandment to witness and to act in obedience, to press for the substance of religious freedom and not merely for the legal form. When Christians say: "We must obey God rather than men," they often find themselves extending the range of freedom for themselves and for others. These things are not said to belittle the authority and power of the State under God in its own sphere. It is a providential instrument of order and justice and of the common welfare, and yet it is continually tempted to extend itself beyond its proper sphere, and when it does so, there is often an occasion for conflict between Christians and the State.

The religious freedom of which we speak should include at least the following elements. It should safeguard for the individual and for the religious community freedom of worship and of teaching within the community and freedom for the community to govern itself. It should also safeguard freedom of public witness, freedom to propagate the Gospel, and this implies recognition of the right of a person to change his religion. Also, religious freedom implies opportunity for the religious institution to acquire the material means for its existence and for its work. The soundness of this last requirement for religious liberty should not obscure the temptations which often cause churches or other religious institutions to ask too much for themselves. Pressure upon the State in the interests of
the Church's privileges has so often marred the record of the Church where it has been strong, that we should be on guard against this temptation while we ask for freedom and opportunity to do its work. Not only should it be reminded continually that this work is an expression of its obedience to Christ; it should also be reminded of the many ways in which it has used the name of Christ to advance the special interests of Christians as one part of the community. Also, the Church should remember that God can work through it even when it is deprived of the external opportunities which seem so essential.

How and why should Christians in a religiously pluralistic society cooperate with non-Christians? This is an important question in every area considered in this study. Christians should and do work within religiously mixed political parties and other associations such as trade unions. Christians and non-Christians belong together in their communities and face the same necessities of life. They often share common goals and concern for the same values. Frequently sensitivity to the same human values is a consequence of Christian influence on the culture but this is not the only factor. Such shared goals and values have other sources in human experience under the providence of God. The problem is that the significance of such co-operation is often given in a grudging or patronizing spirit. Co-operation with non-Christians, whether they are the adherents of other religions or are without any religious affiliation, should be governed by respect for them as persons, respect for the sincere conviction and integrity of spirit that we find in them. Christians can learn from them, not only because they may have special knowledge and experience for which Christian insight is no substitute, but also because Christians can often be corrected by the response of outsiders to their ways of understanding and implementing their faith. Every group needs to see itself as outsiders see it. Indeed, often the rejection of Christianity by their neighbours may be in part caused by sins and failures within the Christian community which obscure the truth of the Gospel.

Christian responsibility to witness to the Gospel is never suspended, but this does not mean that occasions of co-operation with non-Christians should be used to bring pressure upon or to manipulate neighbours and fellow workers. Such a practice would be self-defeating, but even more, it would be a sin against the integrity of other persons.

IV. Christian Citizenship and Politics

We have already emphasized the fact of Christian political responsibility. Even efforts to escape from political responsibility have political consequences. Inaction may itself be a form of political action.

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**Work being done on religious liberty**

*Work being done on religious liberty, in: Minutes and reports of the eleventh meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Nyborg Strand, Denmark, August 21-29, 1958, Geneva [1958], p. 80-86.*
This paper, prepared by Officers of the CCIA, is designed to give a description, in general terms, of the work which is being done in the field of religious liberty. The first part of this paper enumerates the various methods and procedures that have been found generally useful when reports are received about violations of religious liberty. The second part deals with ways in which the churches and the CCIA are endeavouring to secure constitutional safeguards for religious liberty.

I. Methods and Procedures

In the many situations when violations of religious liberty are taking place, remedial action can be taken through various methods and procedures, depending on the nature of the situation. While each specific situation and each concrete problem calls for either different methods or modifications in the combination of available methods, the following will indicate some of the procedures which have been found generally useful. It should be understood that the order in which the various points are described below does not indicate any necessary relationship between steps which can be taken either separately or in combination with one another.

