The Churches in International Affairs

Reports 2007-2009

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches
IN MEMORIAM

Clement John
1941 – 2008

An excellent colleague and
a devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Prince of Peace

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• Meeting of US Christian leaders with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, 27 September 2007

• 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".

• 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

• 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

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• 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

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- Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008
- Open letter from WCC general secretary condemning the attacks on civilians in the Gaza strip and in Israel, 3 March 2008
- 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
- Open comment by WCC general secretary on the occasion of 60 years since the disintegration of the Palestinian state and the creation of the state of Israel, 9 May 2008
- Message from Global week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008
- Open statement on the Gaza crisis by WCC general secretary, 29 December 2008
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H. E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, conveying WCC’s support for the leadership and work of the United Nations in Gaza during the present crisis, 7 January 2009
- Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in the Middle East and churches in Jerusalem regarding a just peace in Israel and Palestine based on international resolutions, 7 January 2009
- Statement on the Gaza War adopted by WCC executive committee, 17–20 February 2009
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Barack Obama, president of the U.S.A., expressing concern at the recent war in Gaza, the current situation there and Gaza’s essential role in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace, 3 March 2009
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority, voicing support for all parties to the conflict to fulfil specific obligations under international law, 11 March 2009
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MODERATOR’S INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure and privilege that I present this volume of ‘The Churches in International Affairs’, which contains important documents on the World Council of Churches’ involvement in international affairs through various actions of public witness during the period 2007-2009.

In response to various emerging issues at international, regional and national levels, the CCIA has been deeply involved in addressing such contexts on a day to day basis. Such actions included public issues statements by the general secretary, the governing body, and the officers of the central committee as well as other public issues actions such as sending letters of concerns and solidarity by the general secretary and the director of the CCIA. There have been other public issues initiatives and advocacy actions undertaken including representations to diplomatic missions, intergovernmental agencies, solidarity visits to affected areas and countries and facilitating mediations and negotiations.

WCC’s public issues statements, communiqués and reports are normally addressed to a wide range of audiences; although they are primarily to the members of its fellowship, churches or ecumenical councils are not the only addressees. A large number of public issue statements are addressed to governments, heads of states and other authorities at various levels, inter-governmental systems or to the United Nations. Often, questions are raised about the impact of WCC’s statements especially when requests and demand for immediate attention and urgent actions are not heeded by governments or authorities. This kind of poor response warrants the need for appropriate monitoring and follow-up by staff working in the area of CCIA’s mandates.

The term beginning a new mandate of the CCIA started immediately after the 9th assembly of the WCC held in February 2006. Since then the CCIA experienced several changes. The new CCIA started with a significant change in its composition of membership as certain other Commissions and advisory bodies of WCC ended their mandates and merged with the CCIA. However, the new and integrated CCIA also has been mandated to take the lead in facilitating and coordinating WCC’s public witness actions in various ways. The new CCIA expanded its size to 38 members ever since a new Commission was nominated by the central committee in its meeting held in early September 2006 and I assumed the responsibility as the moderator of the new CCIA Commission. Two meetings of the CCIA took place during the first quarter of the term the Commission – in Geneva, Switzerland in 2007 and Havana, Cuba in 2008.

There were several changes during the first three years since I assumed the responsibility as the moderator, immediately after the Port Alegre Assembly. Peter Weiderud, Director of the CCIA resigned from the position in July 2006 and Clement John became the Interim Acting Director starting from September 2006 until his retirement in March 2007. Subsequently Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory was appointed by the executive committee as the new CCIA director and she continued in the position until she resigned in June 2009. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, who has been on the staff since 2000, was appointed as the new Director of the CCIA by the central committee in its meeting in August-
September 2009. I take this opportunity to thank all these colleagues who facilitated and coordinated the programmes of the CCIA, especially the public issues actions and advocacy at various levels during the period of this report. The fruit of such intensive work done by various staff colleagues of WCC is reflected in the contents of this volume.

Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik
Moderator, CCIA
Oslo, Norway 10 May 2014
DIRECTOR’S INTRODUCTION

The nature of the emerging issues at the international, regional and national levels demand responses by churches and the ecumenical movement as these issues are of particular concern for WCC’s constituencies around the globe. Ecumenical actions in international affairs especially through public witness and global advocacy, thus, are an integral facet of the work of WCC and its Commission on the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). The CCIA has had a special mandate to carry out this part of the agenda of the ecumenical movement ever since the CCIA was founded in 1946 as well as since the founding of the WCC in 1948. The tasks of advising the Council and its governing body and acting on behalf of the wider fellowship, especially to be engaged in the realm of international affairs have been traditional and historical roles and mandates of the CCIA over the decades. The years following the post-Port Alegre Assembly also have witnessed significant changes in international politics. The period during which the public statements made by WCC’s governing body and the leadership cover a wide range of issues which emerged at the international, regional and national levels. Often, the struggle has been to select priorities when dealing with the emergence of most complex and pressing problems and calling the attention of the WCC for urgent responses and actions.

During the period covered in this report (2007-2009), the CCIA has been involved in a number of pressing issues in areas such as international affairs, war and peace, conflicts, disarmament, violence, economic justice, climate justice, freedom of religion, religious intolerance, ethnic and indigenous people’s struggles, right to self-determination, etc. This was also the beginning of the period of a new structure for the CCIA that was introduced by the central committee by way of integrating certain other commissions and advisory committees. Unfortunately, lack of clarity before initiating the new structure resulted in rather unfocussed ways of working and in the end it has been proven that the new mandates and emphases added to the CCIA have not been effective. This has resulted in missing opportunities in setting the priorities for appropriate and timely actions, sharpening the focus of CCIA’s involvement and effective coordination of advocacy and strengthening networks. However, the tasks of the CCIA within the framework of its cardinal responsibility and fundamental mandates continued during this period.

While realising the complex realities and challenges the ecumenical movement was called to respond to, all colleagues who have been working in the area of CCIA’s mandates contributed immensely to ensure a quality programme in their respective areas of work. Certain new programmes also have been initiated during this period, such as the Middle East Focus, the drafting process of a Just Peace Declaration, plans for the culmination of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and sending living letters teams to accompany churches in conflict situations. Through numerous statements, the World Council of Churches continues to reaffirm its conviction that politics is an inseparable reality and churches’ involvement in responding to such situations is a fundamental Christian responsibility. This triennial report published by the CCIA under the title ‘The Churches in International Affairs: Reports 2007-2009’ covers numerous public witness
actions carried out by the WCC through CCIA. The rich content of this report is also a reflection of the fulfilment of the mandate of CCIA.

We are thankful to the Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory (Presbyterian Church of USA), Director of the CCIA (September 2007 to June 2009) who provided leadership during this period.

Mathews George Chunakara
Director, CCIA
Geneva, Switzerland 10 May 2014