



For action

REPORT OF THE ACTING GENERAL SECRETARY REVISED

Introduction

It is with humble gratitude that I want to express my deep appreciation to the leadership of the central committee for their daily accompaniment and direction. Their leadership during challenging times makes a difference.

As we approach the assembly, I want to recognize Bishop Petra for her leadership as co-moderator of the host committee. She has challenged us to amplify our collaboration and I am thankful for her commitment to a successful assembly.

I also want to express my sincere gratitude to the staff leadership group, to the entire WCC staff, to you the members of our governing bodies as well as to our member Churches for the strong and ongoing commitment. I am deeply encouraged and inspired by such powerful dedication.

We continue to publish monthly accountability reports, keeping you informed about daily work and operations. In this report, I want highlight few things which were already mentioned in the accountability reports you have received: 1) the WCC response to the conflict in Ukraine, 2) the upcoming central committee, 3) our progress in preparing the assembly, 4) our financial situation and 5) a word about this meeting

Conflict in Ukraine

When the executive and central committee met in February, the conflict in the Ukraine had not yet broken. All situations of conflict and war are of great concern to the fellowship. This situation has special implications for the fellowship of member churches.

From the beginning, the WCC has condemned the war, has called for an immediate end to armed hostilities and appealed for an immediate end to indiscriminate attacks with an escalating impact on civilians in Ukraine. The WCC has been in the focus of media since day one of the war and until now more than 4,500 articles mentioning the role of the WCC.

WCC response has been consistent in:

- denouncing violence as solution to conflict;
- calling for the protection of innocent and vulnerable people;
- maintaining contact and dialogue with the churches in Russia and Ukraine;
- engaging churches from the neighbouring countries in round table dialogue (at the end of March we had the first round table meeting and on 10 June we will have the second roundtable meeting);
- advocating for humanitarian assistance with visible expressions of accompaniment (together with Act Alliance a WCC team has visited Ukrainian refugees entering Ukraine from Hungary and

Romania and recently they have returned from a humanitarian visit in Russia meeting the Ukrainian refugees in Russia.

At every step, it has been my prayer that the WCC can provide a space for dialogue; for listening and caring for one another; and for just peace and reconciliation. We are and should continue to be alternative to geo-political solutions that seek to deepen divisions.

Central Committee

The central committee meets in two weeks for the first time in 4 years. It will be a great reunion with over 135 members and substitutes attending. There are no pandemic-related restrictions for meeting in Geneva. However, we are planning cautiously with tables that allow more distance, onsite medical care; and masks and sanitation protocols are in place.

It will not be an ordinary meeting. I will say more about the agenda in the overview of matters for decision. I believe we must be ready to manage tense discussions and a variety of outcomes.

We have heard some individual voices calling for the suspension of the Russian Orthodox Church from the WCC. Such proposal may be brought forward. If so, it will be a difficult discussion.

I have tried to answer to this question and other challenging matters in a rather lengthy interview, which was shared with you. I went back and made analysis on how our predecessors dealt with such concerns when they were confronted with similar issues, including the participation of churches during the Cold War, the issue of apartheid in South Africa, the more recent wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans. The conclusion was clear – the WCC has never suspended a church for theological reasons – even in the case of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa during apartheid, in which the church itself withdrew from the WCC. (*The membership of Kimbanguist Church was discontinued after years of encounters and dialogues due to its theological non-compliance with the WCC basis concerning Trinitarian Theology*).

Despite difference and divergences, WCC has been during all these years since its foundations an open platform of encounter and dialogue and made efforts to bring and engage churches in dialogue not to divide and disperse. Is our fellowship strong enough to maintain and continue the reason and goal that our predecessors envisaged for the WCC?

I pray for a spirit of togetherness and fellowship, in which the members can speak, listen, discuss and discern God's will with honesty, trusting that God is changing hearts and attitudes and leads his Churches to the path of just peace, reconciliation and love.

Assembly

The assembly is around the corner and we are intensifying communication with participants and cooperation with the host churches. This is an assembly of resilience. We continue planning and revising in response to all that is happening in the world and in the life of the churches.