1. Self-scrutiny and self-improvement. It is axiomatic that the freedom which we claim for ourselves must be equally granted to others. This appears clearly in the "Declaration of Religious Liberty" adopted in 1948 both by the WCC and by the IMC. Individual Christian groups as well as ecumenical agencies are therefore called upon periodically to appraise their own procedures in the light of the standard which they have accepted. When any practice does in fact violate that standard, measures for self-improvement should promptly be initiated.

2. Research and Analysis. Scientific study of the causes and manifestations of discrimination needs to be continuously pursued. Frequently the churches have sought to combat restrictions upon religious freedom by superficial and unadjusted measures. A thorough analysis of specific situations should help identify the real factors of tensions and determine the extent to which certain measures are in fact discriminatory or not.

3. Information. There is a need for continuing information about current developments in the field of religious liberty, even though problems may not have reached the point of acuteness when direct action is called for. Further procedure for combating actual violations of religious rights when they begin to occur can be much more expedient and effective when background data are readily available and when they have been previously compiled and studied.

While these first three steps may seem to serve mainly the purpose of preparing the ground for more direct action, it should be pointed out that the process of self-scrutiny, scientific study as well as the assembling of precise information may often in itself produce an easing of tensions and result in remedial measures.

4. Appeal to Religious Leaders. It is frequently possible to make violations of religious liberty in any country informally known to religious leaders who are members of the dominant group, whether in that country or in another. Especially when relations of mutual confidence have previously been established, such informal consultation can be productive of sound results.
5. Appeal to Government. In certain instances, the WCC or the IMC can, either independently or through the CCIA, make direct approach to a government within whose jurisdiction violations of religious rights occur. Often first attempts to secure remedy are best made without undue publicity. Unofficial approaches to government representatives and requests to check with the competent authority in their country on the accuracy of reports on violations of religious rights can result in necessary remedial measures, especially insofar as the body representing the churches is able to establish the reputation for objectivity in relation with governments. Formal representation to Government is a type of procedure which can be used only if unofficial channels are not available or if other procedures have failed to improve situations of tension.

6. Friendly Intervention by Government. Governments have normally intervened with other governments only in the event that their own nationals are involved, or that violations have reached such proportions as to offend opinions of mankind. In certain situations, however, the offices of ambassadors and consuls have been employed to make known the concern which a government feels about conditions in another country.

7. Intergovernmental Action. International machinery to deal with violations of human rights is only in process of formation and offers, for the time being, only limited possibilities of effective remedial action. However, efforts are being made to set up agencies to receive petitions or protests and, if verified, to act upon them. Even at the present time petitions submitted from non-self-governing territories under the Trusteeship System receive careful attention. Likewise certain aspects of the present activities of the Commission on Human Rights provide, in a limited and indirect way, opportunities for approaches to governments. Moreover, the position advanced by the CCIA and its parent bodies in relation to internationally recognized standards of human rights, especially in relation to the standard of religious freedom as set forth in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provides a useful basis for approaches and consultations in connection with the previously mentioned procedures.

8. Publicity. It is normally preferable first of all to seek redress through direct and quiet consultation. If remedial measures are not forthcoming and other channels fail, publicity or the threat of publicity can, in certain situations, prove effective. In other situations, however, an international publicity campaign may tend to harden attitudes in the offending country.

9. Enquiry. While presenting real difficulties, an objective and mutually agreed enquiry into the facts of alleged discrimination in religious rights offers a potentially useful means for securing remedial action.

It is of importance to stress that the ways in which these various procedures can be used are determined by the nature of each specific situation. Careful attention needs also to be given to the co-ordination of efforts between local or national groups, the WCC or the IMC and the CCIA.

Over the past years situations involving problems of religious liberty in Columbia, Indonesia, Italy, Israel, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua, Spain, the Trust Territories of the Pacific (U.S.A.), countries of East Europe and of the Middle East have been the concern of the CCIA and of its parent bodies.

