

## Letter to our Churches and Congregations

From 12 to 16 September 2000 Christians from South Korea, Japan and Germany met in Musashi-Ranzan near Tokyo. These are the findings and the questions raised. The following is a contribution to the World Council of Churches' Programme to Overcome Violence.

We worked on the topics of FORGIVENESS; REPARATION AND RENUNCIATION OF VIOLENCE. We are dismayed at the atrocities committed in the last 60 years in Germany, Korea and Japan, some of which are only just being made public in all their terrible details. We remember e.g. the Massacre of Nogun-ri caused by US troops during the Korea War, Kwangju (1980), the bloodbath committed by Japan in Nanjing (1937), the Shoa in Germany and the political wrongdoing in the former German Democratic Republic.

We are dismayed to hear how Japanese soldiers handled Korean women in the Pacific War. We heard of the forced abductions by the Japanese state during the colonial domination of Japan over Korea. We are troubled that many innocent people who suffered in prisons have not yet been compensated. We confess that our churches in their countries did not raise their voice against this use of violence with sufficient clarity.

Because God has given us a new beginning we see that it is possible to find new avenues to move towards one another, and go forward with one another, despite all the still unsettled business and all offence given.

### **Renunciation of Violence**

with contempt for people of other cultures and religions, with indifference towards the political and economic reality, with ignoring other people, with a use of language that is pejorative about minorities, with social isolation or psychological humiliation.

In each state and in economic power (Mammon) we see the danger of people becoming not just more protected and wealthy but also threatened. We consider it legitimate to resist enslaving power. We request congregations to talk with believers from other countries about the role of the military and the non-violence, in order to outline new prospects for a non-violent future. The goals of the Sermon on the Mount and the practice of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and 1997 in Kwangju ("disempower tear gas") must not be forgotten. We hold law and justice to be the most important alternative to violence. That is why international law, the international courts and human rights must be reinforced.

We intend to be more alert to respecting conscientious decisions. The conscience of people in congregations must be constantly strengthened through the commands of the Bible (e.g. against violence towards women). Churches must fundamentally take the side of the vulnerable.

### Forgiveness

Nationalist thinking in Germany and Japan led to the Shoa, unleashed the Second World War and victimised many neighbouring peoples. Representatives from Korea reported poignantly on the particular consequences in their country. However, there are perpetrators and victims in

every people and every church, but also a silent majority of spectators and fellow travellers. We are representatives of the generation of children and grand-children who have nothing directly to do with the criminals and wrongdoings of the Second World War or the Korean War. Nevertheless, we must take a position. After all, we are constantly confronted with the history of our fathers and mothers. We are responsible for seeing to it that no generation ignores the burden of history, seeking from ways out of the guilt of the peoples and churches through paths of reconciliation.

We are convinced that public confessions of guilt open up a new future for offenders and victims, particularly if they specifically name their guilt. We are convinced that those offenders who do penance, uncover their atrocities and provide compensation, will receive forgiveness from the victims. However, we are aware that offenders hesitate to take this step for fear of condemnation and a loss of honour. Often they can only confront their guilt and entanglement when they are offered a readiness to forgive. The strength of the victims is their willingness to take the first step towards reconciliation. We know that unconditional forgiveness is possible for individuals. For peoples, reconciliation needs to be organised in political and economic terms.

Inspired by the biblical story of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) we are convinced that the churches too cannot stand back as spectators. They must contribute to offenders and victims going towards one another, with the public recognising the suffering of the victims and the offenders being willing to tell the truth about their acts and provide compensation. In that way forgiveness can be enabled by reconciliation offered by the victims.

#### Compensation / reparation

We think that reparation between offenders and victims is basically impossible. Victims and survivors need a clear statement of truth and the possibility of working through their history; equally, they need material compensation, as far as this is possible at all. Compensation can help to prevent a repetition of evil. It is undeniable that compensation contains the risk of being misused to terminate the discussion. The restoration of human dignity is likewise of great importance. Hence we also call upon ourselves to bring the truth to light and call the people to remembrance.

We Christians from three countries invite the Japanese government to apologise immediately to the victims and provide compensation. We therefore also support the Tribunal for the Comfort Women in December 2000 in Tokyo.

These assignments will change the relations between peoples and also our own lives. They are part of the ecumenical and missionary role of all churches.

#### Conclusion

We request our churches in Korea, Japan and Germany to work locally for the remembrance of history and the transmission of insights gained thereby to the next generation.

We therefore request our congregations to work for a situation where the wrongdoing, which in some cases has only just come to light, is not repressed, and call upon them to seek solutions in cooperation with the responsible politicians and citizens' action groups.

We request our churches not to overlook the first-hand witnesses and to seek further opportunities for exchange and encounter between the three countries, in order to responsibly involve young people in the questions that concern us.

We likewise request the churches in our three countries to work at all levels for the reconciliation between North and South Korea that began in June this year.

The conference took place on the initiative of the German East Asia Mission, the Tomisaka Christian Center (Japan) and the Korean Theological Research Institute (Seoul).

16 September 2000