For two years, we have been monitoring the impact of the pandemic. The pandemic no longer stands in our way. Entry requirements and meeting restrictions are manageable. The leadership of the central committee and host committee met ten days ago and affirmed the need to move from monitoring to implementing. We enter a new phase of collaboration in which I will personally committed myself to convene weekly meetings with the assembly office, Karlsruhe office and the EKD to help address any pending issues.

Until now, we had two pre-assembly meetings:

1. The online meeting of Specialized Ministries held in March strongly reaffirmed that the “commitment to unity and sharing cannot be limited to the life of the churches and their wellbeing. It is a calling to serve in the world, participating in God’s mission of healing and reconciliation, and of lifting up signs of hope, announcing by word and deed God’s reign, God’s justice and peace.”
2. Earlier month the Inter-Orthodox Pre-Assembly took place in Cyprus. The participants referred to it as a historical meeting. Fifty participants representing both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families have participated. Despite divisions and tensions within the two families, all participated with a spirit of dialogue, love and communion. All prayed together, took part actively in discussions and in the drafting of the final report and communique. The focus was on the assembly preparations and the theological input is an important asset as we prepare for the Assembly.

Particular attention was also given to discussing some sensitive issues of our time, which may require at the Assembly a clear and articulate Orthodox input and contribution, such as Israel/Palestine, Human sexuality, the war in Ukraine. A special hearing was organised with the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church and sincere, honest and open discussions took place. The final communique, which condemns the war and violence, asking for peace and reconciliation, was agreed by consensus by all.

I want to say a word here also about the WCC Syria project. Following the Central Committee, a meeting with representatives of the WCC member Churches from Syria was organised in Bossey, and our moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom attended as well. The agreement was that the Syria programme continues with the full participation of the Churches in Syria and by listening to their concerns and expectations. The invitation to visit Syria as soon as possible but before the Assembly was renewed and we are in the process of organising it in the near future.

Finances

From a financial perspective, I am happy to report that 2021 was strong year. We transferred membership contributions of CHF 0.5 million to the assembly fund and closed the general reserves with an increase of almost CHF 0.5 million. We can all be grateful to the member churches, ecumenical partners and others for contributions income of CHF 16.1 million, being CHF 1.2 million higher than in 2020.

The updated financial forecast for the 11th Assembly projects CHF 14.2 million in total income and available funds, over the years 2018-2023, increased from the budget of CHF 13.8 million approved in November 2021. With the contingency of CHF 0.6 million retained in the forecast, there is reasonable assurance the assembly can be managed within the available funds. We express gratitude to the host churches for the focused collaboration and contributions, as well as to the German Federal Foreign Office.

This year, there will be adverse impact on our budget, estimated at CHF 500,000, due to the depreciation of the Euro against the Swiss franc. We will adjust accordingly.

Green Village

We are grateful to be moving forward with the decision, together with Implenia, to accept the revised binding offer for Kyoto from Swiss Life. We have a proposed date of signature at the notary's office in mid-June. We are cautious. The sale is not complete until all documents are signed. We move forward in hope, with an aim of target net proceeds of CHF 23 million for the WCC before tax.

Recruitment

Following the decision of the executive committee in November 2021, we are now finalizing the interviews of four staff leadership positions, including programme director for Unity and Mission, programme director for Public Witness and Diakonia, director of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, and director of the WCC Commission on Mission and Evangelism. The names of the four new staff selected will be submitted to you for appointment during the in person meeting of the Executive Committee on the 14 June.

Agenda

The agenda of this meeting addresses the regular business of the executive committee such as the financial and programmatic reports from last year. There are updates on programmatic work, including the Syria project, human sexuality and overcoming racism. The last programme reports to the assembly are ready. The meeting will give direction for the final preparations of the central committee and further guidance for the assembly.

I want to end my report expressing gratitude to the members of the executive committee. Every one of you has served beyond the call of duty. The past two years would have been difficult without your dedication to the fellowship of member churches. It is an honour to serve with you, the leadership of the central committee and the WCC staff in strengthening the fellowship of member churches to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.