II. Constitutional Safeguards of Religious Liberty
The drafting of constitutions for new, or newly independent states has laid responsibility on the churches and CCIA to take action to secure therein legal safeguards of religious liberty. But this action is not conceived as primarily an attempt to secure privileges or security for the Christian Church so much as an exercise in proper witness of the church to the state, establishing true human rights for all men.

In the first place this requires careful definition of the rights which it is proper to require of the state. In 1948 both the WCC and the IMC adopted a Declaration on Religious Liberty. Drawing on missionary experience over the years, the document enunciated four main requirements in this field, which may be briefly summarised as:

1. The right to choose one’s religion.
2. The right to proclaim and express one’s faith.
3. The right to associate with others for religious purposes.
4. The right of religious organizations to conduct their own proper affairs.

The task of CCIA has been to work out in legal terms the provisions appropriate to the constitution of a state whereby these rights may be established and safeguarded. As churches in different countries over the past twelve years have turned to CCIA for help in particular situations of interference, CCIA has learnt in experience the many ways in which religious liberty can be reduced by the state in oblique ways, perhaps without intention, and has therefore been able to refine its definitions.

The material the Commission has thus collected is embodied in part in two documents—"Notes on procedures for securing constitutional safeguards for religious freedom" (a confidential document prepared in 1954) and "Constitutional Provisions for Religious Liberty" (a compilation of recent enactments throughout the world, providing a variety of useful models, issued in 1956). These documents have been made available to church leaders and people engaged in national politics and constitution-making. It is natural that in most such countries there is little or no experience of constitution-making to draw upon, and sheer information (as much as ammunition!) is in short supply. There is a simple task of providing from a central source whatever wisdom has been gained in any part of the life of the churches throughout the world on these matters.

But information may be meaningless or baffling to churches which find themselves for the first time called to define and stand up for religious liberty vis a vis a new independent state. Often representing small minorities in the population, perhaps unaccustomed to responsibility in public or national affairs, church leadership may not be experienced and expert in the techniques of approach to government and the way to prepare a brief. Moreover the question may arise whether it is wise to make a total case to a government unprepared for it, or prevented by popular opinion from acceding to it, with the certainty of the case being refused. Then the cause of religious liberty may be more seriously endangered than if a more cautious and gradual method were adopted. In such matters of wise procedure, where the cause of effective religious liberty is of paramount concern the officers of CCIA have been able over the years to act as channels for the sharing of experience between one part of the world and another. By much correspondence, and as often as possible by personal visits and consultations, the officers of CCIA have tried to help local churches to act in a wise and effective way in this complicated field.
In several of these cases, the formulation of a new constitution is a matter of joint responsibility between a metropolitan government and the authorities of a state which is achieving independence of the metropolitan government, as is the case in certain former British colonial territories. It is important that the churches at both ends act in collaboration towards their respective governments. In fact there are usually close links through missionary agencies between the churches, but in so far as CCIA is in touch with both groups of churches it can help to secure co-ordinated action. Its officers have on occasion been authorized by such churches to make personal approaches to the responsible ministers of government, in order that the case for religious liberty shall be seen to be not simply the concern of a local, perhaps minority, group but a matter of fundamental interest to the whole church for the sake of all men.

In describing all these operations it must be understood that the work ascribed to CCIA is in fact the co-operative activity of church and missionary leaders, Christian lawyers and statesmen for whom the Commission is a focussing point and a link. It is also important to record that whatever successes have been achieved are due to the collaboration of men outside the Christian fold who share a concern for the establishment of true human rights. For this reason Christian initiative is often best employed in the long and sometimes laborious task of building brick on brick with other men and women, rather than by dramatic interventions.

Finally, it cannot too often be remembered that this work in relation to constitutional reform must not be let degenerate into an attempt to seek self-centredly political security for the Christian community, but must be seen always as an act of witness to the pattern of society appropriate to the true nature of mankind. It must lead to deeper reflection not only on the defence of religious liberties but on the proper service owed by Christians to the state itself.

The constitutions of the following countries have been the concern of CCIA in one way or another in the past four years: Colombia, Indonesia, Malaya, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia.

Proposed Study on Religious Liberty

At the 10th meeting of the Central Committee, held at New Haven, U.S.A., it was agreed "that the Executive Committee be asked to arrange for a study to be made of problems of religious liberty arising in Roman Catholic and other countries, with the understanding that the co-operation of the International Missionary Council will be sought in this study." The Executive Committee at its meeting in London in February 1958 agreed "that on the basis of the resolution adopted by the Central Committee at New Haven and of the discussion of the matter at this session of the Executive Committee, the staff be instructed to prepare a paper on the study of religious liberty to be submitted to the Central Committee at its 1958 meeting. This paper should consider the relations between the fundamental principles involved, the long-range programme required and the immediate problems demanding ecumenical attention."

In view of these instructions the General Secretariat submits to the Central Committee the following proposals:

General Considerations
The proposed study should take into account these general considerations:

a) While there is a broad consensus in the ecumenical movement concerning the importance of religious liberty and the need to take a definite stand in its favour, there has not yet emerged a consensus concerning the theological and ethical reasons why religious freedom must be defended.

b) There is need for a comprehensive study of the different ideological, religious and political forces which work for religious freedom and of those which work against it.

c) Many different methods are used to advance religious freedom. A study of these different methods and of their respective effectiveness will help the churches and the World Council of Churches to work out a definite policy for the future.

d) The study should continue the considerable work already by the ecumenical bodies: the report on "The Universal Church in the World of Nations" of the World Conference on Church, Community and State, Oxford, 1937; the Declaration on Religious Liberty of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdamm:1948; Report on Religious Freedom in Face of Dominant Forces adopted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Toronto 1950; the statements of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Evanston, 1954; and the Report on Proselytism and Religious Liberty adopted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Galyatető, Hungary, 1956, should especially serve as a basis to this study and to the further policy of the WCC in this matter.

e) The essential aim of taking effective steps to promote religious freedom demands a proper balancing of study and action. Therefore the pursuit of the study should in no sense serve as a substitute for action on current violations of religious liberty. The CCIA will continue its work in this field. But it is to be anticipated that the findings of the study as they are progressively made available, and without waiting for final results, shall increase effectiveness of action under the existing structure of responsibility in the WCC, IMC, CCIA and other organs.

f) The pursuit of this study should involve continuing consultation with CCIA and IMC as well as with the confessional world organizations.

g) The East Asia Christian Conference has also launched a study of Religious Liberty in Asia. Certain special emphases in the EACC plan of study may be specially noted here.

The EACC survey will include "a survey of the traditional social and communal patterns in the various countries with a view to understanding the relation between religions and traditional social instructions and how far traditional communal life recognizes or limits religious freedom"; and the influence "of the dynamic forces at work" in society, on religious liberty. It will also include "a study on the concept of religious freedom in ancient non-Christian faiths both in its traditional and renaissance phases," and in the "various ideologies of modern Asian nationalism." It involves a study of "the basis of cooperation with men of other religions and ideologies in the promotion of religious freedom."

The WCC Commission should seek to cooperate with the EACC in this study and make full use of its results.

Seven areas of study

The proposed study may well include the following:

1. Basic Principles
The study should in the first place contribute to the elaboration of an ecumenical consensus on what we mean by religious freedom and on its relation to the freedom in Christ to which the New Testament testifies. Indeed the study should ask whether there are specifically theological grounds which supply a content to the conception of religious liberty and justify claims on its behalf and what the nature and limits of such liberty are seen to be in Christian theology. Special account must be taken of the understanding of religious liberty explicitly or implicitly assumed in the beliefs and structure of the non-Christian religions, and in humanist approaches, and exemplified in the practices of their adherents. Similarly, the view of religious liberty, held or implied in political systems, including Communism must be examined. Finally the theory and practice of religious liberty within and between the Christian churches, including (as required by the previous instruction of the Central Committee) the Roman Catholic Church must be clarified.

While there is clear need for a theological study, full consideration should also be given to philosophical, juridical and social aspects. In this connection the relation of religious liberty to other human rights and the inter-play of all human rights should be taken into account.

2. Analysis and Classification of Data

It would seem necessary to assemble a comprehensive documentation, to collect the data thus far scattered in the various agencies and to submit them to analysis and classification.

This assembling, analysis and classification of data should include inter alia:
(a) clauses concerning religious freedom in existing constitutions, in projected constitutions and in other legislation and in jurisprudence;
(b) statements and actions of churches and other religious bodies concerning religious liberty;
(c) reports on violations of religious freedom with an appraisal of their reliability; and
(d) reports on situations where problems of religious freedom have been satisfactorily solved with an appraisal of the methods and ways by which this result has been achieved.

Special attention should be paid to the location of sources of such information and the procedure whereby sources which are reluctant to provide information, may be induced to cooperate.

Information received as well as the findings of the work of analysis and classification should be progressively transmitted, after proper consultation, to the agency or agencies best equipped for immediate action.

This assembling of data should be done without in any sense detracting from existing responsibilities already undertaken by the CCIA or other agencies.

3. Analysis of Trends and Forces Opposing Religious Liberty

Consideration should be given to trends and forces that oppose the exercise of religious freedom at various levels, such as government, church and society; and the inter-relationship of these should be explored.

In virtually every country there are constitutional and legal recognitions of the right of religious liberty; but, at the same time, there are in practically all cases limitations on various grounds such as national unity, public order, public safety, public morality, and the like, which in some instances militate against essential elements of religious
freedom. Frequently violations of religious liberty occur when reasonable limitations are invoked in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner. Some limitations of the exercise of religious freedom must be admitted as legitimate. It is therefore extremely important to study which limitations must be considered as abusive and which must be considered as acceptable.

Also significant as counter forces are the attitudes which dominate in a society or church community such as the desire to maintain national unity or to perpetuate ecclesiastical tradition as well as desire to defend recently gained independence against foreign influence.

It would seem that these two types of counter forces are sometimes related to each other. The extent to which one is brought into play in support of the other calls for careful analysis.

4. *Analysis of Trends and Forces Making for Religious Liberty*

The effort to promote religious freedom will become more effective if positive factors bearing upon any situation are known to such extent that they can be utilized. These factors include liberal elements in a religious community which practises discrimination, personal contacts among religious leaders, national pride and the desire not to be open to criticism in the debates of the international community, enlightened self interest, necessity of union against anti-religious attacks, and the like.

But any study of this question ought not to regard religious liberty solely in the light of trends and forces. While agreeing with the fundamental conception of liberty as an essential demand of man’s moral nature, have we not to ask other questions? Is not religious liberty in practice often a consequence of the prior existence of massive institutions, the State, the Church, the structures of non-Christian religions and cultures, economic institutions and traditional mores? What resides in the ethos and purposes of some of these institutions which either hampers or enlarges the area or the expression of religious liberty?

5. *What the Churches Should Stand For*

The Declaration on Religious Liberty jointly adopted by the WCC and IMC represented an initial effort to set forth the basis and the components of religious freedom. While this Declaration was the product of extensive international study, it does not serve all the purposes which the present venture envisages. As an outcome of the new theological-juridical-philosophical study and of the proposed analysis, a new formulation of the position on religious freedom should be sought in order to arrive at a solidly established basis of our Christian attitude and of the main lines of our policy concerning religious liberty.

6. *How Can the Churches Act*

The promotion of religious freedom can never be truly effective if it is pursued solely by centralized agencies of the churches. There is need for a relatively inclusive analysis of the part which could helpfully be played by all branches and agencies of the churches and missions.

In this connection it would also seem desirable to identify and review the methods and procedures which have thus far been employed by the churches in the effort to promote religious freedom. Important action has been taken by member churches and councils and by independent bodies. The collection and analysis of information about such actions would be highly important.
(a) to indicate the extensive work and considerable effort already undertaken or under way and to take it into account as a guarantee of continuity;
(b) to identify the instances where efforts were successful and the methods which contributed to success; or, on the contrary, where efforts failed and why;
(c) to reveal unmet needs or the need for continuing action; and
(d) to create all over the world a positive and friendly climate of religious freedom.

7. The Specific Task of the World Council of Churches

On the basis of the broader analysis effort should be made to identify what lies within the peculiar competence of the World Council of Churches and its organs, and under what general conditions the policy and tactics of the World Council of Churches concerning religious liberty should be undertaken.

The identification and review of the methods and procedures employed by the WCC to promote religious liberty would also be necessary in the same way indicated for the churches in paragraph 6, (a), (b), (c) and (d).

The findings of this analysis could then be progressively considered by officers of the WCC, the IMC and the CCIA with a view to assigning or reassigning responsibility and the coordination of effort.

The various parts of the study, as they are indicated above, are not to be undertaken in consecutive fashion; to whatever extent is feasible, the objectives of the study should be sought simultaneously and concurrently.

Organization

It is proposed that the study should be under the general auspices of the Division of Studies, that a special committee of about ten persons be appointed for its supervision and that the General Secretary should be the secretary of that committee. It is understood that the committee is at liberty to propose changes in the above proposals to the Executive Committee for its approval. A research-worker, appointed by the Executive Committee, will give full time to this assignment. The study is to be financed for the time being by special gifts.

Resolutions II - IV from the Second Assembly


RESOLUTION II

That the Central Committee be requested to appoint a delegation or delegations (i) to communicate the foregoing statement to the member churches of the World Council of Churches, (ii) to take such steps as seem most suitable with a view to the presentation of the same statement to the churches not related to the World Council of Churches, including the churches in U.S.S.R. and in other lands, (iii) to invite these churches to consider ways in which they might communicate the statement to the governments of their countries.

RESOLUTION III
The World Council of Churches, at its Second Assembly in August 1954, records its concern and sorrow over the continuing sufferings and disabilities of fellow Christians in many parts of the world.

It knows that the Assembly is incomplete because the World Council cannot communicate with many churches over whose life and testimony a veil of silence has been forcibly drawn. We assure these fellow Christians and those who stand with them of our prayers and we earnestly look forward to the day of freedom and reunion.

Christians must stand together with all who, in the struggle for freedom, suffer pain and trial. We thank God for the steadfastness of our fellow Christians who, in trial and tribulation, gave so much—even their lives—for Christ's sake and for ours, and we humbly pray that we may not be unworthy of their sacrifice.

The Assembly also deeply regrets that in certain countries from which information can be gathered with reasonable accuracy, Christians are suffering many disabilities and even violence; and human rights and liberties, albeit acknowledged in official protestations, have in practice been denied.

To all such the Assembly extends the assurance of the prayers of its member churches, that those who are absent from its fellowship may be sustained by the presence of Christ. The World Council will continue to work for a new day of fellowship and liberty of witness.

We thank God that His Church is worthy to follow its Lord in suffering. We rejoice—with our brethren who suffer in the faith—in that fellowship in Christ which nobody and nothing can destroy. We know that their fidelity and ours will prevail.

RESOLUTION IV

Having received representations regarding a number of specific and serious cases of religious persecution and repression, this Assembly of the World Council of Churches reaffirms previous declarations regarding religious liberty and expresses its grave concern regarding the situation in a number of lands and continents. It also calls attention to the statement on religious freedom in the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. The Assembly instructs its officers and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs to continue to use every effort in representations to the governments concerned and, where they are involved, the religious authorities; and appeals to its member churches to make direct representations in certain cases and to continue in prayer for those suffering from persecution and repression.

A Declaration on Religious Liberty


An essential element in a good international order is freedom of religion. This is an implication of the Christian faith and of the world-wide nature of Christianity. Christians, therefore, view the question of religious freedom as an international problem. They are concerned that religious freedom be everywhere secured. In pleading for this freedom, they do not ask for any privilege to be granted to Christians that is denied to others. While the liberty with which Christ has set men free cannot be given nor destroyed by any government, Christians, because of that inner freedom, are both jealous for its outward expression and solicitous that all men should have freedom in religious life. The nature and destiny of man by virtue of his creation,
redemption and calling, and man’s activities in family, state and culture establish limits beyond which the government cannot with impunity go. The rights which Christian discipleship demands are such as are good for all men, and no nation has ever suffered by reason of granting such liberties. Accordingly:

The rights of religious freedom herein declared shall be recognised and observed for all persons without distinction as to race, colour, sex, language or religion, and without imposition of disabilities by virtue of legal provisions or administrative acts.

1. Every person has the right to determine his own faith and creed.

The right to determine faith and creed involves both the process whereby a person adheres to a belief and the process whereby he changes his belief. It includes the right to receive instruction and education.

This right becomes meaningful when man has the opportunity of access to information. Religious, social and political institutions have the obligation to permit the mature individual to relate himself to sources of information in such a way as to allow personal religious decision and belief.

The right to determine one’s belief is limited by the right of parents to decide sources of information to which their children shall have access. In the process of reaching decisions, everyone ought to take into account his higher self-interests and the implications of his beliefs for the well-being of his fellow men.

2. Every person has the right to express his religious beliefs in worship, teaching and practice, and to proclaim the implications of his beliefs for relationships in a social or political community.

The right of religious expression includes freedom of worship, both public and private; freedom to place information at the disposal of others by processes of teaching, preaching and persuasion; and freedom to pursue such activities as are dictated by conscience. It also includes freedom to express implications of belief for society and its government.

This right requires freedom from arbitrary limitation of religious expression in all means of communication, including speech, Press, radio, motion pictures and art.

Social and political institutions should grant immunity from discrimination and from legal disability on grounds of expressed religious conviction, at least to the point where recognised community interests are adversely affected.

Freedom of religious expression is limited by the rights of parents to determine the religious point of view to which their children shall be exposed. It is further subject to such limitations, prescribed by law, as are necessary to protect order and welfare, morals and the rights and freedoms of others. Each person must recognise the right of others to express their beliefs and must have respect for authority at all times, even when conscience forces him to take issue with the people who are in authority or with the position they advocate.

3. Every person has the right to associate with others and to organise with them for religious purposes.

This right includes freedom to form religious organisations, to seek membership in religious organisations,

It requires that the rights of association and organisation guaranteed by a community to its members include the right of forming associations for religious purposes. It is subject to the same limits imposed on all associations by non-discriminatory laws.

4. Every religious organisation, formed or maintained by action in accordance with the rights of individual persons, has the right to determine its policies and practices for the accomplishment of its chosen purposes.
The rights which are claimed for the individual in his exercise of religious liberty become the rights of the religious organisation, including the right to determine its faith and creed; to engage in religious worship, both public and private; to teach, educate, preach and persuade; to express implications of belief for society and government. To these will be added certain corporate rights which derive from the rights of individual persons, such as the right: to determine the form of organisation, its government and conditions of membership; to select and train its own officers, leaders and workers; to publish and circulate religious literature; to carry on service and missionary activities at home and abroad; to hold property and to collect funds; to co-operate and to unite with other religious bodies at home and in other lands, including freedom to invite or to send personnel beyond national frontiers and to give or to receive financial assistance; to use such facilities, open to all citizens or associations, as will make possible the accomplishment of religious ends.

In order that these rights may be realised in social experience, the state must grant to religious organisations and their members the same rights which it grants to other organisations, including the right of self-government, of public meeting, of speech, of Press and publication, of holding property, of collecting funds, of travel, of ingress and egress, and generally of administering their own affairs.

The community has the right to require obedience to non-discriminatory laws passed in the interest of public order and well-being. In the exercise of its rights, a religious organisation must respect the rights of other religious organisations and must safeguard the corporate and individual rights of the entire community.